Expediency, Ambivalence, and Inaction: The French Protectorate and Domestic Slavery in Morocco, 1912–1956

Abstract

This article examines how the French Protectorate in Morocco enabled a defining institution of social inequality to endure and adapt. Colonial policies and the norms and evaluative beliefs surrounding domestic slavery are probed to explain the lack of political will against, and the resilience of, slavery within twentieth century Morocco. Previously unpublished archival findings are used to reconstruct how the Protectorate’s association with the Moroccan monarchy and slave owning elites entailed not only the suspension of the French ideal of liberty, but also the active management and manipulation of knowledge and representations of slavery. Discussion of Protectorate policy formation, and official controls of how domestic slavery was understood in response to anti-slavery pressures, reveals that administrators remained faithful to the contradictions guiding initial colonial maneuvers to satisfy French and international abolitionist expectations while simultaneously maintaining this form of non-interference in elite Moroccan affairs. The article also considers ways through which the Protectorate accomplished the work of negating domestic slavery. A vague deference to Islam via “Muslim policy” became a standard means of characterizing and approaching the institution; further ambivalence about slavery was reinforced through ongoing selective color-blindness entailing official non-recognition, manipulation, and regulation of blackness. Though French officials and Moroccan slave owners were of unequal powers and frequently divergent interests and spheres of influence, attention to the Protectorate’s handling of the problem of slavery helps illuminate the ambiguous social history within which domestic slavery in Morocco was reframed into lessened significance and transformed, before eventually ending as an institution.

Expectations that colonial authorities were morally obligated and politically responsible for ending slavery were thwarted by official ambivalence throughout the twentieth century. In Morocco, a clandestine slave trade continued along with domestic slavery throughout the French Protectorate, from the 1912 Treaty of Fes to independence in 1956. Notably, on the eve of decolonization, a French colonial official recorded payments for royal slaves without any remark. This
letter reflects over forty years of efforts by French colonial officials and the Moroccan monarchy (the Makhzen) to develop and maintain policies, practices and attitudes that allowed the continued purchase and use of slaves. As elsewhere the political realities of colonial alliances mandated and were supported by manipulations of difference. Selective understandings and self-serving representations of Islam and blackness helped the Protectorate develop shared mechanisms to accommodate slavery in Morocco. Reinforcing this course of inaction was the French commitment to maintaining tradition and Islamic authority, and the absence of support for expanding freedom for Moroccans.

This article details how the French Protectorate enabled a defining institution of social inequality to endure and adapt. Analysis of colonial policies, and the norms and evaluative beliefs about domestic slavery, explain the lack of political will against, and the resilience of, this social institution within twentieth century Morocco. The Protectorate’s association with elite slave owning Moroccans not only entailed a suspension of the French ideal of liberty, it also led to the active management and manipulation of knowledge and representations of slavery.

**Official Abstruseness, Calculated Non-Interference, and “Muslim Policy”**

French colonial experiences in Algeria and West Africa during the nineteenth century produced a general characteristic “logic” toward abolition focused on ending the legal trade in slaves while avoiding more direct forms of intervention, such as within elite Muslim domestic slave owning households. Where French gradualist abolition policies were implemented, slavery continued and sometimes expanded. The ongoing major role slavery played within political, military and economic life in late nineteenth century West Africa was directly linked to the surge and historic peak of West African-born slaves imported to Moroccan slave markets via trans-Saharan networks in the 1890s. In contrast, though there were “drudge” and military slaves in early twentieth century independent Morocco, present historiography indicates that the preponderance of slaves at this time worked within households, serving more as a consummation of political and aristocratic power than as a material basis of economic power or state structures. Thus, the West African prevalence of peasant slave ownership and impact of the European impetus toward legitimate commerce are quite distinct from, and not fully comparable with the contours of emancipation in Morocco.

The French occupations of Timbuktu (1894) and Touat (1900) brought a definitive decline in West African-born slaves in the trans-Saharan trade, but did not lessen Moroccan demand for and usage of slaves. A shift of emphasis in slave origins followed, with increased enslavements from within Morocco and its frontiers, as well as the Sahara. In 1905 the indebted and politically weak Makhzen responded to foreign pressure by closing the public slave suq (market) in its then most important and populous city of Fes. The gradual removal of slave sales from public display was part of a reorganization of the trade, which readily adapted through confidential and clandestine enslavements and exchanges. On the eve of the Protectorate, Moroccan slave owners faced minor if any challenges from abolitionist influences in their capacities to purchase, own and use house slaves and concubines.

Domestic slavery was a basic feature of everyday elite Moroccan household life when the Protectorate was created in 1912 to reform and preserve the existing
administrative structures of the Makhzen. The administrative structures of the Protectorate were established to maintain, not reorganize, traditional Moroccan household and family life. No agency directly responsible for emancipation was envisioned or instituted. Where Sultan Moulay el-Hassan's (r.1873-94) late nineteenth century reforms regulated and curtailed vizirial power, the Protectorate limited the Sultan's powers, effectively eliminating Moroccan ministries of war and finance. A French Resident General with a sweeping range of powers over internal and foreign affairs was directly responsible to the French Foreign Minister in Paris; in addition to being the commander in chief, this official was the overall central administrator, ultimate architect and decision-maker concerning reforms. A Delegue to the Residence General was a second in command, entrusted to serve as an extension of, and even substitute for, the Resident General, while the Secretary General of the Protectorate was a powerful hands-on officer charged with civil and municipal control including all police. A key French administrative feature instituted in the functioning of this asymmetrical partnership was the Direction des Affaires Chérifiennes, for which there was a Conseiller du Gouvernement responsible with "Muslim affairs."

A further relevant institutional shift occurred with the first systematic European efforts at knowledge production about Morocco (begun in the 1890s), represented by the Mission Scientifique du Maroc founded in 1904. Amid an eclectic series of writings published by this Mission (including coverage of pre-Islamic themes, Muslim dynasties, technical features of manufacturing, Jewish history, Berber tribes, archeology, fully translated Arabic texts, and architecture) we find early evidence of important official attitudes toward slavery. A 1907 collection of documents examining fatwa published by the Mission Scientifique du Maroc details legal views concerning slave sales, liberations, and the rights and responsibilities of owners. More than a purely informative scholarly exercise, this publication reveals a tactical and contingent level of acceptance through its clear interest in and respect for reconstructing and commanding an intimate knowledge of the legal basis of slavery in Moroccan terms. Soon after the 1912 establishment of the Protectorate, knowledge claims about Islam and slavery became integral to the official French relationship to Moroccan domestic slavery.

The following correspondence between General Gouraud, Commandant of the Region of Fes, and Resident General Lyautey illustrates several features of the formation of Protectorate policy toward slavery. On May 22, 1914, Gouraud wrote Lyautey requesting clarification of French policy toward slavery. Gouraud described two recent events in Fes, reporting that in April 1913 prominent Fasi Mfeddl Bennani Smires sought the return of his "negresse." The enslaved woman had left his house to seek refuge with a brigadier of the Senegalese company at Dar Debibagh. The Bureau Chief of Fes-ville reported that the Senegalese soldier had sheltered the woman, pretending that she was his sister in law stolen from the Sudan. Gouraud decided to not intervene at the time. In a second event over a year later, in early May, the "negress" of Mohammed "Seghir" upon learning that she would be sold or moved to Marrakesh, sought refuge along with her two girls with a French officer who employed her as a "domestique." Some days later one of the daughters, around age ten, returned to Seghir's house where she was held. At this point Gouraud judged that he could not allow the return of Mohammed Seghir's slave, now in the refuge of a French officer. After noting that such events had become more frequent he writes,
In December of 1913 . . . Through the Pacha I ordered the closure of all houses which sell slaves, limiting myself to this sole measure to not simmer discontent in the spirit of the Fasis. You know then that there is slavery here . . .; the slaves, for the most part born in Morocco, are in general very well treated; the negresses, in particular, live in the intimacy of their masters and, being concubines in general, are treated on the same level as legitimate women. It is certain that if they were offered the choice between their liberty and the status quo, very few among them would abandon their masters who provide for all their needs and treat them with kindness.

In this situation it is indispensable to find a formula which permits reconciling the actual state of things with French legislation, in order to act with prudence and not disturb our conciliatory politics and appeasement, or create a general malcontent which will become more grave if it touches the masses of the Fasis concerning the greatest intimacies of their life.

In waiting for your instructions on this subject, I will continue to recommend to my officers not to intervene officially in any affairs which relate to the question of slavery.

This direction seems to me for the instant, a sufficient solution to this question, but if, it should become that the desertions of negresses take an epidemic character, it might be necessary to move the Senegalese from urban barracks where they are at this time a refuge and a center of attraction for negresses of cities.

Lyautey's response on June 4, 1914, further reveals the early priorities of the Protectorate administration,

In answer to your letter I have the honor to make known to you that I estimate with you that it is necessary to prohibit in an absolute way the open sale of slaves.

This measure, as well as the refusal of a French authority to lend support when complaints are directed against slaves who flee the house of their masters will prove sufficiently that we reject slavery.

An intervention more direct on our part in the repression of this trade would have, at present, serious disadvantages from the political point of view.17

The de facto acceptance of domestic slavery as a Moroccan social institution, and the decision to oppose only the most glaring representations of the trade inaugurated what was at most a feeble and indirect effort against slavery. Lyautey's calculated position deferred concerns about runaway slaves by emphasizing measures against the "open" or public sale of slaves.

Limiting Protectorate policy to the prohibition of public slave sales was an essentially political move, expressing an interest in maintaining an internationally acceptable anti-slavery policy while not alienating slaveholding Moroccans. As the Protectorate was formed through direct cooperation with Fasi authorities and elites, all levels of French administration were particularly cautious and deliberate about interference in their lives. Within and among Fasi homes varying numbers of slaves participated in and performed all of the visible and behind the scenes forms of work needed for the daily life and special occasions of their owner's households. Fes was emblematic of elite Moroccan households, who emulated and connected with each other and the Makhzen through the use and exchange of slaves as a means of maintaining and circulating prestige throughout their social networks.18
variance from a clear commitment to, preparation for, and enforcement of abolition, which would have necessarily entailed developing a systematic opposition to the ongoing informal trade, and an active programmatic intervention addressing domestic slavery. Moroccan slave owners readily responded to, and even anticipated, these distinctions concerning a public slave trade and domestic Moroccan affairs, adapting slavery in ways which endured beyond Protectorate policies and practices.

Shaped from its founding by the precedence of several other colonial experiences and Lyautey’s severe elitism, a dominant French interest throughout the Protectorate period was to preserve and even strengthen Moroccan socio-political hierarchies as a basis of maintaining and exercising indirect rule.¹⁹ In his analysis of Protectorate era administrative history Abdellah Ben Mlih describes an “incoherent conservatism” initiated by Lyautey.²⁰ Far beyond a single French colonist’s cult of personality, eccentric political visions and manipulative relationships with Moroccan traditions, Ben Mlih strikes upon a feature resonant throughout Protectorate policies toward slavery. In effect, Lyautey, Gouraud and local French administrators embarked upon what continued to be a remarkably vague anti-slavery program, based upon social continuity and political interests. Officially the Protectorate opposed the slave trade, yet practical realities encouraged administrators to avoid involvements with and acknowledgements of slavery. In Fes, slaves challenging their plight were far more often received by Fasi than French authorities, who served the interest of owners and wielded corporal punishments.²¹ Lack of official commitment was fused with contrived official French attitudes toward slaves and their conditions. Romantic images such as Gouraud’s assertion of slave’s well-being and satisfaction, and the expressed fear of the consequences of an “epidemic” of slaves seeking freedom through their liaisons with “Senegalese” troops, reveal a core disinterest in supporting slaves’ efforts to redefine their station in the colonial social order.²²

The Protectorate continued to function in this mode of ambiguity and calculated non-interference for over a decade. In the early 1920s communications among officials reiterated the need to clarify policy and expected practices concerning slavery. One case from this time stands out in particular. In November 1922 a civil police officer from Mogador wrote the General Commandant for the region of Marrakech concerning two children either retained or sold by an “ex-Caid” from Mogador residing in Marrakech. The letter was written in response to the diligent and emotional lobbying of Fathma Blal and her parents Blal and Djemaa (all former slaves of the ex-Caid Sidi M. Ould Anflous), who sought custody of Fathma’s two children.²³ In January of 1923 Anflous gave a testimony explaining that a year and half earlier Blal and Djemaa had sought and received their emancipation from the French office, but in subsequently seeking their official recognition from the Mogador Caid, found that the Caid demanded that Fathma remain with her owner. Anflous recounts,

I sought to sell her but without success. This slave refused to follow the purchasers who presented themselves. Confronting her attitude I resigned myself to give up, and at this time the authorities of Mogador started to engage in the continuations against me, for the restitution of her two children.

She is not unaware however that her children were sold by me approximately four years ago at the Sidi Ahmed moussem...
I sold them because my financial circumstances did not enable me to provide for their needs anymore, under the legal terms conferred in Muslim law. The detailed machinations surrounding these events and their outcome for Fathma's family are unknown, but the situation clearly assumed a larger resonance. Following Anflous's testimony, the head of the civil police in Mogador was stirred to present the case to the Plenipotentiary Minister in Rabat. He expressed doubt that Anflous had sold the children and sought to clarify the scope of his powers.

In view of the frequency of acts of the kind, slaves seeking refuge for themselves with the French authorities . . . make known to me the advisable attitude to observe, particularly if it is possible to reject the claims generally made by fugitive's owners.

Two weeks later the Plenipotentiary Minister Urbain Blanc urgently sought the advice of the Director of Indigenous Affairs in an attempt to “define in precise terms the role and the limits of intervention of the policing authorities in litigations of this kind.” The response which followed continued to articulate a perverse ethos of manipulating appearances whose realties ultimately fell heaviest upon slaves:

If pressing considerations of Muslim policy prohibit us from officially abolishing slavery, it rests with us to practically reduce it to the degree of a state of ordinary domesticity and consequently imply, for the individual fixed in this position, the faculty to leave at any time.

It was subsequently recommended that escaped male slaves and their children be immediately freed by Caid, with a distinction for women and their children, whose freedom was qualified upon paternity. It was also proposed to forbid the writing of any legal acts related to the sale of slaves by an Adoul, or under the authority of a Qadi or Caid.

Later in 1923 M. Urbain Blanc (then acting as Secretariat General) distributed a circular throughout the Protectorate concerning slavery and referring directly to “Muslim policy.” Over the course of the Protectorate, documents addressing slavery consistently refer to the importance of “Muslim policy.” In the early twentieth century “Muslim policy” was a malleable feature of French imperialism used on a larger scale than the Moroccan Protectorate, defying simple definition. It broadly referred to French colonial policies informed by social scientific inquiry concerning Muslims and has been described as having emerged as a “new framework for implementing the imperial project and putting it into practice.” A more precise depiction of what such a “new” and purportedly singular framework entailed across diverse French interests, even across the Maghreb, is unlikely. “Muslim policy” simultaneously appeared in theorizing assimilation for Algerians and in Commissar Resident General Lyautey’s anti-assimilationist promotion of authentic Morocanness.

Urbain Blanc's 1923 circular intended to codify the Protectorate's local actions after “a recent incident expressed that the controlling authorities were dubious concerning the attitude which they were to adopt, about the question of freeing slaves.” The document presented three points of instruction for local administrators to follow, prefaced by an explanation of official perspective:
With an aim of avoiding any undulation and any discordant action in this delicate matter, I have considered it necessary to make known, in a precise way, the methods, as well as the limits of the intervention of authorities in the litigations of this kind.

By the fact of the establishment of French Protectorate, the free and public trade of the slaves, which was exerted openly in Morocco under the terms of ancestral habits, was abolished; but it continues among many Moroccan families through the rather important domestic, from this established fact, they are attached to their masters by an old bond of serfdom.

Although, in an almost absolute way, the domestic does not protest against their state because it offers them, in certain ways, rather serious advantages, not least among which is their safe existence, it is required of us, however, since it is impossible for us through the most pressing considerations of Muslim policy, to penetrate in the internal life of families, to intervene in all the occasions which will arise, to allow the domestic to leave their servile situation, at any time.

Among the greatest contradictions of this circular was the patent effort to deny that slaves protesting their condition had raised a core unresolved issue of accountability for official representatives of France. If slaves (here termed "domestics" in a redefinition of status which became standard), remained in the "advantages" of their conditions in "an almost absolute way," what was being clarified? The toothless and impracticable circular further instructed that escaped slaves encountered were to be immediately freed through the office of the Caid, noting that this would be voluntary to their owners (thus without the use of force). Two further points noted suggestions for distinguishing an escapee’s sex and the paternity of their children, and extending the interdiction of slave sales to forbid Caids, Qadis, and Adouls from legally recognized any acts related to slaves. Incorporated alongside the mammoth glaring omission of failing to outlaw slavery was the Protectorate’s selective and contradictory “Muslim policy.” Targeting the role of Caids and Qadis was a conscious effort to further delegitimize the trade. But this measure had long been anticipated by Adouls such as those in Fes who were already careful to control references to slaves, and all but completely sustained the omission of references to slave purchases. The circulars’ concern with the paternity of slave children has been interpreted as a strategy promoting recognition that concubinage with categorically non-slave women be forbidden by Mālikī šaría (the prevailing school of Islamic law in Morocco) as a form of fornication. Yet, if this detail was to be considered consequential for combating domestic slavery, it must be noted to have relied upon validation of the formal legal status of slave and concubine.

Residential Circular 17 did not have a clearly discernible impact upon the clandestine trade or the institution of domestic slavery. Neither outlawing nor ending slavery, it became a nebulous reference point throughout the Protectorate administration. An example from southern Morocco is illustrative. In June of 1924 two slaves who had fled from their owner were taken by French authorities to the Qadi in Tamanar to receive declaration of their liberty as officially prescribed. The Qadi refused to free them without receiving instructions to this effect from the Visir of Justice. The officer interpreted the refusal as a personal pretext, however, and the situation revealed a more substantial issue. Three months later a brief discussion ensued following a letter from a Lieutenant intent to call "attention to the difficulties of applying the circular if these instructions
have not been given to the Qadis who are presented with fugitive slaves by local authorities.”

37 The Direction of Affaires Indigenes in Rabat responded that there was no practical value in starting a discussion of principle with the Makhzen concerning slavery, offering the iconic and oblique advice that the circular be applied “at all times when possible.”

38

International Conventions, Internal Realities, and Colonial Depictions of Slavery

International pressure to hold the Protectorate responsible for abolition does not appear to have significantly impacted the “Muslim policy” of non-interference in religion or “tradition” established during the Lyautey period (1912–1925). Rather, in the realities of Moroccan slavery international forums and organizations’ attention to the institution help reveal contexts of Protectorate anticipation and control of how domestic slavery was represented and understood. These manipulations are clear in the handling of two occasions in the nineteen twenties when the Ligue française pour la défense des droits de l’Homme et du citoyen probed into slavery in Morocco and corresponded with Paris and Rabat. In early September of 1926 two members of the League attended the moussem at Bou-Enfir in Chichaoua in the region of Marrakech, where they reported to have been offered the purchase of slaves. Later that month they wrote the head office of their League in Paris, protesting the slave trade in Morocco. Their letter was sent within the same week that France signed the International Slavery Convention outlawing the institution.

In February of 1927 the President of the League wrote to Resident General Steeg in Rabat raising the issue again, which prompted an internal inquiry. In March the Captain at Chicahaoua reported on the matter, based on “long years . . . lived among the tribe.” He wrote to the General in Command of the Marrakesh region:

It is not doubtful that the exchange of slaves still exists in Morocco, and no one is unaware that all the chiefs and notables have slaves in their service, moreover we are not armed to prohibit this traffic, which is not practiced in the auctions of the souks, or Moussems, at least in the subjected zone.

This trade is made under the cloak, among confidants, and it appears unlikely to me that spontaneous offers were made to Europeans.

Steeg’s subsequent letter to the President of the League in Paris reports “a meticulous investigation by the regional authorities of Marrakech, in order to attempt to identify the natives who had been able to quote slave prices.” Having discovered no trace of the suspected traffic, he expressed regret that the two observers failed to inform local authorities at the time. He then amplified the imperial military rationale that it is appropriate to recognize that the clandestine slave traffic could not easily be detected and repressed on the edge of areas which we do not control yet, but the progress of pacification will allow the monitoring of the French authorities little by little to remove the practice of slavery in Morocco, where only domestic slavery still exists in a patriarchal and very attenuated form and a slave has only to present themselves to the local French police to obtain their immediate freedom.
It made full contemporary political sense to emphasize that ending slavery was integral to French imperial interests in pacification, given ongoing campaigns in southern Morocco and the recent collaborative annihilation of the Riffian state. Despite this compelling rationale, the President of the principal French anti-slavery organization could not passively accept a clear and direct statement of the Protectorate’s full awareness of continuing slavery. Without surprise, the President of the League continued to pursue the issue of the clandestine trade in Morocco, and retorted by involving the minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris.43

Within a week of receiving notice of the minister of Foreign Affair’s present interest concerning slavery in Morocco, the Resident General took notable care in the handling of an incident near Imintanout in which a Khalifa sought to reclaim his slaves from local authorities. He responded in detail to local concerns about the matter:

This circular always fixes the Protectorate point of view in the matter. If its application raises difficulties in particular cases, it would be enough to interpret it based on the general principle which all our colonial policy in Muslim countries takes as a starting point.

France does not admit slavery and only knows free beings on all the territories of its colonial domain. Consequently, not only could it not put the police force at the service of a master allegedly claiming for the arrest or the search for a so-called slave, but still, if recourse to the police force were necessary, they could be exerted only in favor of the native escapee.

Also respectful of the organization and the traditions of the Muslim family, France does not want to penetrate in its intimacy and does not seek to specify up to which point the black domestic of either sex, attached to a house, is or is not entirely free in their actions. As long as these black servants do not assert the rupture of the bonds which link them to the Muslim family, France is unaware of the nature of these bonds. On the other hand, as soon as one of them is placed under our safeguard, complete assistance and protection is granted to them.

In the case of the young man Ayad Ben Ali, the chief of the Office of Imintanout acted perfectly in refusing to give this native to the agent of the Khalifa of Mtougi and it rests with to you to seek employment for him or he can freely, without being exposed to molestation from anyone, live and work for himself.44

Despite the swollen sense of France and her scruples, it is unclear what qualitative changes had been enacted. The entire onus of liberation and what it would entail continued to be borne exclusively by slaves themselves, with no further promotion or concern from the Protectorate. This passing instant of charitable consideration for a boy’s possible livelihood beyond slavery was not programmatic, and remained the unaddressed existential concern of those envisioning lives beyond slavery. Later in the month Steeg further displayed his heighten attention to slavery, writing a confidential complaint to the Commandant General of Marrakesh about leaks to the press of confidential correspondence concerning slavery, which resulted in the publication of document extracts including a circular related to slavery.45

In October of 1927 the President of the League wrote the Resident General again, observing the prior made point in their correspondence of the importance of colonial pacification for abolition, and demanding inquiry into a new case within Marrakech itself. He related that on July 12th a woman named Aabla
Tougia who had lived for fifteen years in the household of Si Madani, brother of the Pacha of Marrakech, was abducted and taken to the local slave merchant “Bel Khait.” Investigations followed, producing at least two secret reports. The most extensive detailed that “Bel Khait” was indeed a well-known local slave trader, specializing in procuring musicians, cooks, concubines and trained house slaves. In the other document, the General Commandant of Marrakech was matter of fact in reporting that “the clandestine traffic is found in all large cities of Morocco” and that “all notable’s houses are full of slaves.” Overall the inquiry, including the General’s interview with the Pacha, found that Aabla Tougia was now a resident in the care of an associate of the Pacha, and her personal statement was recorded.

In early November a response was sent to the President of the League in Paris. It studiously avoided use of the term “slave,” explaining that during a family disagreement concerning succession, the “maidservant” Aabla El Touguia was temporarily housed with “Bel Khiat.” It selectively mentioned that the General of Marrakesh personally intervened and interviewed the Pasha, and excluded mention of the Pacha’s acknowledgement that “Bel Khiat” had dealt slaves in “the past” in representing the full findings of their investigation. Aabla El Touguia, who is described as an “already old, tubercular patient and incompetent of any work,” testified:

I am nourished and I was never maltreated nor despoiled of my clothing. It is true that when I left the Madani palace my trunk was removed from me by Rarc Ben Belkir, but it was with an aim of checking it for fear I carried some jewels. It was returned to me a few days later complete with all my affairs.

Though the League had duly uncovered a significant clandestine slave trader, this principal issue was thoroughly deflected unto the individual incident. Soon afterward Resident General Steeg himself initiated another round of correspondence between Rabat and Paris concerning the affair. This time the Protectorate was more emphatic of the political difficulties inherent in suppressing the trade given their inabilities each time that it involves “the principal Muslim characters, fundamentally the Maghzan itself.” This minor variation of the familiar ideology and political logic reiterated that “Muslim policy” prohibited any intervention, “as long as these family servants do not wish to leave and get employment allowing them to live with complete freedom.”

What was true for the largest contexts of the Protectorate itself was also the case for slavery—projecting ideologically-laden notions of Islam as the basis of Moroccan authority could be used to obscure and rationalize arrangements of power both over and amongst Moroccans. Distinctions made by European scholars and administrators became blurred as their efforts to understand and respond to slavery revealed recurrent assumptions that slavery was an expression of Islam. As has been shown, selective deference to Muslim law and “Muslim policy” was a recurrent response both toward the trade and even more so for the institution of slavery. A 1927 letter from Résident General Steeg to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris culminated by reiterating the stock mantra that,

(If pressing considerations of Muslim policy prohibit any intervention from us, as long as these family servants do not wish to leave their masters, those of them
who request their freedom are ensured to find assistance and protection from controlling authorities.  

In addition to this reference to “Muslim policy” serving to index the elephant in the room of the fully deemed political necessity of the Protectorate's tacit tolerance of domestic slavery, this awkward official position statement revealed the enormous mythic reassurance that slaves (here termed “family servants”) were fully acting and living within their own agency and choices. That there is no evidence and no reason to believe this official attitude toward slaves and slavery was anything but arbitrary, in no way based on any efforts at official or systematic non-biased inquiries documenting slave’s realities and voices, again brings into sharp relief the fully expedient nature of “Muslim policy.”

Predictably, the official French mixed message of tolerance toward the institution did not reinforce their prohibitions against the formal slave trade. In 1928 colonial officer and prolific scholar Edouard Michaux-Bellaire wrote a well-informed report on the commerce of slaves in Morocco. His “note” went further than contemporaries' standard official repetitions. Where “Muslim policy” often meant simply meant a convenient deferral to the “traditions” of the Maghzen and Moroccan elites, thus providing a basis for tolerating slavery, Michaux-Bellaire promoted the nineteenth century abolitionist writings of Moroccan scholar Ahmed Ben Khaled Naciri. Where the accustomed refrain had become a restatement that the Protectorate had outlawed the trade and that therefore the institution was gradually dying, Michaux-Bellaire outlined the adaptability of contemporary realities:

> the establishment of the Protectorate, the suppression in principal of the slave trade, have obliged the merchants and buyers of slaves to create a new organization for procuring their human merchandise for sale without risking administrative intervention. . . little by little they have created a sort of modus vivendi which has permitted this profitable trade to be continued with the French administration seeming to be unaware of it.

Though it is impossible to accurately reconstruct the volume or the complete details of the adaptive and temporary arrangements within the informal trade that Michaux-Bellaire and other administrators encountered, evidence of several salient features can be considered.

Protectorate era Moroccan military and economic histories were closely intertwined with ineffective anti-slavery policy and the irrepressible clandestine trade. Extended military “pacification” of the lands of “useful Morocco” paired with early to mid-twentieth century capitalist agricultural penetration into rural Morocco with complex consequences widening and accelerating social vulnerabilities and stratifications. As witnessed elsewhere, the survival of the slave trade was asserted as a rationale within the politics of colonial military expansion and pacification over an extended period, which in Morocco lasted until 1934. In an important contrast with West Africa the disruptions of colonial warfare did not occasion Moroccan slaves into mass exodus, but rather contributed to the ongoing supply of rural captives for the enduring clandestine trade in urban domestic slaves. That runaway rural slaves produced no comparable collective movements shifts this history away from a standard Africanist historiographic theme of slave agency, revealing how West-African-centered debates assessing
the relative import of colonial policies and slave initiatives in ending slavery are not a close fit with the Moroccan experience.\textsuperscript{55}

Prior to the Protectorate, the 1906 Act of Algeciras enabled legal foreign ownership of land for agriculture and from 1910 onward the Service du Contrôle de la Dette began direct administration of Moroccan customs (aside from the Spanish Zones).\textsuperscript{56} Though the majority of Moroccans clung to rural life throughout the Protectorate, with the total rural proportion of the population declining from 89\% to 76\% across the entire period between 1914 to 1952, this resilience occurred amid mounting challenges for millions of rural Moroccans.\textsuperscript{57} Beginning in 1913 the Protectorate re instituted and modified a traditional tax (\textit{tartib}). The \textit{tartib} was designed to extract a cash tax on the revenues from approximately two-thirds of the population, and fell as a great burden upon Moroccan farmers.\textsuperscript{58} Agricultural modernization was accompanied by forced redistribution though which Europeans and a minuscule Moroccan elite held complete control of water rights, the best lands, and access to a growing abundance of rural labor for poorly regulated subsistence wages.\textsuperscript{59} Moroccan farmers' limited access to capital and improvements meant that for nearly everyone farming techniques could change little, and as the relative value of their crops rapidly declined there were increased displacements, growing communal and familial insecurities, and deepening dependencies upon wage labor and migration.\textsuperscript{60} These conditions contributed to the ongoing kidnapping and sale of unfortunate children of the rural poor and dispossessed.

Where Lyautey's economic policies disfavored and sought to curtail the presence of colons, after 1925 Steeg's administration initiated aggressive rural settlement and development following the Algerian example.\textsuperscript{61} Several successful years of legal displacement was followed by the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{62} Rapid demographic growth, urbanization and “deracination” paired with unemployment to form another crucial dimension at play. In 1929, on the eve of an extended period of generalized decline, only 100,000 total Moroccans were employed in all sectors of modernized economic activities both urban and rural.\textsuperscript{63} The ostensible planning of “colonial urban systems” such as Casablanca and Rabat did far more to contain and segregate than address and resolve the economic and social consequences of their demographic explosions.\textsuperscript{64} In the interwar years cities such as Fes bore the imprint of marginalization within the Atlantic-bound colonial economy. Slaves introduced via the clandestine trade to elite urban households became demographically engulfed—along with entire medinas—by growing ranks of desperate poor. As Fes lost its rank as Morocco’s economic and political capital, its wealthy residents capitalized upon these historical changes, maintaining and even expanding their distinct traditional network and status, which continued to entail slave ownership.

It should be emphasized that Protectorate military presence, and even control, did not equate with an end of the slave trade. Reference to the sale of slave women centered in the Casba of Beni Mellal, “with correspondents in many cities, particularly Fes,” was advanced in the argument for greater military force.\textsuperscript{65} Michaux-Bellaire argued that the enslavement and trafficking of “tribal women” benefited those who resent the Protectorate, both insiders and the dissidents. He urged an examination
of the necessary measures for closing the Casba de Beni Mellal which forms a part of the gravely disadvantageous criminal intrigues, not only authorizing the trade of free women but prolonging the dissidence.

Though “pacification” was completed in 1934 the clandestine trade continued. Michaux-Bellaire’s further policy suggestions for working closer with local leaders, and targeting suqs and moussems with known slave sales, naively ignored or at least apparently contradicted the very modus vivendi he himself had described. Again, a fundamental transition of this period was that slave dealers and elite slave holders anticipated and responded to colonial policies and the distinctions they involved, replacing public slave sales and their legal record, with a greater reliance upon the established base of interpersonal trade.

A widespread myth persisted that Moroccan slaves sold during the early twentieth century were predominately of Sudanese birth. As one French officer recounted:

it is certain that we can often see slave women in Moroccan houses who have absolutely nothing to do with the Sudan and whose origins everyone knows are from the sous or berber tribes.

Though few specific regions were cited in rare Protectorate reports concerned with the public sale of slaves, ongoing references to the widespread clandestine trade reveal administrator’s awareness and limitations of the Protectorate. The majority of oral historical informants of slave descendants in Fes had family origins in the Sous and Sahara.

Throughout the dramatic uncertainties surrounding World War II the clandestine slave trade remained active, and continued in its delegitimized and evolving form beyond the Protectorate period. Following the formation of the United Nations as a forum for abolition, in 1950 J. Lapanne-Joinville wrote a report published by the Centre de Haute Etudes D’Administration Musulmane examining slavery in Morocco. “Note Sur L’Esclavage au Maroc,” is comprised of four parts, three of which are dedicated to Islam and Islamic law. In spite of the text’s opening line: “(t)oday slavery has practically disappeared from Morocco,” the report substantively reveals little not touched upon in the 1907 collection noted above. One exception is a perfunctory section reviewing measures taken by the Protectorate, another exception of more interest is found in the discussion of the conclusion titled “the Current Position of Chraa.” Here several uncommon assertions are made:

The attitude of the fuqahas has been for a great part the success of our anti-slavery position.

Many Muslims, prompted by the reasoning of jurists, have had scruples to protect their slaves and have returned their freedom, some without (legal) forms, others resorting to (legal) proceeds of liberating.

Despite the self-congratulatory claim, at present no available evidence confirms the direct influence of anti-slavery positions through fuqahas, or substantiates the premise that there were significant numbers of slaves informally freed due to changes in their owner’s legal and religious views. Rather the overall negligible numbers of legal liberations in Fes casts great doubt upon the likelihood of either
Moreover, each of these scenarios fully mutes and excludes direct consideration of slaves’ lives and relationships as well as relevant transformations they underwent. Protectorate authorities persistently missed the realities of Moroccan status quo attitudes toward slave ownership being intertwined with their shifting usage of Islamic law and legal documentation. A repeated tendency was to equate Moroccan slavery with immutable and ahistorical conceptions of Islam and Islamic law, and effectively overlook the realities of slavery. Fasi usage of legal documentation referring to slaves reveals a measured overall decrease followed by a rapid decline from the 1950s onward, a pattern which stands in complete contrast with the recurrent colonial projections of an absolutist Muslim position or fixed practices concerning slavery.

Lapanne-Joinville’s 1950 report reiterated the hackneyed position that the Protectorate had never recognized the legitimacy of slavery or the slave trade and asserted the vacuous official homily that the suppression of public markets had been a “final” blow in the inevitable natural demise of slavery. The lack of official legal opposition mirrored by the general tolerance of domestic slavery, along with the failure to commit to any concerted efforts to combat the stubborn demand and durable informal trade, represent the negligible impact of market closures and the very limited political will of Protectorate efforts against slavery on the whole. Remarkably, Lapanne-Joinville acknowledged as much, noting with regret that administrative prohibitions had failed to bring the complete disappearance of the commerce in slaves, now comprised of brokers and intermediaries moving enslaved females from the South. He writes,

We still note the existence of a slave broker in Fes from whom prospective buyers supply themselves. The person in question moved their center of operations to their home at the beginning of the Protectorate . . . and continued to operate as a black market institution.

Unwilling and unable to invest in effect measures to end domestic slavery, the recurrent redefinition of slave status reflected the ambivalence and inaction that endured throughout the Protectorate.

A further strong example of durable ambiguity in the relationship between Protectorate positions toward Islam and slavery can be found in the internally circulated notes in preparation for the 1956 International Convention for the Abolition of Slavery. After describing domestic slavery as a “quasi-voluntary form of female domesticity,” “legal concubinage,” and “semi-slaves, whose condition is in general rather soft,” the argument is made that,

If slavery were legally abolished, the children born of concubines would be illegitimate and even, most often of adultery. Reforms would thus be paradoxically to them, on this point, unfavorable and it is probable that the traditional (authorities), would formulate, this objection if necessary.

The position expressed here is apparently in support of a projected status quo for Moroccan slaveholders. This remarkable defense of slavery emphasizes the primacy of Islamic legal principles and practices, which by the mid-1950s had unquestionably entered an historical transition concerning patterns of legal usage. And again, the wellbeing of slaves and their children are interpreted with neither
cogniscence nor inclusion of their actual conditions or their own articulations of interest. The steady deployment of this maneuver endured throughout the Protectorate. Looking back to 1913, during the second year of the Protectorate a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Doukkala-Abda region responded to Resident General Lyuatey concerning slavery in the region, noting in his concluding remarks,

in Morocco, the word “slave” does not have the attributes that we generally designate due to our mentality. It is a non-free servant who is part of the household and represents valued merchandise for this reason.77

In 1955, one year before Moroccan independence, the Director of Cherifienne Affairs extensively edited Lapanne-Joinville’s report for the International Convention for the Abolition of Slavery in 1956.78 In drafting the document a sentence originally written, “It hardly remains but in the great Moroccan families, in the form of domestic female slavery or legal quasi-voluntary concubinage,” was amended, replacing the words “domestic female slavery” with “domestic women.”79

Protectorate Delimitations of Blackness and Slavery

Historians interrogating diverse forms of colonial knowledge production have consistently explicated its service to imperial attitudes and interests.80 In this case, colonial knowledge and representations of blackness in Morocco operated within a core disjuncture—blackness as a lived category within complex social realities was suitable for recurrent intellectual discussion and ethnographic recognition, but was restricted from official demographic or political recognition. Powerful shared beliefs about blackness meant that although enslaved and free Afro-Maghribi people were a fundamental part of Moroccan history, human geography, and contemporary social organization, their numbers and conditions were deemed officially invisible by the Protectorate and so remained. This normative denial of blackness was an important feature of managing how domestic slavery was known and approached, extending the clear pattern of deep vested political interests trumping empiricism.

An element of social continuity throughout the Protectorate era was that the majority of Moroccan slaves remained “black” and female. In the legal principals of Mālikī sharīʿa, slavery was not related to color or ethnicity, and in the multifaceted realities of Moroccan slavery, light-skinned Berber female slaves were common. It is key to note that Moroccan Arab elites’ capacity to paternally claim and directly assimilate their children with non-Arab and enslaved women was integral to their historic identity and unity. The well-worn patterns of social values and practice related to slavery were complex and contingent, and this ideal legal route to emancipation and assimilation was not always guaranteed and realized. In the historical continuities experienced during the Protectorate there was a lived continuum of color and human geography within which blackness and slavery were generally associated with one another, and amid ordinary exceptions, dark-skinned male and female slaves remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Intimately tied to the Protectorate's relationship to slavery were shared French and Moroccan attitudes toward and understandings of color. Earlier colonial experiences, particularly in Algeria, informed the Protectorate importation
and manipulation of racial categories. Far from being abstract and idle anthropological taxonomies, colonial notions of who Moroccans were and how their identities and social orders functioned, repeatedly influenced Protectorate understandings, policies and political manipulations. Academic and political attentions have long focused on the issues and consequences of this period for Jewish and Berber history, blackness and slavery were, and continue to be, approached in a distinct manner. The dominant criteria employed by Protectorate officials, subsequent Moroccan officials, and broader studies for measuring the diverse human geography of Morocco’s population have been religion (Muslim and Jewish) and language (Arabophone and Berberophone). The annual population statistics throughout the Protectorate period were recorded for French, Foreign (European), Muslim, and Jews. Again, the accepted view held that although blacks and blackness clearly exist and are of importance within Moroccan communities and social orders, they are of no collective political consequence and require no official recognition.

It is useful to reconstruct how this normative formal denial of color emerged and was maintained in spite of empirical sociocultural realities, amid continued inconsistencies and incoherence. One French study published prior to the Protectorate, though grounded in the assumptions of contemporary racist theories and drawing upon limited sources, raised fundamental questions about blackness in Moroccan life:

In contact with Blacks (Negres) of the Saharan edge of the Atlas, or import of Sudan as slaves or as janissaries of Khalifes, the races Jewish, Arab and Berber little by little, in certain places, were tinted with black blood: Jews of the Marrakech region, of which “some are slightly dyed” in consequence of mixtures prior to Islamization: Arabs of Western Morocco or the crossings are particularly frequent, Berbères of the Rif or of the Atlas or several tribes have black skin.

In this ahistorial paradigm blackness existed as a form of miscegenation into the discrete and pure racial types of Jews, Arabs, and Berbers. However when the text actually addresses the Moroccan population it is with a great measure of self-contradiction, as the categories which the author chose to provide population approximations for prove more extensive than these pure types, also including Maures, Blacks, and Haratin.

In 1928 an official French guide was published to orientate and serve as a reference for Protectorate officers. The cursory “ethnography” provided by the guide ordered Morocco into three population groups: Berbers (comprised of three “principal races”), Arabs, and Jews. The only remote allusion to blackness which can be interpreted was through a verbatim reprinting of Urbain Blanc’s 1923 Residental Circular 17 S.G.P., reiterating the ineffective official slavery policy of the Protectorate.

In what initially appears to be a complete contrast, a 1937 extended ethnography of indigenous North Africa described in its introduction as being a “practical sociology,” included a significant thread of discussion of blackness. One passage explains:

In the population one also finds negres: abid or oucfane, more or less groups. They are in general the descendants of former slaves freed by their masters or France. In some centers, they are joined together in a district called Village
Negre under the direction of one as of their called Caid El Abid (Caid of Negres). Formerly they were launderers of houses; now they are employed as sweepers or street cleaners.

They are Moslem; nevertheless, they have preserved of the fetishistic practices. Their "owner" or marabout is Sidna Belal, negre muezzin of Mahomet.

Their naivety and their simplicity have generated, on their grounds, the spirit of begging: this is why they benefit from all the European and Moslem Festivals to dance in the streets with their tom-tom and their immense castanets out of wrought iron and so as to ask a little money.

The fleeting mention of the fascinating and important “black villages” that seem to have developed within Protectorate era patterns of urbanization is overshadowed among other problematic references. Despite the earlier published official guide’s complete denial of a black population, how this text recognizes color renders their perspectives and historical impact inseparable. Even though the ethnography initially asserts three “types” of black population (“Gourari”; “H’art’ani”; and “le negre”, “l’oucif”, or “Abd” described as “descendants of old slaves freed by France”), its discussion supports at least two important shared vague suppositions with the officers guide. First, the unexamined notion that slavery somehow ended (or would end) due to French presence, and second, that color and social stratification within Moroccan communities were rightfully subsumed into effective irrelevance by the categories of religion and language. Another official publication from the following year intended for a general and commercial readership confirms the standard option and tendency of a complete omission of blackness. The annual Protectorate population statistics featured categories for a non-Moroccan population of French and Foreigners, and a Moroccan population of Muslims and Jews, sometimes with a brief discussion configured around a Muslim population subdivided with Berberophones and Arabophones, an Israelite population, a population of diverse European nationals, and French citizens.

The Protectorate political interest in minimizing blackness from Moroccan and international attention was expressed in refusing permission of the 1927 fourth Pan-African Congress. The following explanation, made in justification of the refusal, helps explicitly situate Protectorate attitudes toward Moroccan blackness in relation to larger historical currents:

There was never a negro question in Morocco; it thus seems (at this time) useless . . . to create one by initiatives and demonstrations which would be explained by no claim.

Morocco is not a people of negroes; thus one does not see why it is required to authorize here the American organization which is interested in the development of the black people.

What actually hides under the label of this Pan-African Congress seems to be quite simply an investigation into slavery. It is the one of the most delicate questions and requires to be handled with the greatest prudence.

In theory, even the fact of the establishment of the Protectorate, has removed slavery from Morocco. In reality, there are still slaves and it is obviously not possible to immediately remove an organization which plays a considerable part in the social state of the country. That can be done only by successive stages.

One of the first stages was the suppression of the public and official sale of the slaves: this trade which still exists is nothing more than clandestine. As such,
it would be enough to allow an anti-slavery and pro-negro delegation to present itself with all the humane demonstrations usual to these organizations. There could be a pretext of blackmail which seems preferable to avoid.

Besides in Morocco one should not confuse the negro question with the slave question nor with the Moslem question. Slavery existed in Morocco before Islam and was exerted on populations which were not black . . .

There are no comparisons to establish between the negroes of Morocco and those of America . . .

The fact of being not simply slave, but black in Morocco does not prevent (one) from arriving at the highest situations. Not only can a negro be caïd, but can be a vizier and even grand vizier. The famous regent during the minority of Abdelaziz, Ahmed, who was negro, was a grand vizier . . . and signed Ahmed Ben Moussa Ben Ahmed proudly.

Besides in Morocco the black color does not have anything particularly pejorative, famous figures are black . . .

Concerning this matter Elisee Reclus wrote a concise sentence: Sid el-hadj Abdessalam el-ouazzani, Grand Master of Moulay Taieb, count among his ancestors mulattos but not negroes. His small son, Moulay Taieb Ben El Arbi who is today Grand Master of the Zaouia d’Ouazan, where he resides, also had a negress mother from Medaghra in the North of Tafilalet, who had been given to his Father Moulay El Arbi by Cherif Alawi. The Chief of Zaouis Naciriya de Temegrouit, Sidi Abdessalem is also very coloured; finally there is a very prominent Moroccan personality, well known and very appreciated in the most elegant Parisian circles, the Pasha of Marrakech. Certainly Tahmi El Glaoui has undeniable signs of a negro origin, which does not prevent him from being at the forefront of situations in Morocco, and everywhere enjoying very great influence and consideration.

In summary color prejudice absolutely does not exist in Morocco, it can be seen to be completely useless to create it by authorizing congresses, committees and other demonstrations from which blacks would learn that they must be despised by whites and from which whites would learn that they have the right to despise the blacks, whereas until now all this world saw . . . (has been) without worrying neither about their color nor of others.91

The primary contradiction throughout the document is the simultaneous denial and recognition of blackness for political interests. This contradiction reflected political anxieties concerning the Protectorate’s tolerance of slavery amid the potential of transnational outcries against slavery and contemporary influences surrounding Pan-Africanism. Interestingly, the Pan-Africanist movement is reduced here to an association with America and slavery. Juxtaposed with the denial of blackness are the recognition that in Moroccan history “the great mass of slaves were black,” and a selective recognition of blackness in an effort to demonstrate that color has not prevented Moroccans from greatness.92 Not only do the citations of the blackness of Moroccans of great station verify their non-normality, these examples present no conceptual, historical, sociological, or linguistic vocabulary other than the very blackness argued not to exist. A final attempt to register a definitive negation is made in concluding that absolutely no prejudice exists and therefore there should be a refusal of organizations and forums which would teach “blacks” and “whites” to despise one another. In a crowning contradiction, use of the “American” black and white racial dyad dominates the logic and framing of this call to preempt the importation of outside racial categories and tensions.
In fact, a further key feature of this disjuncture and silence was that neither slavery nor blackness became significant to a Moroccan social movement and remained exceedingly marginal references within nationalist discourse. An example of great contrast is shown in the dramatic 1930 Moroccan reaction to French manipulations of Berber ethnic identity and law, within which elite Fasi nationalist leaders played the most consequential organizational roles. A lack of interest in ending slavery clearly crossed beyond varied lines of political contention.

Other examples of the cautious monitoring of transnational movements entailed attention to slavery and blackness. Within the long term and general apprehension over the “birth of the Moroccan proletariat” and the ongoing Moroccan labor movement, one confidential Protectorate report notes that the Komintern had a “centre negre” in Paris. The organization is noted by French authorities for its propaganda work in North Africa, but to be precise, the position of its weekly paper *Gringoire* was against “imperialist slavery” not a focus upon domestic slavery. Far more important than there being no evidence of this remote organization being involved in opposing Moroccan slavery; it should be noted that domestic slavery was not a feature of the political agenda of either the Moroccan or French left and labor movements.

A further example appears in French imperialism’s lasting security interest in the politics and movements of the Tijāniyyah Sufi order throughout North and West Africa. This network was of particular salience, as Fes is the burial place of the order’s founder Sîdī ‘Ahmad al-Tijānī and the continual site for West African Tijānī’s pilgrimage, often preceding hajj. Throughout the Protectorate era there was regular attention to the interactions of what was categorized as “Moroccan” versus “Sudanese,” “black,” and “moor” Tijānī. Colonial officials sometimes reported that Moroccan Tijānī were hostile toward “certain black Tidjani.” Despite French perceptions of a security threat, the politics and movements of the Tijāniyyah Sufi order throughout North and West Africa did not coalesce through an abolitionist agenda. Among the most significant of the numerous contrasts and similarities between experiences of emancipation within Morocco and West Africa is the absence of pagan, traditional or non-Muslim religious authorities. The sense of emancipation predating “aristocratic decline and Muslim ascendance,” lacks a clear analogy within Moroccan history. No Sufi order in Morocco was remotely as dedicated as the West African Mouride in fostering social support and mutual aid structures for slaves and ex-slaves. Oral testimonies suggest that during and after the Protectorate the Tijānī order in Fes was an occasional source of aid for individual former slaves, but posed no organized opposition to the trade or institution.

Another important niche of evidence of attitudes and controls toward color and slavery appears in Protectorate efforts to regulate representations and the movement of ideas through the official monitoring, censuring, and banning of films. Moroccan movie theatres were understood as potentially dangerous socioeconomic spaces, and there was a concern that their content serve, compliment, or at least not contradict Protectorate ideology and interests. Official concern and censorship was applicable to both large-scale factors and minutia. In 1940, prior to the Vichy period in Morocco (1940–1942), the 1937 Hollywood production *Slave Ship* (re-titled *Le Dernier Negrier*) attracted Moroccan police attention for the “annoying influence” it would bring to Moroccans through its images of...
“ill treatments,” and “the hard beatings of blacks on a boat several of which are even thrown to sea.” Gunga Din was flatly banned in 1942 and then again in 1945 for its depictions of anti-British resistance “against slavery, for the homeland.” In a bizarre turn, in 1942 following the American-lead conquest and subsequent military presence in Morocco, a further Hollywood production, Road to Morocco, featured Bob Hope as a slave. The comedy was emblematic of American channels for internationalizing attitudes which trivialized Morocco and dismissed contemporary slavery. Egyptian films in particular were a broad persistent focal area for French security interests, raising fears of the implicit and explicit messages and readings of pan-Arabism and nationalism. Despite the efforts of Moroccan entrepreneurs (particularly Fasis) to develop a Moroccan cinema, imported films long continued to dominate theaters. While asserting very different representations and visions of the importance of Morocco, attitudes fully compatible with Hollywood racism were evidenced in the use of “blackface” in Serenade a Meryem (1947), which was filmed in Fes by a Moroccan company and funded by “bourgeoisie Fasi nationalists.” The following year, the script for a Moroccan film La Belle Captive attracted executive Protectorate concern for its depictions of Christian slaves in Moroccan history.

Along with Protectorate patterns of dismissal and concealment there were also very important efforts to manipulate and deploy blackness. One of the most popular historical representations of the Moroccan state’s traditional display of authority is the monarch in procession on horseback dressed in a white robe and accompanied by a large umbrella held by one of the uniformed black male slaves who flanked him. This image was first iconized and popularized by European visual artists with a lineage including Delacroix. The legacy of the ‘Abd El Boukhari and the sultan’s “black guard” took on a special significance through the French deployment of tirailleurs sénégalais. Following and manipulating the example of Moroccan tradition Lyautey formed his own personal “black guard” thus attempting to present an explicit equation of himself as a French sultan. Indeed one function of tirailleurs sénégalais was to be paraded alongside the sultan's black guard during political pageantry. But far more important was their historical military presence and how it was understood and responded to.

Prior to and throughout the Protectorate West African soldiers were consistently used at the frontline of violent conflict and control. In the Fes medina the most common visible daily human contacts with the Protectorate was the presence of armed tirailleurs sénégalais stationed and patrolling. As noted above in the initial years of the Protectorate some Fasi domestic slave women formed relationships with these soldiers and fled their owners. Later, the Protectorate shipped West African women from Dakar to become wives, and a village, complete with ill-suited vernacular architecture, was built outside the medina. The following excerpt of a 1911 report is relevant:

The Senegalese (tirailleurs sénégalais) live at odds with the other troops and the Moroccan population . . . and prefer to confine themselves in their areas, half camps, half villages. They find in their family life an escape from the vice of the country; this reason itself would be enough to justify the presence of their wives and their children . . . Thus they form a separate colony within Morocco, inassimilable and without contact with the outside.
Though further research should be conducted in this area, it is apparent that these troops and those who were resident with their families lived within colonial manipulations of their separateness that contributed to stigmatization and contention with Moroccans. For many Moroccans the tirailleurs sénégalais became and remained a deeply resented figure, the most blatant representative and enforcer of French interests. The most well-known applicable incident erupted in 1947 following an argument between two tirailleurs sénégalais and an Arab prostitute in the Bousbir district of Casablanca. After the two soldiers were repelled by stones from a Moroccan crowd, they returned with fifty other heavily armed tirailleurs sénégalais; several hundred Moroccans and three “Senegalese” died in the subsequent bloodshed. The popular denunciation and violent rejection of tirailleurs sénégalais lingered, as seen in the May 1956 kidnapping of a group of tirailleurs sénégalais outside of Fes, over two months after official Moroccan Independence began.

A final relevant transnational dimension of attitudes toward color is evidenced by the shifting approaches to slavery within international forums and organizations, which gave recurrent attention to “white slavery.” A 1904 international agreement against white slavery became the direct precedent for the 1949 United Nations adoption of The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. White slavery has been generally understood as having two meanings: the first equating prostitution with slavery, and second addressing the slavery of non-Africans. But in our context the term is more problematic and the political transitions it appeared within raised further meanings. As a reference to color it was historically resonate with enslaved Europeans and Christians, and signified a call for updating and redirecting international attention against forms of exploitation with the implicit idea that “black slavery” had been ended.

Discussions of white slavery in which the term became synonymous with human trafficking and prostitution, brought slavery into closer association with, and absorption into, a widened focus upon slavery-like forms of exploitation. Throughout the Protectorate period, international forums continued to widen and reframe their attention to slavery. As mentioned, the 1926 convention was followed up with a 1953 ratification and another convention on slavery held by the United Nations in 1956. In the evolution of the international community's twentieth century agenda toward slavery, overlapping currents of additional political attentions fanned out to address child marriage, debt servitude, women's rights, and human rights among others. Protectorate administrators, Moroccan slaveholders, and slaves themselves experienced waves of changing discourse and shifting frameworks of international politics that hovered at an enormous remove and social distance from domestic slaves and how their lives and those of their children would gradually change. Over time the equally remote belief of having entered a panacean modernity in which slavery simply no longer existed became an increasingly widespread and powerful national and international status quo. Though domestic slavery neither remained fossilized nor naturally disappeared, throughout these and many other subsequent changes both the decline of the institution and Afro-Maghribi history in general remained obscure.
Conclusion

Slavery in Morocco did not end during the French Protectorate period, but continued to transform and decline until it ultimately ended as a social institution in the decades following independence. The failure to effectively oppose domestic slavery had less to do with abortive ideals or ignorance of local knowledge on the part of the state than with actual immediate realities of a functional acceptance of slavery integral to colonial power arrangements. Anti-slavery schemes not only fell short, but amid continued slavery French Protectorate colonial state mandated the transnational camouflage of a commonplace social reality. Details probed here have shown how in order to accomplish the work of negating domestic slavery, a vague deference to Islam via “Muslim policy” became a standard means of characterizing and approaching the social institution; further ambivalence about slavery was reinforced through an ongoing selective color-blindness entailing official non-recognition, manipulation, and regulation of blackness.

Clearly, the Protectorate’s political and military commitment to conserving the Alaouite monarchy had important and enduring social implications. In assessing the analytical limitations of the concept of governmentality Frederick Cooper notes that, “(c)olonial rule in many contexts depended not on making the individual subject understandable within the categories of the state, but on a collectivized and reified notion of traditional authority.” In this context, Protectorate administrators made slaves and slavery understandable and acceptable, as a basic feature and tolerable liability within their collaboration with traditional Moroccan authorities. The exigencies of operating with the Makhzen—collectively the region’s most extensive and powerful practitioner of slavery—and its patronage apparatus spanning across ruling-class slave-owning Moroccan families, bound the Protectorate to a calculated non-interference, and even protection of, the social relations expressed and reproduced through slavery. Though French officials and Moroccan slave owners were of unequal powers and frequently divergent interests and spheres of influence, attention to the Protectorate’s usage of the confluence among their respective attitudes (such as toward Islam, patriarchy, elitism and blackness) is valuable for reconstructing the reluctant pace and ambiguous social history within which domestic slavery in Morocco adapted and eventually ended.

The French Protectorate remained faithful to the contradictions which guided initial colonial maneuvers to satisfy anti-slavery expectations in France and internationally, while demonstrating their local non-interference in elite Moroccan affairs. Overall, the limited and indirect challenges to slavery that characterized Protectorate response go further to help us detail the persistence of slavery than to clearly illuminate a basis for its demise. This was ultimately true for the slave trade as well as the social institution, as the closure of formal public markets prior to and during the Protectorate was offset by the flexible and durable informal market. Slavery in Morocco continued and adapted alongside official attitudes and forms of knowledge about it developed and deployed during the Protectorate era.

Finally, it can be noted that abolitionist pressures from international organizations remained too distant and weak to have brought effective challenges to slavery in Protectorate Morocco. In fact, far more evident than a direct impact upon slavery, evolving twentieth-century anti-slavery orientations help contextualize the Protectorate and Moroccan management of the representation of...
domestic slavery amid their shared commitments to maintaining traditional households and power arrangements. The intangible influence of slavery being outlawed elsewhere in the world made its clearest impact in how the agendas and lexicons of international organizations allowed for Moroccan domestic slavery to be reframed into lessened significance.

**Endnotes**

I would like to thank John H. Hanson, Sameetah Agha, Cailean Murphy, Mira Sophia Goodman-Singh, Emmy Gyaki, Forrestine Thomas, Sidi Mohamed Taïfi, Hadja Khadija Bentouhami, Aziz Elbakkouchi, Bouchra Moussaoui, Sanae Ajana, Peter Stearns and the anonymous reviewers who commented on the initial version of this article. Address correspondence to R. David Goodman, Department of Social Science and Cultural Studies, Pratt Institute, 200 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11205. Email: rdavidgoodman@gmail.com.


2. A correspondence from Bennasser Ben-Omar, Le Directeur-Adjoint du Protocole Chérifien, Empire Chérifien, Palais Impérial, Le Protocole Chérifien to Conseiller du Gouvernement Chérifien, Rabat, dated November 4, 1955 (Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, hereafter CADN), details multiple categories of expenditure for the popularly rejected Sultan Ben Aarafa, explicitly listing the names and monthly payments to five eunuchs, and three groups (Abid el Bab, Abid Riad, Abid Chorfa) comprising twenty-nine slaves.

3. The term *Makhzen* (literally meaning storehouse, reflecting the state power to tax) is used here as a synonym for the Moroccan monarchy and its incorporated ruling elite. For consideration of the historic and contemporary relations between the *Makhzen* and Moroccan political culture see Hind Arroub, *Al-Makhzen fi al-ththaqafa al-ssiyasiya al-Maghribiya* (Rabat, 2004).


13. This office was charged with overseeing Moroccan Justice, Education, and Relations with the Makhzen.


17. Correspondence from Resident General Louis-Hubert-Gonzales Lyautye, 6.4.1914. (BGA).

18. See Nicolas Michel, Une économie de subsistances. Le Maroc précolonial (Cairo, 1997); Aouad-Badoul, “Esclavage et Situation des ‘Noirs’ au Maroc dans la première moitié du XXe siècle.” For a parallel within the Ottoman empire see Madeline C. Zilfi, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: the Design of Difference (Cambridge, 2010).

19. See Rivet, Lyautey et l’institution du protectorat française au Maroc; William A., Hoisington, Lyautey and the French conquest of Morocco (New York, 1995); Alan Scham, Lyautey in Morocco; Protectorate Administration, 1912–1925 (Berkeley, 1970). Lyautey drew from a variety of French colonial formations (including Indochina, Madagascar and Algeria) to meld military force with political means through fostering patron-clientage relations with local leaders while selectively preserving precolonial society and culture.

20. See Ben Mlih, Structures Politiques Du Maroc Colonial, 143. The larger politics of preservation have been considered elsewhere as well, see Colette Denise Apelian, “Negotiating the City: Conserving Fez, Morocco during the French Protectorate (1912–1956)” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2005).


22. Senegalese here refers to the tirailleurs sénégalais comprised of soldiers from diverse West African backgrounds. For a broader study of tirailleurs sénégalais see Gregory Mann, Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century (Durham, NC, 2006).

23. Correspondence from the Civil Control in Mogador 11.15.1922, NI 284, (CADN). Caid can be translated as governor.

24. Correspondence from the Chief of Municipal Services in Marrakech 1.13.1923 N222, (CADN). A moussem is a trade fair.

25. Correspondence from Chief of Police Mogador, 1.24.1923, (CADN).

26. Correspondence from the Plenipotentiary Minister 2.10.1923, SCC N. 381, (CADN).

27. Copy of correspondence from the Counselor to the Cherifien Government, 2.23.1923, (BGA).

28. An adoul is a legal notary. A qadi is a judge.
29. Circular 17 S.G.P. 10.21.1923, (BGA). Handwritten drafts, copies of Circular 17, and the list of the offices it was initially distributed to, all confirming this date and year are deposited at the BGA in Rabat. Adding perversity to its ostensible impact within the history of abolition and emancipation in Morocco, this document has been consistently misdated as having been issued in 1922, both by some administrators within the Protectorate, as well as subsequent scholars in general.

30. Such references are concentrated in documents from the Direction des Affaires Chérifienne, but circulated more widely as well.

31. While European orientalist knowledge production repeatedly played an important role within French imperial interests such as with Napoleon Bonaparte’s late eighteenth-century invasion of Egypt, and the nineteenth-century Bureaux Arabes, it has been asserted that “Muslim policy” was first officially articulated as an object of importance for French colonial praxis in the early twentieth century. See Laurens, Orientales II, La IIIe République et l’Islam.


33. Correspondence from the Resident General to the Civil and Military Regions. Likely intended to accompany and introduce Circular 17, the document is stamped “Secret” and is not dated, (BGA).

34. Following French “reforms” of the Islamic legal system in 1912, family records were collected in Fes courts from 1913. Though slaves are frequently mentioned in documents concerning inheritance, inventories, and family contestations, there was an almost hermeneutic seal on references to slave purchases. Very rare examples appear in reference to a postmortem debt (21.12.1335/ 10.8.1917), and in monies designated in an inheritance (11.11.1333/ 9.21.1915) Mahkama Smat, Fes al-Bali.

35. Aouad-Badoual (2004) interprets this as a Protectorate strategy, yet extensive oral testimonies and life histories call into question the intended or realized impact of the circular upon the Fasi traditions of concubinage (Personal interviews in Fes, 2003-2004).

36. Correspondence from the General Commander of Agadir, 6.2.1924, N1546 (BGA).

37. Correspondence from the Counselor to the Cherifien Government, 9.11.1924,N4713 (BGA).

38. Correspondence from the Director of Indigenous Affairs 9.24.1924,N2293 (BGA).

39. Correspondence from Resident General Jules-Joseph-Théodore Steeg, 5.27.1927. (BGA). This letter to the President of the French League in Paris recounts many details of the affair, but it is unclear when and how Protectorate authorities were first addressed by the French League.

40. The Hague Convention, September 26, 1926. See Allain, The Slavery Conventions. The treaty reinforced and expanded earlier international agreements against slavery, but its emphasis upon “forced labor” and “conditions analogous to slavery,” was greatly compromised by the realities of colonial forced labor. Concurrent colonial commitments to abolition and forced labor ensured that a broad gulf between diplomatic circles’ shifting discourse on slavery and colonized people’s changing labor conditions could be politically exploited. See Frederick Cooper, Decolonization and African Society: the Labor Question in French and British Africa (New York, 1996); Frederick Cooper, “Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa,” in Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies, eds. Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000).

42. The Resident General’s letter was sent the same day that Abd-el-Krim surrendered to French troops at Targuist and was subsequently exiled to Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean.

43. Correspondence from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, French Republic, 5.24.1927 N998 (BGA).

44. Copy of correspondence from Resident General Steeg, 6.1.1927, N1233 (BGA).

45. Correspondence from Resident General Steeg, 6.30.1927, N639 (BGA).

46. Report from the Chief Commissioner of Safety, Marrakesh Region, 10.30.1927, N177 (BGA).

47. Report from the Commandant General, Marrakesh Region, 11.4.1927, N639 (BGA).

48. When the Pacha (Thami El Glaoui) was interviewed, the term “sahab” was used.

49. Correspondence from Resident General Steeg, 11.28.1927, N2977 (BGA).

50. Correspondence from Resident General Steeg, 12.1.1927, N2170 (BGA).

51. Ibid.


61. Swearingen, Moroccan Mirages, 51.


63. Albert Ayache, Études d’Histoire sociale marocaine (Rabat, 1997), 76.

64. See Janet L. Abu-Lughod, Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco (Princeton, 1980). Abu-Lughod notes that fewer than 10 percent of Moroccan Muslims lived in cities in the first decades of the Protectorate, with their total population shifting from 400,000 in 1921 to 1.5 million in 1951, 206.

66. Ibid.

67. Correspondence from Commandant General, Marrakesh Region, 12 August 1928, N421, (BGA).

68. Locations mentioned in various correspondence from the period as reputed to have public slaves sales include the Mazagan and Chaouia regions, and the M’touga moussum.

69. Interviews, Fes, Morocco, 2003-2004. It was repeated by numerous informants that the ratio of female slaves purchased at this time was far greater than males.

70. Fuqahas are specialists in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh).

71. Research of Fes al-Bali court records throughout the period from 1913 to 1971 revealed only seventy-three formal legal liberations of slaves.

72. Same as 9.


74. Ibid., 14.

75. Ibid.


77. Correspondence from Lieutenant-Colonel, Occupation Troops, Doukkala-Abda Region, 9. 22.1913 (BGA).


80. Examples from heterogeneous geographies and intellectual genealogies addressing this theme abound, see Timothy Mitchell, Colonizing Egypt (Cambridge, 1988); Bernard S., Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India (Princeton, 1996); Nancy Rose Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo (London, 1999).


82. For example see Thomas Park and Aomar Boum, Historical Dictionary of Morocco Second Ed. (Lanham, MD, 2006); the bibliography of which features a “Judaic Studies” (460–74) subheading within the category Culture and Religion and a “Berber Studies” subheading under Science and Social Sciences (590–92).

83. These categories were retained immediately following independence, at which time a notable change was the omission of officially published annual statistics for “justice.”


86. Maestracci, *Le Maroc Contemporain*.

87. Ibid., 22.


91. “Note” concerning the request to hold a Pan-African Congress in Morocco (n/d, no author) (BGA). All underlining reflects the original source. The five principal meetings of the congress held during the Protectorate period were in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945.

92. Ibid.

93. Aouad-Badoual has asserted a cursory examination of the Fasi-centered nationalist movement in the context of the end of slavery, but the import of Moroccan elite commitments to abolition for nationalist purposes remains questionable. See Aouad-Badoual (Ghita Aouad), “Esclavage et Situation des ‘Noirs’ au Maroc dans la première moitié du XXe siècle.” In fact elite Fasi figures with highly differing relations to the Moroccan nationalist movement (Allal El-Fassi, Mohamed Hassan Ouzzani, Mohammed El-Mokri, Basha El-Baghdadi) maintained the commonalities of domestic slavery regardless of their divergent political interests.


96. Ibid.

97. An example of the dominant currents of labor history and historiography can be found in Ayache (1997). A survey of its historical figures and their trajectories can be found in Albert Ayache, René Gallissot, Georges Oved, *Maroc: Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier Maghreb* (Casablanca, Morocco: Editions EDDIF, 1998).

98. For detailed examinations of French efforts to deploy manipulative policies involving Islam, occasionally along with color, in West Africa see Harrison, *France and Islam in West
Africa; Robinson, “French ‘Islamic’ Policy”; Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power in West Africa”; Hall, A History of Race in Muslim West Africa.


102. See for example Searing, “God Alone is King,” 144.

103. See for example Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa.


105. Correspondance from Le Commissaire de Police Chef de la Sûreté Régionale, to M. le Directeur de la Sécurité Publique 1.29.1940 (CADN). In the film Barton Fink (1991) the fictional writer “W.P. Mayhew” (modeled on William Faulkner) is shown working on a frustrating project entitled “Slave Ship.”

106. Correspondence from the Mobile Police of Mazagan, to Monsieur le Directeur des affaires politiques in Rabat, 7.8.1945 (CADN). This was also a film for which Faulkner wrote.

107. For extended consideration of this theme see Brian Thomas Edwards, Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express (Durham, NC, 2005).


109. Savvy Fasis entrepreneurs such as M. Taieb Sebti sought to Protectorat permission to create a Moroccan film industry (Correspondance from Le Commissaire du Gouvernement, Chef du Service du Cinema, 5.18.1945 (CADN), likely playing against concerns that “As long as Egypt will base its policy on a xenophobe and panarabe mystique, its press, its radio and its cinematographic production will be inevitably the instruments of a propaganda, from which we have interests of preserving our nationals.” Correspondence from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French Resident General in Morocco, 4.4.1945 (CADN).

110. Moulay Driss Jaïdi, Histoire du Cinéma au Maroc: le cinéma colonial (Rabat, 2001), 142. Also see M. A. Tazi and Kevin Dwyer, Beyond Casablanca: M.A. Tazi and the Adventure of Moroccan Cinema (Bloomington, 2004).

111. Correspondance from Le Commissaire du Gouvernement Chef du Service du Cinema to M. le Directeur de L’Interieur 8.27.1948 (CADN). It is unclear if the film was ever produced.

113. Photos in the Fonds Iconographique (the French Protectorate in Morocco section) CADN document military marching and musical processions displaying the royal and Protectorate ceremonial usage of “black guards.”

114. Ibid. Further scattered references to these women appear in documents and reports concerning the regiments of traîleurs sénégalais in the Ministry of Defense, Château de Vincennes.


117. Pennell, Morocco since 1830, 270.


119. See Miers, Slavery in the Twentieth Century.

120. A close reading of the preamble suggests that a change was made in which “white slavery” was rephrased from a 1921 convention, and appears to have been left out in the 1949 document.

121. For an examination of Berber politics and nationalism in Protectorate Morocco see Lafuente, La politique berbère de la France et le nationalism marocain.

122. For many the next step was historical focus upon colonialism itself. It is interesting to note that Protectorate documents detailing attention to international activism against “white slavery” mention for example the Movement for Colonial Freedom apparently founded at SOAS in 1954 to campaign in Britain for the freedom of colonial subjects from political and economic domination. Note for General Leblanc, 7.30.1955 (CADN).

123. Gutteridge, “Supplementary Slavery Convention, 1956.”

124. Same as 9.


126. Frederick Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley, 2005), 49.

127. This preservation of power relationships extended beyond slavery. See Abdellah Hammoudi, Master and Disciple: the Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism (Chicago, 1997).