

‘HAVING A ROAD’: SOCIAL AND SPATIAL
MOBILITY OF PERSONS OF SLAVE AND MIXED
DESCENT IN POST-INDEPENDENCE CENTRAL
MALI*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the migration trajectories of individuals of slave descent and ‘mixed descent’ (children of slave concubines) in a royal family network from the Haayre region of central Mali. Focusing on the twentieth century, it considers the extent to which social status has defined options for mobility within this network. Its argument is twofold. First, it shows that attention should be paid not only to the slave/free divide but also to subtler hierarchical nuances such as mixed descent and royal slavery. Rather than social status *per se*, it is internal hierarchies within social status groups which defined a person’s options for movement. Second, the mobile trajectories of people with royal slave status tended to be intertwined with and depend on the movements of their patrons. Although these dependent forms of migration hardly ever changed their social status, they improved their economic condition considerably.

KEY WORDS: West Africa, Mali, slavery, abolition, migration.

DALLA (Fig. 2) is a small village in the central Malian Sahel, east of the Niger and at the fringes of the northern Malian desert (Fig. 1). In this Fulbe village, members of the ruling elites in power since the precolonial period continue to hold the main political positions of chief and mayor to date. In spite of the potentially democratizing effects of decentralization, old elites maintain their political supremacy and continue to rank above clients who were once slaves. Despite major changes in Mali’s political organization over the past century, there seems to be more continuity than change in this stratified Fulbe rural community. An analysis of the internal hierarchical dynamics in relation to the migration trajectories of different status groups of this community will demonstrate, however, that this continuity is only superficial.

To what extent does social status (slave or freeborn ancestry) define opportunities for mobility, both socially and spatially? In the Fulfulde language, the expression ‘having a road’ (*hebbude laawol*) underscores

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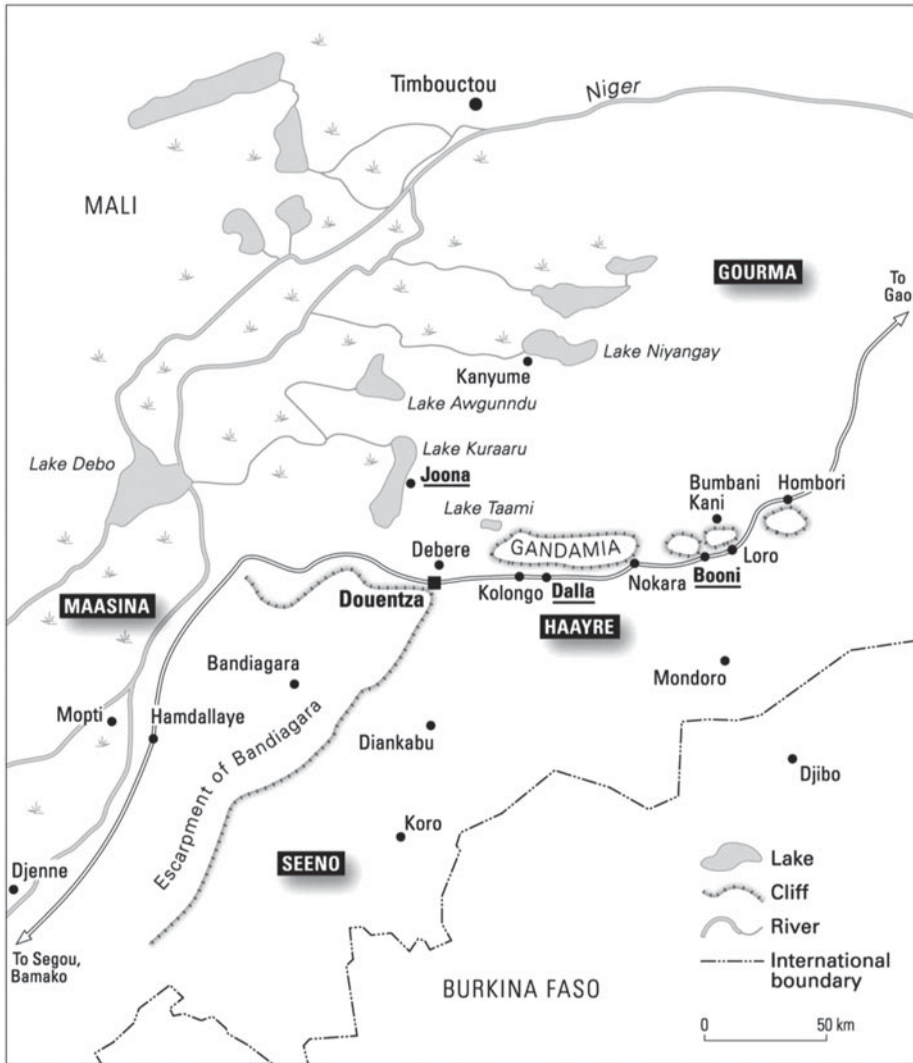


Fig. 1. Haayre region and Gourma region of Mali. Overview of former Fulbe kingdoms of Booni, Dalla, and Joon ruled by Dicko families.

the relation between spatial and social opportunities.¹ The ‘road’ represents both the metaphoric road to social promotion and the material roads followed by people in their travels. This metaphor is tied to a lingering pastoral ideology among Fulbe, even when used by sedentarized speakers.² It matches the historical experiences of Fulbe nomads, who used to elude the demands of

¹ *Hebbude laawol* in Fulfulde literally means ‘to have a road’ and suggests that one has options (for example, to migrate, or not). *Laawol* means ‘a path’ or ‘a road’, but in a symbolic sense can mean ‘a possibility’ or ‘an option’.

² On mobility as a way of life associated with pastoralist Fulbe nomads in West Africa, see R. Botte, J. Boutrais, and J. Schmitz (eds.), *Figures peules* (Paris, 1999), 24 and 28–30.

political authorities by moving away and trying their luck elsewhere, thereby avoiding subordination. Rather than focusing on pastoralist mobility, this article examines the mobility of sedentarized Fulbe who settled in the Haayre region, a semi-arid zone situated east of the Niger (Fig. 1).³ Most studies on Fulbe mobility in Mali have considered pastoralists from the inner Niger, an area which has hitherto received more attention from anthropologists and historians.⁴

A second innovative aspect of this study is its focus on the social trajectories of mixed-descent individuals (a term preferred here because it does not imply the lack or incompleteness suggested by expressions such as half-breed and semi-freeborn).⁵ Haayre hierarchies were created upon the settlement of Fulbe warlords in the region in the course of the eighteenth century. The tripartite stratification of Fulbe society included highest-ranking freeborn (*riimbe*); intermediary casted groups (*nyeybe*); and non-freeborn groups (*riimaybe* and *maccube*) at the bottom. Freeborn, casted, and non-freeborn groups to date are not permitted to intermarry and thus maintain their status acquired at birth. The only exceptions to this have been hypergamous marriages between freeborn men and slave concubines, which generate persons of mixed descent. Although there have been several occupational status groups among freeborn, this text focuses exclusively on former royal families and their dependants, as in the Haayre region such hypergamous marriages have been contracted only by royal elites.

Freedom to move was historically intertwined with social status. More specifically, freedom of choice over how, when, why, and where to move has been partly defined by one's place in local hierarchies at specific times and places. In precolonial times (roughly up to 1898), royal freeborn elites (former warlords called *wehebe* in Fulfulde) thrived on slave labor and continued control over the movements of slaves captured in warfare and raids. As in many other stratified societies of the West African Sahel, precolonial slavery included a considerable range of dependent positions, going from

³ For a precise geographical description of this region, see M. E. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, 'Drought and coping strategies in Fulbe society in the Haayre (central Mali): a historical perspective', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 34:133/135 (1994), 85–108.

⁴ M. E. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, *Arid Ways: Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society, Central Mali* (Amsterdam, 1995); M. E. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, 'Ecology and power in the periphery of Maasina: the case of the Haayre in the nineteenth century', *Journal of African History*, 42:2 (2001), 218; M. E. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, 'Changing population mobility in West Africa: Fulbe pastoralists in central and south Mali', *African Affairs*, 102:407 (2003), 285–307; and C. Angenent, A. Breedveld, M. E. de Bruijn, and H. van Dijk (eds.), *Les rois des tambours au Haayre: récitée per Aamadu Baa Digi, griot des Fulsse à Dalla (Mali)* (Leiden, 2003).

⁵ Terminology related to mixed descent individuals in slave societies tends to reinforce associations of slave descent with incompleteness or lack. Meillassoux uses the term 'half-breeds': C. Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (London, 1991), 130–7. I have previously used the notion of 'semi-freeborn': see L. Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies: Roads In and Out of Slave Status in a Central Malian Fulbe Network* (Leiden, 2011), 117–8. An alternative French notion is 'métissage statutaire': see M. Villesante-de Beauvais 'La question des hiérarchies sociales et des groupes serviles chez les bidân de Mauritanie', in M. Villesante-de Beauvais (ed.), *Groupes serviles au Sahara: approche comparative à partir du cas des arabophones de Mauritanie* (Paris, 2000), 277–322, esp. 297.

slaves who had no say over their own bodies, to clients who worked independently and paid taxes.⁶ The *weheebe* were a relatively immobile group, who looked down upon professions requiring mobility, such as trading, transportation, and physical labor. They delegated these jobs to freeborn commoners and slaves. Since these *weheebe* masters were relatively immobile, their domestic slaves were also rather immobile compared with other slave groups, who accompanied their cattle herding or trading masters. Moreover, if royal slaves were entrusted tasks that required mobility (for example, going to the city to buy certain goods, assisting their masters in raids), they could always command lower status slave groups to fulfill these tasks for them: like their masters, royal slaves could delegate mobility to lower-status groups.

Not only before but also during colonial rule, freedom to move was embedded in hierarchical power relations.⁷ But, for Mali in particular, the majority of historical studies of slavery and mobility focus on the decades directly following the legal abolition of slavery.⁸ Slaves' mobility has been analyzed as a strategy of emancipation: by moving out of the societies in which they had been captured, slaves supposedly managed to get relative freedom and installed themselves in cities or regions where the demand for unskilled labor was high; labor migration has been considered in historical studies of this period as a viable 'road' leading to emancipation.⁹

However, the recent literature that links postcolonial migration to social status in West African societies seems to point out how, in the *longue durée*, the colonial abolition of slavery in 1905 did not necessarily change people's social status, but rather their condition. Few slaves obtained enduring emancipation from their status.¹⁰ Those who did leave were often forced to

⁶ C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975).

⁷ R. Roberts and M. A. Klein, 'The Banamba slave exodus of 1905 and the decline of slavery in the western Sudan', *Journal of African History*, 21:3 (1980), 375–94.

⁸ B. S. Hall, 'Bellah highwaymen: slave banditry and crime in colonial northern Mali', in B. A. Mirzai, I. M. Montana, and P. E. Lovejoy (eds.), *Slavery, Islam and Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 2009), 193–215; F. Manchuelle, 'Slavery, emancipation and labour migration in West Africa: the case of the Soninke', *Journal of African History*, 30:1 (1989), 89–106; F. Manchuelle, 'The "patriarchal ideal" of Soninke labor migrants: from slave owners to employers of free labor', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 23:1 (1989), 106–25; F. Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens, OH, 1997); Roberts and Klein, 'The Banamba'; M. Rodet, 'Migrants in French Sudan: gender biases in the historiography', in F. Toyin and A. Niyi (eds.), *Trans-Atlantic Migration: The Paradoxes of Exile* (New York, 2008), 165–81; M. Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal: 1900–1946* (Paris, 2009).

⁹ For example, see J.-G. Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884–1914* (Oxford, 2006); M. A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998); Manchuelle, *Willing*; and E. Pollet and G. Winter, 'The social organisation of agricultural labour among the Soninke (Dyahunu, Mali)', in D. Seddon (ed.), *Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology* (London, 1978), 331–56.

¹⁰ R. Botte, "'Esclaves et prolétaires": les migrants soninkés en France', *Pensée*, 368 (2011), 119–130; F. Boyer, 'L'esclavage chez les Touaregs de Bankilaré au miroir des migrations circulaires', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 45:179/180 (2005), 771–803; O. Leservoiser, "'Nous voulons notre part!" les ambivalences du mouvement d'émancipation des *Saafaalbe Hormankoo* de Djéol (Mauritanie)', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 45:179/180 (2005), 987–1014; O. Leservoiser, 'Contemporary trajectories of slavery in Haalpulaar society (Mauritania)', in Rossi (ed.), *Reconfiguring*, 140–51;

engage as strangers in new relations of dependence elsewhere or came back without the means to reformulate existing power relations. Meanwhile, those who stayed behind instrumentalized their slave status and made claims on historical reciprocity between masters and slaves. They were rarely able to reconfigure the ideology from which they derived at least some social security and, when lucky, also more material benefits.

However, this article's central argument wishes to underline is that social status *per se* has limited analytical value in explaining trajectories of migration and emancipation. The assumed links between migration and social status are often much more complex, situation-bound, and contextual. To demonstrate this, the analysis is based on the mobile trajectories of sedentary freeborn 'masters' and descendants of former domestic 'slaves' of the royal court in the central Malian Haayre. The use of inverted commas suggests the anachronistic use of the terms 'slave' and 'master' after legal status abolition. Yet these groups are identified as 'slaves' and 'masters' in contemporary Haayre society and are part of what has been termed categorical slavery.¹¹ More specifically, a particular substratum of the royal elite will be analyzed, that is the 'mixed-descent' individuals. Mixed-descent individuals are children resulting from the union between a freeborn man and a slave woman. In order to analyze the unequal spread of mobility within social status groups of royal 'slaves and masters' in postcolonial Mali, this article examines the trajectories of various individuals over two generations (1920–2007). Data were collected in 2001–2 and 2006–7 and are based on archival research and oral interviews with members of a large Fulbe family network.

The argument that there are limits to a linear and univocal interpretation linking mobility to social status will be made through three main sections. A first section sets out the putative historical interrelations between social status and the mobility of royal elites in the Haayre region from precolonial times to the present. The second section tests these presuppositions against the actual trajectories of two mixed-descent children, called Muusa and Haidi, arguing that they were discriminated against *vis-à-vis* their 'pure' freeborn peers of the royal court, and that this setting apart paradoxically contributed to shaping particularly successful avenues of spatial and social mobility that became available to them.¹² In the long run, a combination of factors such as access to French colonial education and postcolonial politics made possible long-lasting social advancement for migrants of mixed descent. The third and final section describes how ultimately the trajectories of the 'slaves' belonging to individuals of mixed descent were closely intertwined,

Pelckmans, *Travelling*; M. Rodet, 'Mémoires'; J. Schmitz, 'Des migrants aux "notables" urbains: les communautés transnationales des gens du fleuve Sénégal (Sénégal/Mali/Mauritanie)', in E. Boesen and L. Marfaing (eds.), *Les nouveaux urbains dans l'espace Sahara-Sahel: un cosmopolitisme par le bas* (Paris, 2007), 91–134; 19 Y. Sy, 'L'esclavage chez les Soninkés: du village à Paris', *Journal des africanistes*, 70:1–2 (2000), 43–69.

¹¹ For a precise definition of this categorical slavery, see B. Rossi, 'Introduction: Rethinking Slavery in West Africa', in Rossi (ed.), *Reconfiguring*, 1–25.

¹² The name Dicko (also spelled as Dikko) was a praise name for the former warlords who became political leaders in various sedentary Fulbe constituencies of Central Mali (de Bruijn and van Dijk, 'Ecology', 228). Dicko literally translates as 'falcon' and refers to the 'hunting' instinct of this former warrior group.

but dependent on and inferior to that of their ‘masters’ of mixed descent, thus creating parallel roads for dependent status groups. The chosen approach is both historical and anthropological and enables a long-term generational overview of hierarchies both *between* and *within* existing social status groups. The analysis underlines not only how complex the links between status and mobility are, but also how extremely dependent they are on those local dynamics that are often impossible for ‘classic’ historiography to fully take into account.

HISTORIES OF MOBILITY: A STRATIFIED FULBE NETWORK IN
THE CENTRAL MALIAN HAAYRE REGION

In the nineteenth century, several Fulbe warriors established kingdoms in a semi-arid region called Haayre (Fig. 1).¹³ The word Haayre refers to the rocky plateaus at the periphery of the Islamic Fulbe Empire of Maasina.¹⁴ Under the reign of Seku Ahmadu (1818–45), these warriors protected the Maasina Empire from raids and invasions from the north by Moroccan and Tuareg groups. The areas over which these warlords ruled were peripheral to the Maasina Empire and mainly served as a buffer zone to protect it. Kingdoms like Joonā, Kanyume, and Dalla (Fig. 1) emerged owing to the progressive sedentarization of the warriors, who gradually abandoned the prototypical lifestyle associated with nomadic Fulbe. Their economies thrived on raiding and the surplus extracted from slave labor. Cultivation was a form of slave labor delegated to the first inhabitants of the region, who came to be called *Rimaybe*, while domestic labor was delegated to war captives and traded slaves, who were called *Maccube*.¹⁵ Slavery was a dominant feature of these economies. Between 30 and 50 per cent of the population appears to have consisted of slaves.¹⁶

The kingdom of Dalla was the center of power in the Haayre, situated east of the town of Douentza (Fig. 2).¹⁷ Dalla reproduced the administrative and social structure of the Maasina Empire, which was organized around slavery and Islam.¹⁸ Warriors ‘mastered’ the mobility of their slaves – for example, by deciding whether or not they could fight as soldiers in raiding expeditions or accompany their masters on pilgrimage.¹⁹ Some populations in the region deferred voluntarily to Fulbe warriors in order to seek protection; others had been bought in slave markets in Bandiagara and Douentza.²⁰ Many were violently captured in raids and forced into slavery in their new host

¹³ Klein, *Slavery*, 47.

¹⁴ B. Sanankoua, *Un empire peul au XIXe siècle: La Diina du Maasina* (Paris, 1990).

¹⁵ de Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid*; Angenent, Breedveld, de Bruijn, and van Dijk, *Les rois*.
¹⁶ Meillassoux, *L’esclavage*.

¹⁷ de Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid*.

¹⁸ de Bruijn and van Dijk, ‘Ecology’, 229; Angenent, Breedveld, de Bruijn, and van Dijk, *Les rois*, 42–56.

¹⁹ See de Bruijn and van Dijk, ‘Drought’, 99–103; Klein, *Slavery*, 246–7; and L. Pelckmans, ‘To cut the rope from one’s neck? manumission documents of slave descendants from Central Malian Fulbe society’, in A. Bellagamba, S. Green, and M. Klein (eds.), *The Bitter Legacy: African Slavery Past and Present* (Princeton, 2012).

²⁰ de Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid*.

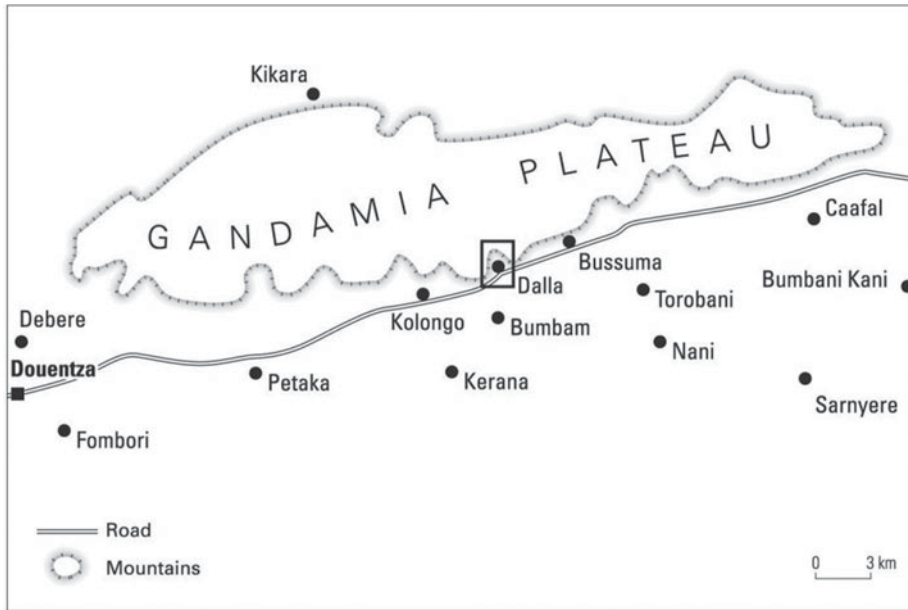


Fig. 2. The Gandamia plateau with Dallah and its direct surroundings.

societies.²¹ Freeborn Fulbe, just like many other ethnic groups in the Sahel, were committed to the patriarchal ideal and the ideology of slavery.²²

Omar Tall's Fuutanke empire overthrew that of Seku Amadu in the mid-nineteenth century and thereby challenged the position of the ruling Fulbe families in the Haayre region.²³ Later, from 1898 onwards, the French colonial abolition of the slave trade and then of slavery in 1905, threatened the control of freeborn families over their slaves. Oral sources mention how, following internal strife, some families left Dallah and settled to the east in a village today known as Booni (Fig. 1).²⁴ From the end of the nineteenth century, Dallah had to share its power over the Haayre area with this 'younger' kingdom called Booni.²⁵ Legal abolition probably stimulated slaves and clients in colonial strongholds (urban areas like Bamako and places like Banamba) to collectively leave their masters.²⁶ However, colonial sources do not mention massive departures of slaves in the Haayre region. This might be linked to the lack of alternatives in this area, where possibilities for wage labor were absent, and there were no 'liberty villages' nearby.²⁷ Moreover, central

²¹ Angenent, Breedveld, de Bruijn, and van Dijk, *Les rois*, 69.

²² P. E. Lovejoy, *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (London, 1981); Manchuelle, 'The "patriarchal ideal"'.
²³ Klein, *Slavery*, 49–52.

²⁴ M. E. de Bruijn and L. Pelckmans, 'Facing dilemmas: former Fulbe slaves in modern Mali', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 39:1 (2005), 69–95.

²⁵ de Bruijn and van Dijk, 'Ecology', 233–6.

²⁶ Roberts and Klein, 'The Banamba'.

²⁷ Source: Archives Nationales Maliens, Bamako, (ANM), Fond Ancien (FA): 1E-123: *Etats numériques de villages de liberté*, Bandiagara (1897–1911); ANM FA 1E-171: *Correspondances sur les villages de captifs libérés-Goundam* (1897).

Mali was situated at the periphery of French colonial Sudan, so the region was therefore relatively under-equipped with colonial officers and the control of the ruling elites over their populations and domestic slaves remained firm.

Domestic slavery was criticized but accepted by the colonizers, who were forced to rely on indirect rule through ‘traditional chiefs’²⁸ locally referred to as kings (*laamiibe*).²⁹ French officers curbed the accumulation of new slaves, but turned a blind eye to the resilience of domestic slavery among ruling royal Fulbe and Songhay families in this region. This is why these royal families maintained power over their domestic slaves well into the 1960s.³⁰ Even though new opportunities to migrate were created by the colonial regime, local rulers such as the king of Dalla (1911–66) effectively curtailed the freedom of movement of what officially continued to be ‘his domestic slaves’. Rather than seeking emancipation, domestic ‘slaves’ were encouraged to work and move in service of their powerful masters.

About three-quarters of the migrants to West African cities from the 1930s onwards were people of slave origins.³¹ Many ex-slaves profited from new opportunities and moved to large-scale plantations, such as those in the ‘Peanut Basin’ in Senegal and rice fields of the ‘*Office du Niger*’ on the banks of the River Niger near Segou in Mali.³² The need for cash to pay for taxes encouraged the labor migration of many.³³ In the 1930s and 1940s the harshness of French forced labor,³⁴ combined with several plagues and droughts, prompted slave descendants in French colonial Sudan to move to British colonies such as the Gold Coast.³⁵ In the Haayre region it was mainly non-domestic slaves – those who lived at some distance from the direct authority of the royal court, such as slaves belonging to traders, artisans, and craftsmen – who engaged new opportunities to migrate. The royal domestic slaves discussed in this text (the Kau family central to the third section) were not able to join these emancipatory migrations until as late as the 1970s. Bound by hierarchical relations, they often followed their ‘masters’ of mixed descent, who mobilized social dependents to accompany them on their own travels.

²⁸ Angenent, Breedveld, de Bruijn, and van Dijk, *Les rois*; de Bruijn, and van Dijk, ‘Changing’; and B. Lecocq, ‘The bellah question: slave emancipation, race, and social categories in late twentieth-century northern Mali’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 39:1 (2005), 42–68.

²⁹ The word ‘king’ is used here because informants translate the Fulfulde notion of *laamiido* in French as *roi*. By the same logic, the territorial areas reigned over by several *laamiibe* will be called ‘kingdoms’.

³⁰ See also Angenent, Breedveld, de Bruijn, and van Dijk, *Les rois*, 100; Klein, *Slavery*, 251.

³¹ Manchuelle, *Willing*, 129.

³² B. Moitt, ‘Slavery and emancipation in Senegal’s peanut basin: the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22:1 (1989), 27–50; I. Dougnon, *Travail de blanc, travail de noir: La migration des paysans dogon vers l’office du Niger et au Ghana (1910–1980)* (Paris, 2007), 75–83.

³³ For an overview of literature on colonial labor migration in West Africa, see Manchuelle, *Willing*, 4–8.

³⁴ B. Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique-Occidentale française, 1900–1946* (Paris, 1993); Klein, *Slavery*.

³⁵ Dougnon, *Travail*.

SOCIAL ASCENT OF PEOPLE OF MIXED DESCENT FROM HAAYRE
ROYAL FAMILIES (1940-70)

One important 'road' to social mobility created by the colonial government was education. In central Mali, French colonial officers forced the elites with whom they cooperated through indirect rule to have their children educated in French schools.³⁶ However, local elites were not keen to replace Islamic teaching with French education; French colonial officers discovered that freeborn elite families did not send their own children to French schools but instead sent the children of slaves.³⁷ French administrators consequently imposed stricter controls to ensure that royal families would send their own offspring; faced with the task of choosing among their own children, the elite of the Haayre region sent those children they considered most marginal: those of mixed descent.³⁸ During the 1940s, the kings of the royal courts of Dalla and Booni in the Haayre region sent the children of their slave concubines (rather than of their freeborn wives) to French schools. But as the cases discussed below will demonstrate, in an unexpected twist of fate and history, French schooling marked an important turning point for these youths of mixed descent.

Before describing the trajectories of mixed-descent individuals, however, it is important to pay more attention to the specific status of this particular group within the wider social status group of royal freeborn (*weheebe*). Mixed descent is a much more complex social status than is often assumed in the literature. Maliki Islamic law stipulates that freeborn men are allowed to marry no more than four freeborn women but can take several slave women as concubines.³⁹ Some scholars, like Ann McDougall, have emphasized how being a slave concubine is 'honorable for slave women in Islam'.⁴⁰ Yet as Paul Lovejoy stresses how being a freeborn wife was 'preferable to being a concubine'.⁴¹ Slave concubines thus remained inferior to freeborn wives of the king. But in a patrilineal society like that of the Fulbe, patrilineal descent

³⁶ de Bruijn and van Dijk, 'Drought'; M. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, 'Fulbe mobility: Migration and travel into Mande', *Mande Studies*, 1 (1999), 41-62.

³⁷ A. Breedveld, 'The rejection of formal education in the 5th region of Mali', *Mande Studies*, 8 (2006) 145-67; L. Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001); J.-H. Jézéquel, 'Histoire des bancs, parcours d'élèves: pour une lecture "configurationnelle" de la scolarisation à l'époque coloniale', *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 43:169/170 (2003), 412; J.-H. Jézéquel, 'Les enseignants comme élite politique en AOF (1930-1945)', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 45:178 (2005), 519-43, esp. 539.

³⁸ Elsewhere, other logics were pursued. The Fuuta Tooro elites appropriated education for themselves. See J. Schmitz, 'Islamic patronage and republican emancipation: The slaves of the Almaami in the Senegal River valley', in Rossi, *Reconfiguring*, 85-115, esp. 101.

³⁹ P. E. Lovejoy, 'Concubinage and the status of women slaves in early colonial northern Nigeria', *Journal of African History*, 29:2 (1988), 245-66, esp. 246.

⁴⁰ E. A. McDougall, 'Dilemmas in the practice of *rachat* in French West Africa', in K. A. Appiah and M. Bunzl (eds.), *Buying Freedom: The Ethics and Economics of Slave Redemption* (Princeton, 2007), 158-77, esp. 173.

⁴¹ Lovejoy, 'Concubinage', 247.

defines social status, rights and obligations, and positions of honor.⁴² These ideologies of honor are reinforced by Malikite legislation, which stipulates that the children of marriages between free men and slave women are considered free. According to this legal norm, having a slave mother is not be an obstacle to social prestige.⁴³

But what happens when one compares this legal norm of status equality with actual social practice?⁴⁴ The children of some of these marriages in the twentieth century enjoyed important political successes and were even the favorite children.⁴⁵ But there are no life histories of mixed-descent individuals which clearly show that maternal slave descent could be completely overcome at any time in their life cycle. Lovejoy writes that these children ‘probably suffered some deprivation relative to their half brothers and sisters born of free mothers’.⁴⁶ The cases from central Mali below show that children of free versus slave mothers were not always treated as equals; particularly during childhood they were disadvantaged. This did not, however, preclude success in the long run. Once they reached adulthood, the mixed-descent individuals described in this text did obtain social mobility thanks to specific external opportunities offered by twentieth-century colonial and postcolonial regimes.

The social mobility of mixed-descent individuals who did not pursue emancipation through education and national politics is a neglected issue in the historiography of both West and East Africa.⁴⁷ Just as colonial legal abolition of slavery did not abolish slave status in people’s minds and social life, the legal free status of mixed-descent individuals in Islam did not take away all ambiguities surrounding their status in social practice. Several informants stigmatized the mixed-descent individuals I worked with from time to time by reference to their maternal kin. However, they did so in whispers and broke the silence on this topic only on rare and exceptional occasions; such references are not made publicly, but rather secretly.⁴⁸ In short, while in outward, official, and normative discourses status equality and

⁴² M. A. Klein, ‘The concept of honour and the persistence of servility in the western Soudan’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 45:179/180 (2005): 831–51; Villesante-de Beauvais, ‘La question’, 298.

⁴³ E. K. Hahonou, ‘En attendant la décentralisation au Niger...: dynamiques locales, clientélisme et culture politique’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Ecoles de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales Paris, 2006), 198; P. Valsecchi, ‘My dearest child is my slave child: personal status and the politics of succession in south-west Ghana (nineteenth and twentieth centuries)’, in A. Bellagamba, C. Brown, S. Greene, and M. Klein (eds.), *Voices of Slavery in West Africa* (Trenton, NJ, 2012).

⁴⁴ Y. Wane, *Les Toucouleur du Fouta Tooro (Sénégal): Stratification sociale et structure familiale* (Dakar, 1966), 119; P. A. Igbafe, ‘Slavery and emancipation in Benin, 1897–1945’, *Journal of African History*, 16:3 (1975), 409–29, esp. 410.

⁴⁵ See Valsecchi, ‘My dearest’; and Hahonou, ‘En attendant’.

⁴⁶ Lovejoy, ‘Concubinage’, quote on 263.

⁴⁷ Often references to mixed descent individuals in West Africa are about their political success, see Hahonou, ‘En attendant’, 198; Valsecchi, ‘My dearest’. Cooper, however, noted that the official equality between children sharing the same father was tempered by racism on the Swahili coast: F. Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, CT, 1977).

⁴⁸ A. Zempeni, ‘Savoir taire: du secret et de l’intrusion ethnologique dans la vie des autres’, *Gradhiva*, 20 (1996), 23–41.

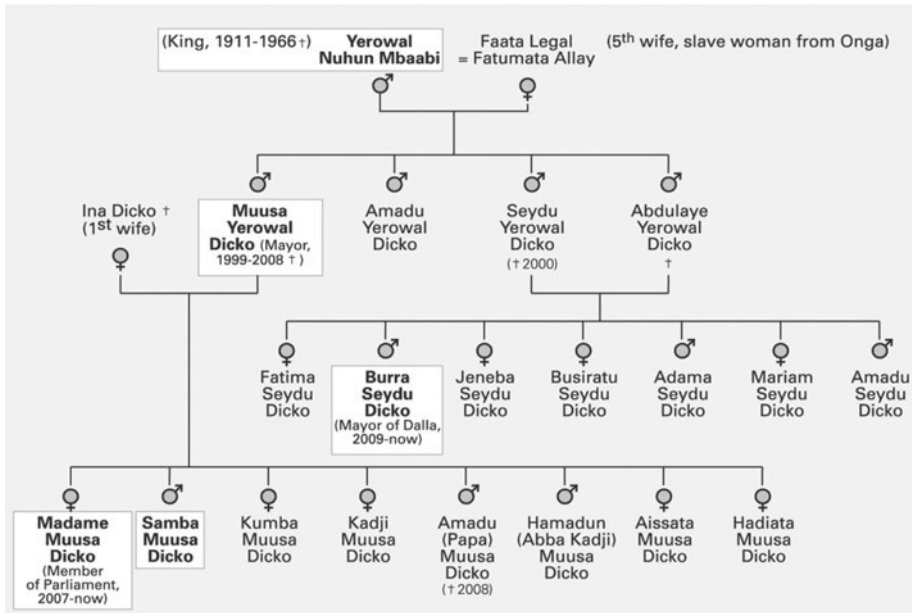


Fig. 3. Mixed descent Muusa Yerowal Diko, descendant of King Yerowal and slave concubine Faata.

the relative advantage of mixed-descent individuals are underlined, in private conversations and daily practice, the slave origins of their mothers handicap these mixed-descent individuals.

The cases that follow show that a study of mixed descent opens a window on actual differentiations within status groups conventionally assumed to be internally homogenous. Even within legally 'free' groups, hierarchical logics operate, just as they do across 'slave' and 'free' groups. The argument is thus that these internal stratifications, rather than social status *per se*, explain the specific roads that individuals could follow.

MIXED-DESCENT TRAJECTORIES: THE CASE OF MUUSA AND HAIDU

Muusa Diko (1932–2008) and Haidu Diko (1937–2010) were the children of King Yerowal of Dalla (1911–66). King Yerowal had several mixed-descent children because he married two slave concubines called Faata and Pendolde (see Figs. 3 and 4). When he took them, they were still considered 'slaves' in Haayre society, although the French colonizers had legally abolished slavery at the time of his marriage in the 1920s.

When the French recruited students among the royal family, the king chose to send only the children he had with one slave concubine (Faata, Fig. 3) and none of his mixed-descent children with the other slave concubine (Pendolde, Fig. 4). Pendolde's father was called Kau (Fig. 4).⁴⁹ He was a royal domestic

⁴⁹ Although slave groups generally had no single and fixed patronym as freeborn status groups do, informants from Dalla refer to this particular slave family by the name of their

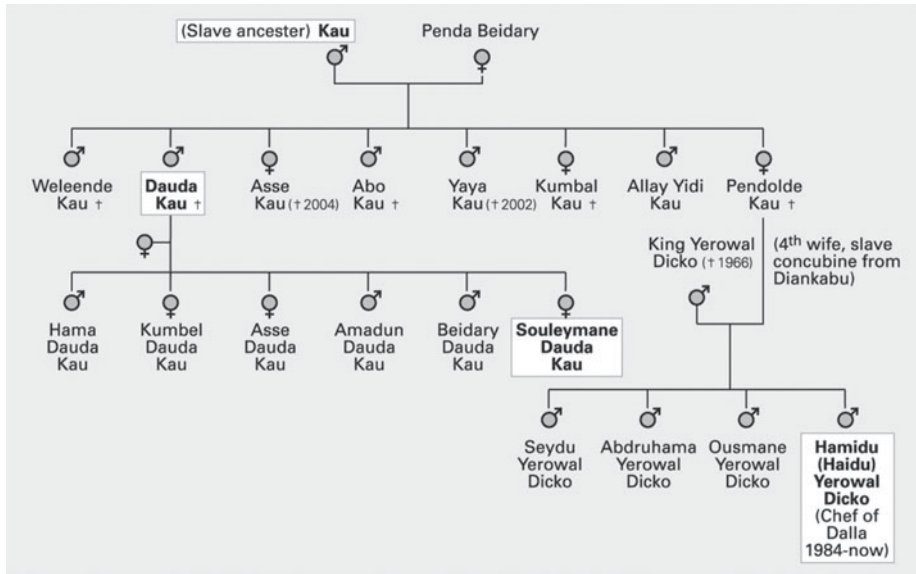


Fig. 4. Mixed-descent Haidu Yerowal Dicko, descendant of King Yerowal and slave concubine Pendolde of the Kau family.

slave and had been the king's most trusted slave and advisor. It is in this privileged position that he managed to bring up eight healthy children, among whom was the beautiful Pendolde. Since Pendolde was the daughter of a highly esteemed domestic slave, her children enjoyed a higher social standing than those of Faata (Fig. 3). King Yerowal valued the children he had with Pendolde, his sixth slave concubine, much more highly than those with Faata. Moreover, the descendants of Pendolde have been very successful in concealing their slave origins. During my first fieldwork period in 2002, I was unaware of their maternal slave descent and considered them of noble descent.⁵⁰

The differentiated status of the slave concubines was translated into a pecking order among their children of mixed descent. King Yerowal sent two mixed-descent sons (Muusa and Nassuru) with his concubine Faata to school. Nassuru died very young, but the trajectory of Muusa will be explained below. Faata was a low-status slave originally from a poor village in the surroundings of Yerowal's kingdom. Faata's grandmother was a Songhay woman who had been captured and enslaved at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Islamic prescriptions, Faata should have become free upon marriage or once she gave birth to children with the king. Claude Meillassoux has indicated that the emancipation of slave women before giving birth (often on the occasion of marriage with a freeborn master) was an important condition for the liberty of their children.⁵¹ However, several

common slave ancestor *Kau*. *Kau* literally means 'uncle' in Fulfulde language. Ancestor Kau was a war captive who became a domestic slave for the royal court.

⁵⁰ de Bruijn and Pelckmans, 'Facing', 78.

⁵¹ Meillassoux, *Anthropology*, 134.

informants confirm that Faata was never married by the king and was socially considered free only when her husband died.⁵² As long as her husband the king was alive, slave concubine Faata was discriminated against within the royal harem.⁵³ Unlike freeborn wives, she had to do domestic labor and received less attention from her husband. In fact, the condition of this slave concubine was thus hardly better than that of her slave kin. The shameful position of their mother exposed Faata's children to ridicule from their 'pure' freeborn peers. As Meillassoux notes explicitly, 'it must be remembered that this progeny, although freeborn, was weakened by the absence of a maternal lineage'. It is precisely this weakened position that has been often overlooked. In the cases under analysis here, it was especially during childhood that social practice differed from official legal discourses and norms.

Sending out slave or mixed-descent children for French school education was, however, not necessarily standard procedure in the wider Haayre area. This recalls J.-H. Jézéquel's argument for a 'configurational approach' whereby 'multiple registers of causality' need to be combined.⁵⁴ In contrast to the Haayre kingdoms of Dalla and Booni, other kings in the region, such as Jooná and Hombori (Fig. 1), sent their 'pure' freeborn sons to French secular schools. Hamadoun Dicko (1924–64), for example, was the firstborn of the king in Jooná and a freeborn wife. Hamadoun enjoyed French education at the 'Lycée de Terrasson de Fougères à Bamako'.⁵⁵ Hamadoun had a very successful but short-lived career. While teaching in Bafoulabe (Kolokani) he was asked by the *Parti Soudanais Progressiste* (PSP) – one of the first Malian political parties, which was affiliated to the French Socialist Party – to be 'député du Sudan'.⁵⁶ In 1951, aged 27, Hamadoun moved to France, where he fulfilled several functions as secretary and deputy minister of different departments, reflecting his personal interest in education and research: he was secretary of the national assembly and became deputy minister of industry and commerce; in 1956 he became deputy minister in charge of the advisory board of scientific research and technical progress; from 1957 onwards, he was the state secretary of French Overseas territories, and in 1958 occupied the position of state secretary of national education.⁵⁷ Although a rising star in colonial and later national politics in the 1950s, Hamadoun Dicko's career was cut short. In 1962, under the first Malian republic, Hamadoun and other prominent PSP leaders were condemned to death because the Keita regime considered PSP members to be enemies of the state as a result of their collaboration with the French.⁵⁸ They were sent to workcamps in Kidal,

⁵² McDougall, 'Dilemmas', esp. 172.

⁵³ Interview with Allay Jangine, Dalla, 27 Jan. 2002. This is confirmed in interviews with Penda, sister of slave concubine Faata Legal, Dalla, 18 Dec. 2001 and with Burra Yero Cisse, Douentza, 12 May 2007.

⁵⁴ Jézéquel, 'Histoire', 419.

⁵⁵ 'Hamadoun Dicko, pionnier des indépendances', in *L'Écho du Mali: Trimestriel d'Information des Maliens de France* (Ambassade du Mali en France), 20 (2006), 18.

⁵⁶ PSP was considered the party of traditional elites that maintained the ideology of slavery. Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), in contrast, was known as the party of the teachers. See Jézéquel, 'Les enseignants', 524.

⁵⁷ Based on archival research by Anonymous, 'Hamadoun'.

⁵⁸ 'A Bamako Mouvement de protestation contre la réforme monétaire', *Le Monde*, 24 juillet 1962, 7; 'Deux personnalités politiques Soudanais arrêtées à Bamako', *Le Monde*, 27 juillet 1962, 7.

where the governing political party of US-RDA probably killed Hamadoun Dicko in 1964.⁵⁹

Hamadoun's political ambitions and career were a source of inspiration for Muusa Dicko, who, by marrying Hamadoun's sister Ina Wuro as his first wife (Fig. 3), hoped to strengthen his bonds with Hamadoun's family. With this marriage Muusa assured himself a strategic position among the royal freeborn Dickos of the former kingdom of Jooná (Fig. 1). Moussa's emphasis on marriages with patrilineal kin also contributed to distancing himself even more from his maternal slave kin. Owing to his in-law relation with Hamadoun, Muusa also became a target for the US-RDA government, who considered not only Hamadoun Dicko but all related Dicko families to be enemies of the state. Muusa Dicko, for example, was forced to move and teach for short periods of some months in the smallest villages in the most remote regions of Mali.⁶⁰ Successive short-term appointments in remote areas were a fate many Dicko family members faced in this period.⁶¹ This practice ended only after Musa Traore's putsch in 1968, when members of the former Keita regime were persecuted in their turn.

The mobile educational trajectories of both Hamadoun and Muusa deconstruct existing linear assumptions about schooling, mobility, and social status. While in classical historiography it is assumed that mainly slaves were sent to schools, the cases above demonstrate how in the Haayre region it was mainly those with freeborn or freed status (elite and mixed-descent children) who were sent to school, rather than those with slave status. In what follows, the trajectory of Muusa's half-brother Haidu will demonstrate how immobility could also contribute to social mobility. Haidu's trajectory shows how spatial mobility was not the only avenue to social mobility and nuances the idea that 'having a road' is necessarily related to nomadism (in earlier times) or migrations (more recently).

Back home in Dalla, the death of King Yerowal in 1966 generated major social changes. Conflicts over the succession to the throne led to a brutal murder among competing freeborn Dicko brothers. After this terrible event, a neutral and low-key candidate was selected in an attempt to temper internal divisions among the royal members of the Dicko lineage. The choice fell on Haidu, son of the king and slave concubine Pendoolde Kau (Fig. 4). Informants of slave descent indicate that Haidu was elected not only because he was the eldest amongst the eligible male Dicko family members, but also because his mixed descent gave him a low profile among the rivaling 'pure' freeborn family members. Everyone agreed to elect Haidu, who had never previously shown any interest in politics and spent much of his time herding. His humble position within the Dicko family made him an acceptable compromise for all parties. The advantages were twofold. First of all, the pure freeborn members of the royal court did not feel threatened by the 'humblest'

⁵⁹ Interview with Mawludu Dicko, Bamako, 13 Nov. 2005; Interview with Muusa Dicko, Douentza, 2002; Interview with Samba Dicko, Bamako, 2006; *L'Essor* special issue, 'Mali 2000', (1999), with a picture of Hamadoun Dicko on p. 23. See also, 'Hamadoun', 18–19; 'Le PSP et le 20 juillet 1962, Rappel aux Maliens les crimes commis', *Soir de Bamako*, 9 août 2005; 'Événements du 20 juillet 1962, le PSP réclame la vérité', *L'Essor*, 10 août 2005.

⁶⁰ Based on Muusa Dicko's life history. Personal correspondence between Dicko and De Bruijn and van Dijk, 1991.

⁶¹ Interview with Mawludu Dicko.

among them. His status was 'corrupted' by his maternal slave descent, and therefore he was not considered as threatening a rival as other freeborn candidates.⁶² Second, in a period of major challenges over existing power positions in the context of decolonization and the socialist regime of Modibo Keita, Haidu's maternal background was considered an advantage, as it would find some support amongst populations of slave descent in the region. Haidu thus installed himself in the house where the drums that represent royal power were kept and allied himself with the political party of ADEMA. In Haidu's case, it was mixed descent at a specific historical conjuncture of conflict that turned him into the ideal candidate for chieftdom in the 1970s.

Meanwhile, the trajectory of Muusa Dicko abroad also contributed to a slowly emerging successful career. Muusa's French education throughout the years enabled him to reposition himself among the 'pure' freeborn members of the royal family back home in Dalla. In the 1970s and 1980s, the dictatorial regime of Traore did not bring much betterment for anyone. But Muusa Dicko maintained a stable job as a teacher in several Malian cities. Although this did not make him rich, he was wealthy compared with his co-villagers. Muusa decided to marry a second wife and chose to ally himself with Booni's royal family. He also maintained close contacts with Mustaphe Dicko, a mixed-descent member of the former kingdom of Booni, who had also been sent to French schools and was an ADEMA adherent. In the 1980s, Mustaphe was making a career as Mali's ambassador in Burkina Faso. During school holidays, Muusa and Mustaphe often met. Thanks to their relative wealth and salaried government jobs, both men gained influence over their freeborn relatives in their home communities. Their 'pure' freeborn brothers and sisters who once discriminated against them on the basis of their maternal slave background now sought their assistance and wealth. In contrast to Joonaa, in both Dalla and Booni mixed-descent individuals had achieved more successful educational or political careers than freeborn members of the royal families.

While the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, in combination with the dictatorial regime, were a disaster for many, they paradoxically brought important opportunities to the Haayre region. By the early 1990s, new NGOs brought money and administrative functions to small peripheral towns like Douentza (Fig. 1), which had been overwhelmed by the influx of starving rural poor.⁶³ Some school-educated individuals of mixed descent, among them Muusa and Mustaphe Dicko, returned to the Douentza province to take advantage of new job opportunities, enabling them to finally work in their home area. During Alpha Oumar Konaré's regime (1992–2002), Mustaphe Dicko was one of the first school-educated persons from the village of Booni to be elected member of parliament for the Douentza province. Like Muusa Dicko, he encouraged his fellow family members and co-villagers to educate themselves, and in his position as an MP he supported the construction of school buildings in the rural communities of Dalla and Booni. He also provided for a secondary school in Douentza, where Muusa Dicko became headmaster.

⁶² This echoes Meillassoux's argument about the slave as an 'anti-kin': Meillassoux, *Anthropology*, 139.

⁶³ R. Zondag, 'Douentza: the dynamics of a rural centre in the semi-arid Sahel', in M. E. de Bruijn, H. van Dijk, M. Kaag, and K. van Til (eds.), *Sahelian Pathways: Climate and Society in Central and South Mali* (Leiden, 2005), 174–6.

In 2002, Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) was elected president of Mali. Under ATT, the Dicko family occupied various positions in government. In 2002, Muusa Dicko became the first elected mayor of the decentralized rural community of Dalla in central Mali. This was surely humiliating to his 'pure' freeborn family members, who were illiterate and thus legally excluded from running for this office. Muusa's election can be explained by the fact that he was the sole school-educated Dicko from the village of Dalla in his generation; moreover, his mixed descent provided him with a large electorate among people of slave descent. The Kau family (Fig. 4), for example, voted for Muusa Dicko out of loyalty to his maternal slave ancestry.⁶⁴

Paradoxically, it is in this specific time period that mixed descent from a slave mother (Fig. 3) gave Muusa access to the fullest form of political legitimacy. When he returned after many years to his home area in the 1990s, his physical mobility and mixed descent had opened a 'road' for him. Although the road was initially spatial (he moved in order to get French education and later on to teach), what actually brought social mobility to Muusa was his insertion in specific socioeconomic fields (French education, political patronage) where slave descent was not relevant. The personal trajectory of social mobility for Muusa Dicko, who died in 2008, contributed to the careers of his children and descendants. Muusa Dicko's eldest daughter Madame Dicko (Fig. 3) was, for example, elected member of parliament for Douentza province in 2007.

In summary, the life history of Muusa Dicko shows that the 'road' to education offered by the French colonial regime was an important one for mixed-descent children of the former royal courts in the Haayre region. Upon independence, it gave this generation the skills necessary to engage salaried government employment, making them rich and empowering them by comparison with freeborn families back home. Those royal 'pure' freeborn who had shunned education came to understand that sending slaves or children of mixed descent to schools had given these formerly marginal and 'impure' children a double advantage. The specific historical conjuncture of the 1940s–60 in which mixed-descent Dickos like Muusa and Mustaphe were inserted in French education proved to 'have given them a road'. Colonial rule and mixed descent had forced them into trajectories which, in the long run, offered them social mobility. But spatial and social mobility were experienced rather differently. The latter is obviously desirable; the former was initially experienced more as a form of exile.⁶⁵ Muusa's social mobility was not only passed on to his children, who had successful political careers, but (as will be discussed in the next section) it also had a lasting effect for their dependants of (full) slave descent.

PARALLEL ROADS OF DOMESTIC 'SLAVES' ATTACHED TO 'MASTERS' OF MIXED DESCENT

This section and the next discuss the 'roads' available to three royal slave descendants related to former masters of mixed descent. These royal slave descendants are called Macca, Souleymane, and Allay. I will point out that

⁶⁴ For a similar argument in the Ghanaian context, see Valsecchi, 'My dearest'.

⁶⁵ Personal correspondence between Dicko and de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1991.

the roads of both 'masters' and 'slaves' run parallel – and that the movement of one group initiated that of the other. The beginning of movement and the moment that roads became available for mixed-descent individuals also heralded the start of movement for the subordinate 'slave' groups belonging to them. Nevertheless, the opportunities and activities on the roads of each social status group were very different, as will be shown through a description of the parallel 'roads' of 'slaves' Allay and Macca, who acted as Muusa and Haidu's personal assistants. A comparison between different forms of migration is illustrated with the example of Souleymane, who shifted between independent labor migrations and dependent movements while following his patrons.

In order to understand the relative status positions of the slave descendants Allay, Macca, and Souleymane, the manner and timing of their acquisition as slaves needs to be explained. When King Yerowal died in 1966, both Muusa and Haidu with their mixed-descent position were entitled to inherit domestic slaves from their father, just like 'pure' freeborn children at the royal court. However, the kind of slaves these mixed-descent sons inherited illustrates the subtle discriminations they faced. Both Muusa and Haidu Dicko inherited 'slaves' with a rather marginal status when compared with other royal domestic slaves. The ancestors of most royal domestic slaves had been captured in raids of the nineteenth century and had already spent several generations in the service of the royal court. In contrast, Muusa Dicko's inherited slave Allay was recently incorporated, having been given as a pawn to King Yerowal in the 1940s by a tradesman who could not pay his taxes: the practice of using slaves as payment or pawns continued well after the colonial abolition of slavery in 1905.⁶⁶

Since slaves tended to reproduce hierarchies among themselves, the second-generation royal domestic slaves like those of the Kau family (Fig. 4) initially looked down upon the pawned slave Allay. His former master was 'but a tradesman' and hence Allay enjoyed inferior social standing amongst other 'slaves' of the royal family. Mixed-descent Haidu also inherited a 'slave', called Macca Maiga, from his father, the king. This man, Macca Maiga, was born as a domestic 'slave' in Hombori, among the ethnic group of Songhay. Macca Maiga ended up in Dalla owing to the marriage of his Songhay mistress with the king. Macca's mistress died young, and since he initially spoke a different language, Macca had difficulties integrating among the much longer-settled domestic slaves of the royal court, who refused him a wife. Macca was thus marginal among royal slaves due to his different ethnic background, and this probably also explains why he was given to Haidu Dicko, a marginal member of mixed descent in the freeborn group.

Muusa and Haidu both inherited fewer slaves than their freeborn peers for the simple reason that their maternal family could not provide them any. This again was a social disadvantage in comparison with their 'pure' freeborn brothers and sisters, who inherited former slaves and dependants from both

⁶⁶ Ahmadou Hamidou Dicko (Junior), Feb. 2009; P. E. Lovejoy and T. Falola (eds.), *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* (Trenton, NJ, 2003); P. E. Lovejoy and D. Richardson, 'The business of slaving: pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600–1810', *Journal of African History*, 42:1 (2001), 67–89.

sides of their kin. The issue of ‘slave’ inheritance thus demonstrates how mixed-descent sons were treated as inferior to sons born of freeborn women.

One might expect that mixed-descent individuals who were the first generation of their maternal families to have escaped slave status would be the last persons to reproduce the ideology of slavery.⁶⁷ However, somewhat ironically, mixed-descent Dicko migrants like Muusa and Mustaphe seem to have an even higher need to prove their authority than their ‘pure’ freeborn family members. Since they obtained good salaries and promising jobs, they attracted clients among former slaves of different (often impoverished) freeborn families. Even though both Muusa and Mustaphe did not live next to the families of the ‘slaves’ they inherited, they recruited girls from slave-descended families in their home region to assist them as domestics in their urban compounds. Once these girls moved to Bamako at the demand of these patrons, they were subjected to strict hierarchical differentiation. Nevertheless, this form of ‘dependent mobility’ alongside wealthy patrons was for these girls one of the few possible roads to labor migration.⁶⁸

Even though they both stayed home, Allay and Macca over time managed to share in the social mobility of their mixed-descent ‘masters’. When Muusa Dicko became mayor of Dalla in 2002, Allay Jangine was appointed chief of the former royal domestic slaves. Macca, who was not even entitled to marry a wife among the royal domestic slaves, became one of the richest inhabitants of the royal ‘slave’ ward in Dalla. Chief Haidu had often generously rewarded Macca for his assistance and this is how Macca managed to get his son a complete school education. In 2011 his son was working as a teacher in the Haayre region. The cases of Allay and Macca illustrate how – just like their initially stigmatized mixed-descent patrons – these two newcomers among the royal slaves obtained relatively privileged positions thanks to their alliance with mixed-descent individuals. The royal domestic ‘slaves’, who initially excluded them, came to respect these former outsiders and were even expected to obey them.

In what follows, the trajectory of the slightly younger-generation Souleymane Dauda Kau (Fig. 4) demonstrates the dilemmas the current generation of royal slave descendants faces: instrumentalizing slave status and engaging in dependent mobility, or renouncing this form of social security and cultivating emancipation with all the risks that total independence and the status of ‘stranger’ abroad can bring about.

HAVING A ROAD AS A DESCENDANT OF ROYAL DOMESTIC SLAVES: LABOR MIGRATION OR DEPENDENT MOBILITY?

Since the entry into labor migration of the former domestic slaves of the royal family such as the descendants of Kau (Fig. 4) came quite late, they started

⁶⁷ For an example of Muusa’s ideas about how the ‘rope of slavery is still there’, see de Bruijn and Pelckmans, ‘Facing’, 79.

⁶⁸ For more on domestic workers among the Dicko family in Bamako, see Pelckmans, *Travelling*, 217–20 and Pelckmans, ‘Memoryscapes of slavery? dependent mobility by ‘related’ domestic workers in Fulbe elite families in Mali’, in J. Quirk and D. Vigneswaran (eds.), *Slavery, Migration and Contemporary Bondage in Africa* (Trenton, NJ, 2012), 149–80.

their migration careers at a disadvantage compared with other migrants. Even though for some of these Kau migrants—such as Souleymane—labor migration was quite lucrative, it did not provide them with roads to social advancement. Another option was 'dependent mobility'—that is, mobility that depends on the mobility of other (higher) status groups.⁶⁹ In the latter case, the mobility of royal domestic slaves was organized 'top down'; higher-status groups moved first and initiated a 'downward social spread of migration'.⁷⁰ The case of Souleymane will demonstrate why this can be an interesting option.

Souleymane is a grandson of Kau, a central ancestor of the royal domestic slaves (Fig. 4). Souleymane's first opportunity to move out of his home village Dalla came when Samba Dicko, son of Muusa Dicko, went to study at the University of Abuja in Nigeria and 'recruited' Souleymane Kau as a personal assistant. For Souleymane this was a unique chance to move out of the village and see something of the world. In Nigeria, he made tea and prepared food for Samba, who could thus devote all his time to studying. When Samba completed his studies, their paths separated for some time. Samba settled in Bamako, where he married a freeborn woman from the royal branch of the Dicko family in Joonaa and, thanks to his education, obtained a position with the World Bank.

Souleymane's assistance was no longer needed once his patron Samba obtained a job and married (his wife brought a former slave to do domestic work). Souleymane thus decided to spend some years working as a migrant farm laborer in Burkina Faso. He married the daughter of Allay Jangine, whose social advancement as personal assistant of Muusa had turned his daughters into prestigious marriage candidates. He settled with his new wife as a cultivator in Burkina Faso, but then returned home to Dalla in 1999 to educate his children. Retrospectively, Souleymane explains how his labor migration did not bring him much social mobility. He earned more money, but back home he faced the fate of many other migrants of slave descent: his remittances did not suffice to buy his own land. Not owning one's land means remaining dependent on renting land from the royal family. This requires him to consciously perpetuate, and instrumentalise his status as the descendant of royal slaves.

Since labor migration did not change his social status, Souleymane re-engaged in dependent mobility for both Muusa and Samba Dicko. Souleymane regularly moved to Samba's family compound in Bamako, where he worked as a butcher (an occupation usually associated with 'slave' status). Back home in Dalla, mayor Muusa charged Souleymane with the task of distributing voting cards in the various former slave villages surrounding the rural community of Dalla (Fig. 2). In addition, Souleymane's eldest daughter Aafi engaged in dependant mobility: she was transferred to Muusa Dicko's compound in Douentza as a domestic worker. In exchange, she could reside and eat for free in Douentza, which was the only option for this family of slave descendants to help her finish her secondary schooling.

Finally, Souleymane decided to instrumentalise his slave status and first supported Muusa and later on his daughter Madame Dicko during their

⁶⁹ This corresponds more or less to 'subordinate movement' in Niger, described by Rossi, 'Slavery', 183.

⁷⁰ Manchuelle, *Willing*, 144, 186.

municipal and parliamentary election campaigns. Souleymane's brother Amadu also campaigned for Madame among labor migrants of slave descent in Bamako. During municipal elections in Dalla (2008), both of them had expected a reward for their assistance and were very disappointed to end up only in the seventh position of the community council, which is the classic position for those of slave origin (freeborn groups traditionally occupy positions one to six): once again, their social status had proved an insurmountable barrier to achieving certain positions of authority.⁷¹

From these trajectories of slave descendants, it can be concluded that those working in the service of mixed-descent migrants profited from both the spatial and social mobility of their patrons. The cases of Allay and Macca demonstrate how just like their stigmatized mixed-descent freeborn patrons, these initially stigmatized royal domestic slaves obtained the highest degrees of social mobility. Souleymane's case demonstrates that for those slave descendants whose patrons were wealthy and successful, dependent mobility was a more rewarding road to social mobility than independent labor migration. These former slaves' 'roads' to social mobility ran parallel to those of their successful patrons of mixed descent, and underline the enduring importance of patronage in the West African Sahel.

THE ROADS THAT LINK SOCIAL STATUS AND SPATIAL MOBILITY

In theories of migration, spatial mobility is often equated with emancipation and social mobility. This article goes against this modern, unilinear, and teleological understanding of social change. It does so by locating life trajectories in the internal differentiations among social status groups. The generational approach chosen here allows the investigation of multiple registers of change in specific times and spaces, explaining people's contextualized embeddings in the internal hierarchy of their particular social status group. The cases demonstrate that it is at the interface of individual performance, meso-insertion in social relations and macro-conditions, that people 'have roads' in terms of access to opportunity structures in politics, administration, education, and the monetary economy. This 'configurational approach' privileges the social agency of individuals who are not passive in the face of legal structures.

The first section debunked the idea that movement is necessarily linked to social status. By analyzing the social history of two families over several generations, the internal diversity of apparently homogenous social status groups was emphasized. Instead of taking for granted common identities underlying ascribed social status, this article demonstrates how the internal power struggles *within* social status groups explain best the silent changes taking place. In so doing, it highlights the shifts under the surface of apparent continuities in the social landscape of hierarchies in the Sahel. Hierarchical relations and ascribed social status are 'denaturalised' by focusing on mixed-descent individuals.

The introduction started with a short sketch of how the Dicko family, who are of freeborn warrior status, had maintained political positions in a small

⁷¹ Phone interviews with Muusa junior Dicko, Demba Dicko, and Ahmadou Hamidou Dicko (Junior), 12 May 2008, 24 Apr. 2009, 10 Sept. 2009.

village of central Mali. Although this particular freeborn group has maintained key political positions over the past century, the analysis demonstrated how significant internal renegotiation over power within the group had occurred. While before, 'pure' freeborn lineages occupied political positions, today it is mixed-descent individuals and their descendants who occupy the central political positions of chief and mayor. Paradoxically, today the 'pure', immobile, freeborn rely on mixed-descent individuals to ensure the leadership position of their social status group in village politics. Analytically conflating mixed-descent individuals with their freeborn peers would have obscured these significant internal power shifts not only within the status group of the royal Dicko family, but also between the social status group of royal slave-descendant families deferring to them. By demonstrating how the legal status of mixed descent does not entirely correspond to freeborn status, the analysis opened the door for future discussions by historians about the life histories and actual status of slave concubines and their mixed-descent children. More specifically, the trajectories of less successful mixed-descent children could be an important counterpoint to analyses that so far have focused on advantages of mixed-descent individuals.

The second argument against any linear and causal relation between mobility and social change has been made by deconstructing mobility as an element of emancipatory progress only. The emic expression of 'having a road' encourages one to see opportunity as a continuum: it is an itinerary that can temporarily be moved in or out of, depending on one's position in space and time. The road can be travelled both back and forth, and social change in post-slavery societies is not about unidirectional, one-way itineraries that eventually lead to adopting a new (freeborn) status. It is not mobility *per se* which has offered opportunities for citizens of slave descent in West Africa (and elsewhere) to emancipate themselves. The notion of 'parallel roads' points out how the spatial and social mobilities of different social status groups have been, and continue to be, interlinked. The clients of wealthy patrons engage in a form of mobility that depends on the movement of their patrons. This reflects the ways in which freeborn masters in the past controlled the mobility of their slaves and can be considered the postcolonial version of 'mastering' the mobility of dependants.

Access to mobility is thus clearly hierarchical and stratified. But although social status in local hierarchies is rather 'sticky' when it comes to possibilities to migrate, it is not determining. The life histories of slave descendants demonstrate how mobility—in the form of labor migration, for example—does not bring full emancipation from their social status. Migration has far more ambiguous outcomes than the expression 'having a road' suggests. The roads to social and spatial mobility of former master and slave groups remain structurally embedded in a shared history of hierarchical interdependence. To continue the metaphor of the road, the labor migration of the Kau family is comparable to a small winding path, along which dependence is often the tax levied by mixed-origin Dickos for granting access to education and/or social mobility.