

A VIEW OF THE SLAVE TRADE FROM THE MARGIN:  
SOUROUDOUGOU IN THE LATE NINETEENTH-  
CENTURY SLAVE TRADE OF THE NIGER BEND\*

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**ABSTRACT:** The region of Souroudougou played a dynamic role in the regional slave trade of the western Niger Bend during the nineteenth century, supplying slaves to neighboring states. A number of mechanisms, termed here ‘indirect linkages’, connected sources of slaves in Souroudougou to the broader regional slave trade. These took the form of commercial activity by Muslim mercantile groups, banditry and alliances formed between neighboring states and local power brokers in Souroudougou. At the same time, the growing slave trade triggered important internal processes of change in the local social landscape, termed here the ‘espace de compétition’. In particular, heightened individual and group competition transformed established codes of behavior and social networks.

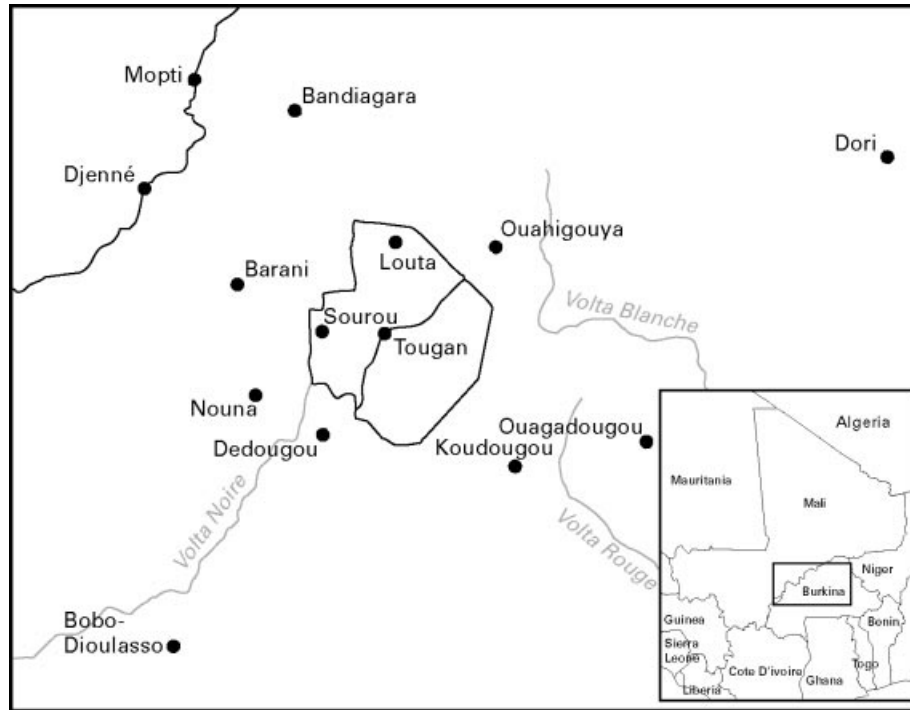
**KEY WORDS:** Burkina Faso, slave trade, decentralized societies.

THE life history of Alfred Diban, the father of the noted Burkinabe historian and politician Joseph Ki-Zerbo, is remarkable and compelling, not least for its theme of perseverance through formidable hardships.<sup>1</sup> Born in the second half of the nineteenth century in a corner of what is now western Burkina Faso – hereafter referred to as Souroudougou – Diban paints a vivid portrait of a complex and highly competitive social landscape dominated by ubiquitous warfare and raiding between and within village communities in the region. In this climate of instability and insecurity, Diban was captured and made a slave during the late nineteenth century, while still a young man. Passing into the slave-trading network of the Middle Niger delta, he ended up a household slave of a Fulani herder somewhere to the north of Timbuktu. Chafing under the cruelty of his master, he on numerous occasions attempted daring escapes, however unsuccessfully.

Finally able to evade captivity, Alfred Diban chanced into the orbit of French Catholic missionaries (*Les Pères Blancs*, ‘The White Fathers’) and became a trusted servant in the Segu mission. When missionary activity was extended into the region of what is now Burkina Faso (then still part of the colony of *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*), Diban was chosen to relocate to the new mission of Toma in southern Souroudougou, returning to his natal region in a triumphant manner. Alfred Diban would gain prestige and recognition for his efforts on behalf of the Christian community in Upper Volta, becoming an acquaintance and confidant of many top government and church officials.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Alfred Diban: Premier chrétien de Haute-Volta* (Paris, 1983).



Map 1. The approximate extent of the region of Souroudougou.

For the purposes of this paper, Diban's history is compelling for the rare first-hand account it provides of the slave trade of the Niger bend region. Historians of the slave trade of the western Sudan will find that his description of his passage through the slave-trading network of the Niger bend challenges predominant explanations of enslavement. Diban was not ensnared in a predatory raid by a neighboring military state, as one might logically assume from the preponderance of studies on enslavement in the western Sudan, but rather was captured by a small group of bandits from a neighboring village and sold to passing merchants.

While Diban eventually passed into circuits of exchange controlled by neighboring states,<sup>2</sup> the initial phase of his capture and sale to passing merchants was marked by the absence of any direct state interference. Thus the manner in which Diban was introduced into the wider slave-trading network of the Niger bend anticipates a central concern of this article: to problematize the predominant conceptual model of the slave trade of the western Sudan.

A number of scholars have effectively demonstrated that warfare and slave

<sup>2</sup> Diban states that he was taken first to Mopti and then to Sofara to the north of Jenne, before finally reaching the slave market of Kabara. This suggests a number of things: first that he, like many other captives in the western Sudan, was traded many times in exchange for a range of commodities (Diban mentions cowries and salt); and second, that he entered into the orbit of either the Futanke of Bandiagara or the Fulbe of Barani after leaving Souroudougou as a captive.

raiding often played a fundamental role in the development and social reproduction of precolonial state formations in the western Sudan.<sup>3</sup> While these studies differ in substantial ways with respect to the procurement of slaves for internal use and trading one can distill from them a common conceptual template, what I will hereafter refer to as the ‘predatory state model’. This model essentially argues that the social and economic needs of states in the western Sudan were met – and their political well-being ensured – through regular cycles of predation among smaller-scale societies populating the interstices and fringes of a given state’s sphere of influence. In the context of this model, a primary purpose of warfare, oftentimes waged during the annual dry season, was to accumulate/capture those primarily human resources – slaves – vital to the perpetuation and reproduction of state institutions. Slaves served this function both as factors of production (as labor and as wives/concubines) and as tradeable commodities.

The predatory-state model of slave procurement produced, in a number of noteworthy cases, a severe depopulation of smaller-scale societies bordering powerful warrior states. In the western Sudan, the case of Wasulu in what is now southern Mali supports this scenario. Evidence dating from the late nineteenth century suggests that a continual and intensive cycle of predation by several neighboring state formations, particularly Samorian, served drastically to depopulate the region.<sup>4</sup> In the central Sudan, the German explorer Heinrich Barth has also provided vivid descriptions of highly destructive annual campaigns by the forces of Kanem among neighboring decentralized societies.<sup>5</sup> However, such cases may have been the exception rather than the rule in terms of how most slaves were produced in the western Sudan. Indeed, Martin Klein has observed that ‘No other large area [in the western Sudan] seems to have been as thoroughly slaved as Wasulu’.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See in particular: Richard Roberts, ‘Production and reproduction of warrior states: Segu Bambara and Segu Tokolor, c. 1712–1890’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13 (1980), 389–419; Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago, 1991); Steven P. Reyna, *Wars Without End: The Political Economy of a Precolonial African State* (Hanover, NH, 1990); Jean Bazin, ‘Guerre et servitude à Ségou’, in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L’esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 135–81.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Klein, ‘The slave trade in the western Sudan during the nineteenth century’, in E. Savage (ed.), *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (London, 1992), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (London, 1965), II, 361–96.

<sup>6</sup> Klein notes that Wasulu appeared to be well-populated even in the late 1870s. Intensive predation in Wasulu by Samori and Sikasso may thus have been confined to the 1880s and 1890s, when the encroachment of French and British colonial forces may have altered pre-existing patterns of slave procurement. Klein, ‘Slave trade’, 43. Though less flamboyant than accounts of the predatory activities of states, a number of other cases suggest that slave-acquiring and slave-supplying societies in West Africa often existed in close proximity to each other without triggering a doomsday scenario of demographic exhaustion on the one hand or a disruption in the cycle of social reproduction on the other. See Charles Piot, ‘Of slaves and the gift: Kabre sale of kin during the era of the slave trade’, *Journal of African History*, 37 (1996), 31–49; Jean-Pierre Warnier, ‘Traite sans raids au Cameroun’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 29 (1989), 5–32; Olga F. Linares, ‘Deferring to trade in slaves: The Jola of Casamance, Senegal in historical perspective’, *History in Africa*, 14 (1987), 113–39.

Thus, while providing an effective conceptual vehicle for examining the dynamic role of centralized slave-acquiring societies in the precolonial western Sudan, the predatory state model is nevertheless unsatisfactory in achieving a comprehensive understanding of regional political economies, particularly the participation of decentralized societies in regional slave-trading systems. In this model, 'peripheral' regions and populations, those located in the interstices or zones of predation circumscribing warrior states, figure only as reservoirs of slaves to be tapped by predatory states.<sup>7</sup> This neglect may be explained for several reasons. Firstly, the study of the history of decentralized societies in Africa has suffered generally from a bias in favor of states and empires. States not only accumulate more evidence for the scholar to sift, but are also often considered of greater intrinsic significance within the scope of broad processes of change than social groupings of smaller scale and more elusive historical pedigree.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, historians have often uncritically accepted the notion that states involved in the slave trade of West Africa dominated the process of accumulating slaves, for internal use or trade, at the expense of 'defenseless' neighboring decentralized populations.<sup>9</sup>

Studies of the slave trade in the western Sudan and West Africa more broadly, have often overlooked or dismissed decentralized societies as passive recipients or 'victims' of predatory action rather than as dynamic participants in regional political economies. A rethinking of conceptual approaches to the study of the slave trade is needed, expanding the conceptual menu beyond the predatory state model to fashion truly regional perspectives on the development and impact of the slave trade. By broadening our conceptual parameters to include a more rigorous examination of the role of 'reservoir' areas, Africanists will gain a more nuanced perspective of the complexity of the interior slave trade in West Africa and the variety of mechanisms that ultimately linked sources of African slaves to the transatlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> An early example of this is Gemery and Hogendorn's 'vent-for-surplus' model of the interior African and transatlantic slave trades. See H. Gemery and J. Hogendorn, 'The Atlantic slave trade: A tentative economic model', *Journal of African History*, 15 (1974), 223-46.

<sup>8</sup> See Robin Horton, 'Stateless societies in the history of West Africa', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa* (London, 1976); Philip Curtin, 'Africa north of the forest in the Early Islamic Age', in P. Curtin, S. Feierman, L. Thompson and J. Vansina, *African History* (London, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Robin Law has correctly observed that representations and models of the precolonial West African slave trade have typically been focused upon large slave-acquiring states, particularly those partaking in predatory warfare and raiding. See R. Law, 'Dahomey and the slave trade: Reflections on the historiography of the rise of Dahomey', *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), 237-67. Charles Piot has also recently addressed this issue in his discussion of a regional slave-trading network in northern Togo: see Piot, 'Slaves and the gift'. Gemery and Hogendorn employ the term 'defenseless' in reference to 'non-state' formations supplying slaves. Gemery and Hogendorn, 'The Atlantic slave trade', 223.

<sup>10</sup> A number of studies have recently begun to move in this direction: see n. 6. and also Robin Law, 'Slave-raiders and middlemen, monopolists and free-traders: The supply of slaves for the Atlantic trade in Dahomey, c. 1715-1850', *Journal of African History*, 30 (1989), 45-68. A number of recent unpublished studies also address the topic. See

Using examples drawn from the case study of Souroudougou during the nineteenth century, this article will argue that a range of mechanisms and strategies were operating to ensure a steady flow of captives from the region to neighboring states and into the wider commercial networks of the Niger bend. During the nineteenth century, Souroudougou was a region populated by village-sized social units, many of which in the past had been loosely grouped together into a number of religious and ancestrally-linked village confederations. Although highly fragmented into autonomous and antagonistic villages by the time of the French conquest during the 1890s, French officials misperceived this fractious social landscape through the distorting lense of the doctrine of '*politique des races*' and applied a tribal label to the regional inhabitants: the 'Samo'.<sup>11</sup> As part of the densely populated western Volta savanna belt and located in close proximity to major slave markets along the Niger river bend, the village communities of Souroudougou were prized as slave 'reservoirs' for neighboring states during and most likely before the nineteenth century.

Several conditions, however, obtaining simultaneously, limited the ability of neighboring states to dominate the extraction of slaves from the region while ensuring that a constant flow of captives did supply external demand.<sup>12</sup> This article will employ two conceptual tools to describe the operation of this regional system: 'indirect linkages' and the '*espace de compétition*' (terrain of competition). The notion of 'indirect linkages' refers to the variety of mechanisms that emerged to funnel captives from Souroudougou to slave markets situated along its periphery. In the unstable environment of the western Sudan during the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of 'reservoirs' such as Souroudougou, far from lying defenseless before the raiding activities of military states, deployed a host of effective defensive strategies to minimize the impact of predation. These included farming in groups, or living within closely-packed communities protected by imposing exterior walls. Faced with the difficulty of penetrating imposing village fortifications and overwhelming skilled defenders directly to control these sources of slaves, neighboring states sought to establish alternative linkages in Souroudougou by cultivating local allies and agents who could ensure a steady flow of captives to the outside. Commercial networks dominated by Muslim

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Andrew Hubbell, 'Patronage and predation: A social history of colonial chieftaincies in a chiefless region – Souroudougou (Burkina Faso), 1850–1946' (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1997); Walter Hawthorne, 'The interior past of an acephalous society: Institutional change among the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau, c. 1400–1950' (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> A detailed discussion of 'tribalization' in colonial Souroudougou can be found in Hubbell, 'Patronage and predation', ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> The terms 'captives' and 'slaves' describe different phases in the process of enslavement. 'Captives' refers to those recently captured and in the process of being transported to markets to be sold as slaves, although this distinction admittedly becomes vague at the point where a captive was sold to a passing merchant to be transported to a slave market. However, very few captives were kept by their captors as slaves within Souroudougou, so it is important to distinguish between this initial state of captivity and the eventual condition of slavery. The progression along this continuum is conveyed by Alfred Diban's narrative. See Ki-Zerbo, *Alfred Diban*.

traders such as the Juula and the Yarse also played an important role in funnelling captives from village communities in Souroudougou to nearby slave markets.<sup>13</sup>

Facilitating the flow of captives to external markets was a pervasive condition of competition between groups and individuals which existed at the local level, an important historical dynamic shaping the precolonial social landscape of Souroudougou.<sup>14</sup> Here, the concept of the *espace de compétition* as defined by Jean Bazin and Emmanuel Terray is helpful.<sup>15</sup> Bazin and Terray liken a decentralized society to a terrain of competition in which warfare, raiding and feuding are the expression of an underlying competitive tension between lineages and individuals over access to the scarce resources needed for their reproduction and growth (demographic proliferation). The nature and intensity of this competition could fluctuate over time, given internal conditions and external influences. While Bazin and Terray focus closely on the centrality of conflict over access to and control of women in such a political economy, competition over other scarce or valuable resources becomes equally important in particular contexts. In the case of Souroudougou during the late nineteenth century, a growing regional demand for slaves and the profit to be made from supplying this demand, encouraged an increasing pattern of localized warfare and indiscriminate captive-taking. In the area of Tougan in central Souroudougou, this form of captive-taking was called '*tampio*' (banditry).<sup>16</sup>

The nature of *tampio* reflected, at a deeper level, a fundamental transformation in the parameters of the *espace de compétition* within the social landscape of Souroudougou. Bonds between villages and established codes of conduct concerning warfare and the capture of individuals were eroding under the stress of the growing demand for slaves to satisfy nearby markets in the Niger river valley. Famines caused by drought and the insecurity of farming beyond the protective walls of villages contributed to this shift in patterns of competition, interjecting the corrosive influence of the slave trade into intra-village and family life.

The confluence of a changing *espace de compétition* in Souroudougou and

<sup>13</sup> Robin Law notes that state-sponsored raiding and commercial mechanisms for obtaining slaves could be 'incompatible alternatives'. See Law, 'Slave-raiders and middlemen', 45–6. The case of Souroudougou appears to support this assessment.

<sup>14</sup> While earlier studies of decentralized societies in Africa tend to stress the mechanisms of mediation and affiliation that served to dissipate competitive tensions between groups and individuals, more recent and historically-inclined work has shifted the focus to the nature and expression of competitive tensions as a defining characteristic of such social entities. A classic example from the earlier school is Meyer Fortes' study of Tallensi social practices, *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi* (London, 1949). Jean Bazin and Emmanuel Terray's more recent compilation of studies of warfare in precolonial and colonial Africa contains several examples of the shift in conceptual focus. See J. Bazin and E. Terray (eds.) *Guerres de lignages et guerres d'Etats en Afrique* (Paris, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Jean Bazin and Emmanuel Terray, 'Avant-propos', in Bazin and Terray, *Guerres de lignages*, 17–18. A detailed discussion of the concept of the *espace de compétition* as it pertains to precolonial Souroudougou is provided in Hubbell, 'Patronage and predation', introduction and ch. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with notables of Boussoum, 23 Sept. 1992; Harana Pare, 'La société Samo de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et la conquête coloniale française: Approche socio-historique', (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Ouagadougou, 1984), 41.

the use of indirect mechanisms of slave extraction is most readily visible in the written and oral record of the late nineteenth century, during the period immediately preceding and including the French conquest of the region, although the silhouette of this emergent political economy is discernable prior to this. What seems clear is that the process of conquest by French forces brought to a climax the slave trade emanating from Souroudougou before French efforts to suppress the trade began to take effect during the early years of the twentieth century. The following section will examine in detail the nature of the slave trade within Souroudougou during the late nineteenth century. Rather than a static 'reservoir' of slaves on the margin of state domains, the evidence indicates that Souroudougou's position in the regional slave trade was one of centrality and dynamism.

INDIRECT LINKAGES AND INTERNAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY SLAVE TRADE OF SOUROUDOUGOU

Few armies in the western Niger bend were up to the task of sacking or investing the formidable village citadels of Souroudougou.<sup>17</sup> As Martin Klein and Thierno Mouctar Bah have observed, the defensive capacity of 'target' populations in the western Sudan was an important factor influencing the ability of military states to acquire captives.<sup>18</sup> In Souroudougou, the fortified architecture of large communities, featuring high outer walls enclosing densely packed villages, made it very difficult for invading armies to make a quick and successful sweep through the region. Also, many of the earliest French reports concerning Souroudougou contain repeated references to the ability of Samo communities to repulse the attacks of invading armies.<sup>19</sup>

One of the first Frenchmen to enter the region (1896), Destenave, observed that 'the Samo have never been conquered by the Mossi, Fulbe, or

<sup>17</sup> Numerous examples of villages successfully repulsing the assaults of powerful armies can be found in the oral and archival record. For information relating to the legendary defense of Sourou against the forces of Al-Kari of Bosse, see Myron Echenberg, 'Jihad and state-building in late-nineteenth-century Upper Volta: The rise and fall of the Marka state of Al-Kari of Bousse', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 3 (1969), 551; interview with Zonkè and Koumadi Yeyé, Sourou, 28 Sept. 1992. Information concerning another famous defensive stand, involving the small village of Dio in northern Souroudougou against the army of the Yatenga Naba Kandgo, is provided by Captain Noiré, 'Etude sur le Yatenga', Archives Nationales du Sénégal [hereafter ANS] 1G326.

<sup>18</sup> Klein, 'Slave trade in the western Sudan', 45; Thierno Mouctar Bah, *Architecture militaire traditionnelle et poliorcétique dans le Soudan occidental (du XVIIe à la fin du XIXe siècle)* (Yaoundé, 1985), 46–49. See also, Claude Meillassoux, 'Plans d'anciennes fortifications (*tata*) en pays malinke', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 36 (1966), 29–43; Jean-Paul Bourdier and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *African Spaces* (New York, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> This reputation for fierceness was such that Samo slaves were in demand as soldiers throughout the western Sudan and even North Africa. See Robert Arnaud, 'Rapport sur l'esclavage en Haute Volta, 1931', ANS 2K5 26. The Yatenga Mossi also employed Samo mercenaries in internecine political struggles because of their effectiveness as fighters. See Michel Izard, *Le Yatenga précolonial: Un ancien royaume du Burkina* (Karthala, 1985), 95.

the Tukolor (Futankes)'. The principal reason he gave for this was the defensive strategy of the Samo: grouping themselves in large, walled villages 'reputed to be impregnable'.<sup>20</sup> Several years later, Ruelle, another French official conducting ethnographic studies in the region, would provide a rich description of the defensive tactics employed by the local inhabitants:

Before our arrival, [the Samo] never succumbed to an invader, grouping themselves by family first, then by village, in the case of attack... Neighboring groups [he lists the Mossi, FulBe and Futanke], while coveting the region, were not able to reduce the solid earthen villages of the Samo. The Samo enclose themselves in their villages, defying any incursion and farm around their houses. [Within these walled villages] are wells and grain stocks for several months that are buried in secret caverns. Only the Dioula merchants have free access into these villages...<sup>21</sup>

Louis Tauxier, writing a decade later as an administrator posted to Upper Volta, described the villages of the western Volta region as 'citadels' because of their thick-sided *banco* houses protected by 'immense surrounding walls'.<sup>22</sup> The French were quite familiar with the defensive resilience of these villages, dating from the period of the French conquest in the late 1890s. A report summarizing the great revolt in the western Volta region two decades later captured the difficulty of reducing this type of fortified village:

The *banco* houses with flat earthen roofs, connected one to the other, with no openings except by small interior courtyards with narrow accesses, constitute veritable fortresses. Each *quartier* is separated from another by narrow, sinuous paths that also facilitate defense. Thus, our troops often encountered very serious difficulties in subduing these earthen fortifications, which offered no opening to attack. [They were] susceptible only to cannon.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, villages in late-nineteenth century Souroudougou were large, many numbering several thousand inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> When threatened by attack, smaller communities would often evacuate to the safety of larger villages with whom they maintained ritual or defense-based relations.

Rather than launching direct assaults, the tactics employed by nearby states during the nineteenth century tended toward infiltrating smaller raiding parties into the region to prey upon individuals or unarmed groups caught outside of village fortifications.<sup>25</sup> While Alfred Diban may have been

<sup>20</sup> Chef de Bataillon Destenave, 'L'occupation et l'organisation de la boucle du Niger: résumé des opérations', *Renseignements Coloniaux*, 9 (1898), 125.

<sup>21</sup> E. Ruelle, 'Notes anthropologiques, ethnographiques et sociologiques sur quelques populations noires du 2<sup>ème</sup> Territoire Militaire de l'AOF', *L'Anthropologie*, 15 (1904), 669. <sup>22</sup> Louis Tauxier, *Le noir du Soudan, pays mossi et gourounsi* (Paris, 1912), 167.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. of Haut-Sénégal-Niger, 'Réfection des villages', 6 Sept. 1918, Archives Nationales du Mali [hereafter ANM] 1N8.

<sup>24</sup> Destenave claimed that some large Samo villages numbered as many as 8,000–10,000 inhabitants, a figure that may well be excessively high; Destenave, 'L'occupation et l'organisation'. Echenberg reports the largest being 7,000; Myron Echenberg, 'African reaction to French conquest: Upper Volta in the late nineteenth century' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1971), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Informants confirmed that small groups of slave hunters circulated throughout the region. See the interviews with Loro and Sababou Boro, Guimou, 23 Sept. 1992; Mamadi Sabo, Koromi, 17 Aug. 1992. See also, Ruelle, 'Notes anthropologiques', 669. However, none of my sources, oral or written, confirmed the statement by Héritier that the Mossi



a victim of one such party, Harana Pare observes that women and children were more often the targets of such raiders.<sup>26</sup> Women and children not only presented less of a threat of resistance or flight, but also generally fetched a higher price than adult men in the western Sudan.<sup>27</sup> One strategy adopted by village communities in Souroudougou to counter this type of small-scale predation was to group women in the middle of armed parties when moving outside of village walls.<sup>28</sup>

Another important means by which neighboring polities could acquire captives from Souroudougou was to cultivate relationships with local power brokers established within the region. Aguibu Tal of Bandiagara and Widi Sidibe of Barani both relied on allies within Souroudougou to assist in funnelling captives to the exterior. One such alliance was between Aguibu and Konia Zon, a local notable in the nearby region of Louta in northern Souroudougou.<sup>29</sup> Based upon fragmentary French reports, it appears that Zon's association with the Futanke of Bandiagara most likely predated the arrival of the French in Souroudougou during the 1890s and suggests his involvement in the slave trade between northern Souroudougou and Bandiagara.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, Aguibu was keen to have Zon maintained in a position of power once the French 'pacification' of northern Souroudougou had been accomplished: upon Aguibu's recommendation, the French made Zon the first *chef de canton* of Louta during the late 1890s.

Bandiagara's influence also extended deeply into the northern Sourou valley. In the important riverine village of Di, located in western Souroudougou, oral accounts suggest that the Wonni lineage supplanted the Seri as the chiefly lineage of the village during the late nineteenth century with Futanke assistance.<sup>31</sup> Kunage Wonni became the chief of Di during the second half of the nineteenth century with the aid of Tijani Tal, who then

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raided in groups of forty or fifty. See Françoise Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes: production d'esclaves et accumulation de cauris chez les Samo (Haute-Volta)', in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 500.

<sup>26</sup> Pare, 'Société Samo', 42.

<sup>27</sup> For a recent review of the literature dealing with slave prices in the western and central Sudan during the nineteenth century, see Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson, 'Competing markets for male and female slaves: Prices in the interior of West Africa, 1780–1850', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 28 (1995), 261–93.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with notables of Rassouli, 23 Oct. 1992.

<sup>29</sup> 'Rapport politique', circle Dédougou, 3rd trimestre 1921, Archives Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire [hereafter ANCI] 5EE7 3. In this report, Konia Zon is referred to as having been Aguibu's 'creature', which, in the context of the report, I translate as his underling or local broker. See also, 'Monographie du canton de Louta', circle Tougan, Angelier, 15 Sept. 1951, Archives du Haut-Commissariat de Tougan, Burkina Faso [hereafter AHCT]; Letter, Co. circle Tougan to Governor Haute Volta, 7 Jan. 1957, AHCT.

<sup>30</sup> Because of its close proximity to Bandiagara, northern Souroudougou was not only a prime area to acquire captives, but also lay astride important slave shipment routes emanating from Bandiagara. French sources reveal that slave caravans, filled mostly with women and children, often passed in the vicinity of Louta in a northerly direction during the late 1890s. Arnaud, 'Rapport sur l'esclavage', ANS 2K5 26.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Sanziè and Drissa Seri, Di, 21 July 1992; see also a succession of *Fiches de Renseignements* for the canton chiefs of Di, 1918–37, AHCT; Capt. Angelier, 'Histoire politique du canton de Di', undated (though probably from the early 1950s), AHCT; Yacouba Cisse, 'L'évolution politique de la vallée du Sourou (Burkina Faso), de 1890 à 1920' (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Dakar, 1985), 38.

used Di as a transit point for captives being moved from the interior of Souroudougou to Bandiagara. Sources indicate that Kunage was involved in this pipeline, obtaining many captives from the nearby slave market of Koromi. Informants also state that Kunage remained the chief of Di until the arrival of the French in the late 1890s. He was then removed by the French for obscure reasons and replaced by Sulle Darame, a figure of no apparent standing in Di, but someone who likely also had ties to Bandiagara.

The most famous of Bandiagara's agents in Souroudougou was Saydu Amadu, a soldier in Aguibu's army who originally came from Segu.<sup>32</sup> Saydu's fame resulted from his reign as '*chef d'état*' over thirty villages in central Souroudougou during the early years of French rule. His rapacity during this tenure, particularly concerning his involvement in the slave trade under the noses of the French, was legendary. However, local informants remembered that Saydu, as an agent of Bandiagara, had arrived in the region of Sumbara-Bumba in central Souroudougou before the arrival of the French and had participated in the trade. He organized raiding parties to capture those caught outside of protective village walls and also assisted in the transportation of captives to Bandiagara and the Yatenga.<sup>33</sup>

Further to the south, Widi Sidibe of Barani maintained a dense network of contacts throughout south-western Souroudougou. One of Widi's most valuable allies in the region was Bere Djibo of Koungny, a local merchant who initially made his fortune traveling to nearby entrepôts on the Niger river to purchase desert salt, which he then brought back to Souroudougou to trade. While the details of Bere's early business dealings are vague (he may also have traded in kola and hides), it is likely that he at some point became involved in moving captives out of Souroudougou to Barani (perhaps as part of the lucrative salt-for-slaves trade in the region). Certainly Bere's close association with Widi is well documented, with numerous sources indicating that he often visited Widi in Barani during his business trips.<sup>34</sup> Much as Bandiagara had orchestrated the appointment of local allies to positions of authority in north-western Souroudougou, at Widi's prompting the French made Bere the canton chief of a large portion of southern Souroudougou, with a base in Koungny. He was removed from this position and imprisoned in 1905 for slave trading and other abuses of his power.

Another of Widi's local allies in Souroudougou was Kourou Banhoro, an influential figure in the large village of Sourou situated near the confluence of the Sourou and Black Volta rivers. Kourou may have been from or related to the Yeyé lineage, the chiefly family of Sourou.<sup>35</sup> However, his initial fame and influence resulted from exploits on the battlefield against the forces of

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Sanziè and Drissa Seri, Di, 21 July 1992; Alphreide Kanama Serémé and Felix Serémé, Sumbara-Bumba, 5 Aug. 1992; 'Monographie du cercle de Koury', ANS 1G312; Cisse, 'L'évolution politique', 69.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Alphreide Kanama Serémé and Felix Serémé, Sumbara-Bumba, 5 Aug. 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Details of Bere's early history have to be cobbled together from a multitude of sources. See the interview with Al Hadj Sekou Diakité, Koungny, 22 July 1992; 'Rapport sur l'histoire du canton de Koungny', unsigned and undated, AHCT; Capt. Angeli, 'Rapport politique', circle of Koury, Jan. 1904, ANM 1E49; Capt. Salaman, 'Rapport sur une demande de mise en résidence obligatoire... de Bere', undated (though probably from the period August-Sept. 1905), Archives du Haut-Commissariat de Dédougou, Burkina Faso [hereafter AHCD]. <sup>35</sup> Echenberg, 'Jihad and state building', 551.

Al-Kari during the siege of Sourou (1892–94). Informants stated that Kourou sought the aid of Widi to defeat Al-Kari.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Kourou became a close associate of the Fulbe chief, overseeing the flow of captives from south-western Souroudougou to Barani. As the French-appointed *chef de canton* of Sourou (again at Widi's prompting), Kourou was able to pursue these activities with virtual impunity during the period 1895–1900, before he was imprisoned and executed for his involvement in the slave trade. The village of Sourou was itself transformed into a major trans-shipment point for captives being moved out of Souroudougou toward Barani and Ouankoro.<sup>37</sup>

Those captives who were not moved from Souroudougou along the established networks maintained by Bandiagara and Barani were often purchased and transported by Yarse and Jula merchants who circulated freely in the region. Ruelle informs us that 'Dioula' merchants were allowed unfettered access to the protected interiors of village communities in Souroudougou because they brought with them valuable commodities for trade.<sup>38</sup> Desert salt, cowrie shells and other scarce commodities were bartered for captives. Also, travelling merchants purchased many captives in smaller slave markets within Souroudougou located at Koromi, Gouran and Oula (all within or near the Sourou river valley).<sup>39</sup> Although impossible to quantify from extant sources, traveling merchants unquestionably constituted an important mechanism for introducing quantities of captives from Souroudougou into regional slave-marketing networks.

These examples demonstrate important indirect linkages that connected slave-acquiring polities in the western Niger bend to valuable sources of captives in Souroudougou. As networks linking state centers with the periphery of Souroudougou, these indirect linkages share similarities with Barrie Sharpe's model of 'chains of relations' joining surrounding peripheral areas to powerful state centers in nineteenth-century Hausaland.<sup>40</sup> Much as Sharpe has argued for Hausaland, the connections between village communities in Souroudougou and centralized polities such as Bandiagara, Barani and Ouahigouya were oftentimes nebulous and fluid, with spheres of influence extending into and receding from Souroudougou on the basis of volatile local conditions. Depicting such zones of influence on a map of Souroudougou would not fit the typical schematic of solid swaths of shaded area representing the control of one or another power, but would rather appear more as an irregular pattern of contacts and allies that constituted oftentimes tenuous political, commercial and informational networks.

However, the conceptual model of indirect linkages leaves unanswered the question of how and why, quantities of captives were produced at the local

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Zonkè and Koumadi Yeyé, Sourou, 28 Sept. 1992; Moussa Niampa and Lira Yeyé, Gassan, 28 Sept. 1992. See also, Echenberg, 'Jihad and state building', 551; Cisse, 'L'évolution politique', 68.

<sup>37</sup> Cisse, 'L'évolution politique', 70. Cisse also notes that some of Widi's lieutenants were stationed in the village of Sourou, hosted by local families.

<sup>38</sup> Ruelle, 'Notes anthropologiques', 669. See also, Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes', 498; Pare, 'Société Samo', 38–42.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mamadi Sabo, Koromi, 17 Aug. 1992; Sanziè and Drissa Seri, Di, 21 July 1992; Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes', 500.

<sup>40</sup> Barrie Sharpe, 'Ethnography and a regional system: Mental maps and the myth of states and tribes in north-central Nigeria', *Critique of Anthropology*, 6 (1986), 33–65.

level within Souroudougou, seemingly with little direct interference by neighboring slave-using polities such as Bandiagara and Barani. Furthermore, how did transformations in the political economy of Souroudougou during the late nineteenth century – as the intensity of the regional slave trade began to increase – influence the fabric of daily life in the region? To arrive at an answer, one must first delve deeper into the social and political fabric of Souroudougou prior to the important transformations of the nineteenth century.

Given the paucity of written sources about Souroudougou prior to the late nineteenth century, one must rely upon local oral traditions to obtain a discernable outline of the distant past.<sup>41</sup> In many traditions village associations stand out in sharp relief, informing us that variable groupings of affiliated villages were important features of the precolonial landscape of Souroudougou.<sup>42</sup> These associations, or confederations, were often of extended scale and served religious or defensive functions.<sup>43</sup> The largest groupings appear to have been religious/ritual in orientation, linking villages that reputedly shared a common ancestral background. Typically, these groupings formed around parent villages, called *dôdana* villages, acknowledged to be the oldest settlements in the immediate area. The religious specialist of a *dôdana* village, the *lamutiri* (rain chief), was the custodian of ancestral relics important to the confederation and was responsible for performing the proper sacrifices and rituals to ensure good harvests and prosperity. The *lamutiri* could also perform a mediatory function in the case of disputes involving member villages or individuals. As such, the *lamutiri* wielded a unique, though oftentimes tenuous, authority over the other villages in the association.<sup>44</sup>

As Echenberg notes, these confederations were probably not political formations in the sense that the *dôdana* village or its religious chief exercised any formal political authority over associated villages. However, as the religious hub of a confederation the *dôdana* village and its *lamutiri* would be visited by the members of associated villages for important ceremonies and events, which probably accorded the village and chief enhanced status and influence. For example, informants in Koromi, a village located close to the Sourou river valley, stated that conflicts in their confederation (centered upon the *dôdana* village of Di) were settled by the ‘*grand chef*’.<sup>45</sup> This individual would summon the disputants to Di and levy fines payable in

<sup>41</sup> For problems confronting historians working with the oral traditions of decentralized societies in the western Volta region, see: Carola Lentz, ‘A Dagara rebellion against Dagomba rule? Contested stories of origin in northwestern Ghana’, *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), 457–92; Jan Ovesen, ‘Ethnic identification in the Voltaic region: Problems of the perception of “tribe” and “tribal society”’, *Working Papers in African Studies* (Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Uppsala), 13(1985).

<sup>42</sup> Many informants spoke about such federations. See the interviews with: Joseph and Antoine Zerbo, Etienne Bobo, Tougan, 19 July 1992; Kouni Drabo, Lassina Djiri, Dian, 7 Aug. 1992; Kouere and Drissa Gomina, Zazou Gusseni, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Joseph and Antoine Zerbo, Etienne Boro, Tougan, 19 July 1992; Kouni Drabo and Lassina Djiri, Dian, 7 Aug. 1992; Gouagoule Drabo, Kassoum, 3 Nov. 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Echenberg, ‘African reaction’, 5–6; Françoise Héritier, ‘La paix et la pluie: Rappports d’autorité et rapport au sacré chez les Samo’, *L’Homme*, 13 (1973); Pare, ‘Société Samo’, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mamadi Sabo, Koromi, 17 Aug. 1992.

cowrie shells. In central Souroudougou, larger village associations were organized around the *dôdana* villages of Diouroum, Bassan and Dian. Their considerable size (Diouroum was reputed to command 70 villages, Bassan 60 and Dian 40) suggests that a substantial degree of influence was wielded by many *dôdana* villages and their religious chiefs at some point.<sup>46</sup>

At the village level, authority and control was exercised by other important male elders, such as the *tandana* (earth chief) and lineage heads. Meillassoux's model of the West African sudanic village ruled by a male gerontocracy corresponds well with the image portrayed in the oral traditions of Souroudougou.<sup>47</sup> Male notables in the villages of Souroudougou monopolized the distribution of, and access to, important resources. For, example, the circulation of marriageable women was frequently regulated according to alliances contracted between lineage elders of allied villages.<sup>48</sup> According to Hérítier, this served to cement important alliances which were mobilized during periods of famine or in times of war.<sup>49</sup>

Other resources controlled by male notables were captives and slaves. Again, Hérítier informs us that traditionally only the *lamutiri* and in some cases the *tandana*, possessed the right to hold slaves, but only if they had been acquired 'properly'.<sup>50</sup> These individuals were entitled to employ a small number of slaves as domestic servants or field laborers, or they could sell them to other lineages or to passing merchants to provide an income meant to subvent their ritual duties. However, other informants indicated that this monopoly on the labor and market value of captives was not solely the domain of the *lamutiri* or *tandana*, but included other village notables (elder lineage heads) as well. Tiegna Yaro of Gomboro stated that 'captives would be given to the chief as his personal slaves, while the rest were sold to merchants. The cowries received in exchange for the captives would then be divided among the notables of Gomboro'.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Echenberg, 'African reaction', 4. Interview with Joseph and Antoine Zerbo, Etienne Boro, Tougan, 19 July 1992; Kouni Drabo and Lassina Djiri, Dian, 7 Aug. 1992; Gougoule Drabo, Kassoum, 3 Nov. 1992. Traditions differ over the actual number of villages contained in each of these confederations.

<sup>47</sup> See Claude Meillassoux, *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* (Paris, 1977), part I. Jean-Pierre Warnier has also noted a similar process of unequal distribution of wealth and power arising in the precolonial Grassfield communities of Cameroon as a result of participation in the regional slave trade, favoring a hierarchy of notables. Certain elder males, it appears, were able to enhance their personal and family positions by controlling the flow of captives introduced into regional commercial networks linking the Grassfields to the coast. These captives were acquired from their own or neighboring villages. See Warnier, 'Traite sans raids'.

<sup>48</sup> However, arranged marriages were not established without resistance from women. For a discussion of marriage alliances and resistance during the late nineteenth century and early colonial period, see Hubbell, 'Patronage and predation', ch. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Hérítier, 'La Paix et la pluie'.

<sup>50</sup> Hérítier defines proper and improper seizure in the following manner. A proper, or 'legal', seizure entailed the capture of a non-local – someone not from the host village or from a neighboring allied village. An improper seizure involved the capture of a fellow villager or someone from an allied village. Such a seizure could generate inter-village feuding. See Hérítier, 'Des cauries et des hommes', 487–98.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Tiegna Yaro, Gomboro, 20 Oct. 1992. Ousmane Ki of Biba also noted that those with the means in his village bought slaves to work their fields. See the interview with Ousmane Ki, Biba, 14 Sept. 1992. See also the interviews with Al-Hadj

In the idealized portrait woven by oral traditions, competition over access to valuable resources was circumscribed, limited essentially to conflict between rival villages and federations.<sup>52</sup> The hegemony of elite male elders was buttressed by their ability to monopolize how such resources were acquired and disposed of. Evidence dating from the late nineteenth century, however, suggests that important transformations were occurring within the social landscape of Souroudougou. By this time, Souroudougou had become a more fluid, complexly divided, social landscape composed of increasingly autonomous village communities situated in an increasingly precarious environment. Alfred Diban's vivid remembrances of late nineteenth-century Souroudougou recalled in the introduction indicate that Souroudougou during this period had become a vast, roiling theater of conflict and competition, with quarrels, skirmishes and warfare occurring between and within villages.

Echenberg supports this depiction, noting that by the nineteenth century it had become dangerous for the inhabitants of Souroudougou to visit their ancestral shrines located in *dôdana* centers. This weakened the important religious/ritual bonds that gave form to many of these federations. Instead, ritual functions were increasingly performed individually within each community.<sup>53</sup> Another indication of the fragmentation of large federations during this period was the trend towards alliances between much smaller groups of villages, usually no more than two or three. These smaller-scale groupings were often formed to ensure defensive aid and preparedness in the event of attack, representing an adaptation to an increasingly hostile and precarious environment.<sup>54</sup>

This fragmentation of social cohesion at a macro-level of society, the village confederation, reflected deeper transformations in the nature of competition within the region. As the regional demand for slaves increased, there was greater motivation for individuals to circumvent established codes of conduct pertaining to the capture and enslavement of others. Héritier notes that the 'illegal' seizure and sale of persons (banditry) was increasingly practiced by groups of young men ('commandos') during this period of flux in the slave trade.<sup>55</sup> These were precisely the individuals who were most adversely impacted by the traditional mode, or ethics, of competition, being excluded from the circle of elder male beneficiaries who controlled the most important sources of wealth and status. In essence, a reciprocal process appears to have been at work within the social institutions shaping the social landscape of Souroudougou. On the one hand, linkages between villages – for example, between a satellite community and a *dôdana* village – were becoming more tenuous as banditry increased. At the same time, the fraying cohesion of broad-based village organizations probably encouraged banditry because moral and ethical standards that had constituted an important part

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Abdouramane Demé, Bossé, 21 July, 1992; Mamadi Sabo, Koromi, 17 Aug. 1992; notables of Gomboro, 20 Oct. 1992; notables of Rassouli, 21 Oct. 1992; notables of Lankwe, 21 Oct. 1992. <sup>52</sup> Echenberg, 'African reaction', 4–5. <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>54</sup> Pare, 'Société Samo', 58–60; interview with Kouere and Drissa Gomina, Zazou Gusseni, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes', 491–2; Pare, 'Société Samo', 41; interview with notables of Boussoum, 23 Sept. 1992.

of the glue that held village confederations together were no longer enforceable – *dôdana* villages and their *lamutiri* were increasingly isolated from their constituent villages. In essence two sides of the same coin, these linked processes transformed the nature and scale of competition in late nineteenth-century Souroudougou.

The scale of banditry practiced during this period knew few boundaries. For example, informants related that bandits would kidnap a child from their own village and either hold it for ransom or sell it to merchants. Such actions often provoked intra-village fighting between *quartiers* (lineages).<sup>56</sup> Another informant, from the village of Tiao in eastern Souroudougou, noted that ‘outsiders’ (those not from the village) would collaborate with certain people within the village to acquire captives, especially children. Precautions against such tactics included moving beyond the household in whole family units: ‘If you left a child at home when you went to farm, you would return to find him missing. Thus, each time you ventured away from home, you brought your children.’<sup>57</sup> Families who moved together were not, however, necessarily safer:

Perhaps there would be a family who ventured into the countryside (*la brousse*), a man, his wife and children. There would often be bandits who hid along the paths leading into the country. Suddenly they would trap the family, and perhaps kill the man. The mother and her children would be sold as slaves.<sup>58</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, banditry had transformed the region into a dangerous zone of predation. As one early French report recorded:

There is a shocking anarchy reigning in Samo country: the pathways are not safe; one ventures out with one’s bow and arrows and returns with booty, the product of banditry. Unfortunately, the Dioula, particularly those coming from Bandiagara, encourage this unstable situation by buying captives. For one cow or one bar of salt, a Dioula can purchase a slave, who was probably captured the day before in a neighboring village.<sup>59</sup>

While this report identifies cattle and salt as items exchanged for captives, cowrie shells were probably more important. In precolonial village communities in Souroudougou, cowrie shells played an important role in defining the social and political status of an individual or lineage.<sup>60</sup> Cowries circulated within communities more as symbolic rather than commercial capital, being exchanged between lineages and individuals in the form of gifts and charitable donations. This occurred in a number of contexts: on the occasion of funerals, to cement a marriage alliance between two families,

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Loro and Sababou Boro, Guimou, 23 Sept. 1992; notables of Boussoum, 23 Sept. 1992; Kouere and Drissa Gomina, Zazou Gussen, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Tiazon Serme, Tiao, 5 Aug. 1992.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Tiegna Yaro, Gomboro, 20 Oct. 1992.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Rapport politique du cercle Koury’, June 1899, quoted in ‘Rapport de l’administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l’esclavage’, 1923, ANCI 5EE61.

<sup>60</sup> Commercial activity in precolonial Souroudougou was primarily restricted to exchanges between the local inhabitants and traveling merchants. Cowries came into the region in exchange for local commodities (such as captives), but typically were not used by the local inhabitants to purchase other commodities. Rather, households often hoarded cowries, usually burying them for safe keeping. See Héritier, ‘Des cauris et des hommes’, 492–497; interview with Adama Drabo, Bassan, 3 Aug. 1992; Pare, ‘Société Samo’, 39.

during traditional rites and celebrations and in beer cabarets. A family or individual in possession of plentiful cowries thus occupied an enviable position in the local social hierarchy, to whom status and power accrued. Conversely, a cowrie-poor individual or lineage was unlikely to attain a position of status and power within the village or enter into beneficial relations of alliance with other groups. Young men who found themselves in such a position, their career paths blocked by a hierarchy of elders, may have chosen to participate in 'illegal' banditry to acquire cowries.

Important transformations can also be identified within family structures during this period. An examination of the practice of pawning illustrates this change. Sources inform us that pawning was a common survival strategy practiced in precolonial Souroudougou during times of food scarcity, with children being pawned locally for food or aid to ensure the survival of the family unit.<sup>61</sup> When the head of the family had amassed sufficient resources, he would buy back his child. Young girls were often the first to be pawned to sustain the rest of the family.<sup>62</sup> However, reports dating from the first years of French rule indicate that household heads often resorted to selling their wives and children to passing merchants for cowries or millet, with no option for re-purchase.<sup>63</sup>

This constituted a departure from established methods of reproducing the family unit during times of duress, as kin became actual commodities that were bartered (not loaned) away. A report from 1900 observed, '[T]he Samo, at war with his neighbors, never leaves his village in fear of being captured and made a slave... Primarily, he has recourse to the slave trade to procure his millet and salt. Fathers sell their children...'<sup>64</sup> Adama Drabo, *chef de village* of Bassan, added vivid detail to this scenario, indicating the degree to which the human trade had permeated all levels of social activity in Souroudougou by the late nineteenth century:

During times of famine, if a father wanted to sell a child in order to buy food, he would first scatter a little millet on the ground and tell the children to gather it up. He would then tell the slave merchant, with whom he had already negotiated a price, to choose the one he wanted. The victim would then be tied up and taken away. In this way, children were sold just like chickens. With the proceeds gained, food could be purchased to sustain the family.<sup>65</sup>

These transformations in patterns of social interaction and individual and group survival strategies during the nineteenth century reflect a fundamental change in the nature of competition in Souroudougou, a shift directly attributable to the influence of the growing slave trade. The evidence suggests that patterns of competition over resources, with people becoming the most valuable of resources, began to transgress established ethical

<sup>61</sup> Arnaud, 'Rapport sur l'esclavage', ANS 2K5 26; interview with notables of Gomboro, 20 Oct. 1992; interview with Kouere and Drissa Gomina, Zazou Gusseni, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Kouere and Drissa Gomina, Zazou Gusseni, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992; Adama Drabo, Bassan, 3 Aug. 1992.

<sup>63</sup> 'Rapport politique', circle of Koury, 2nd semester 1899, quoted in 'Rapport de l'administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l'esclavage', 1923, ANCI 5EE61.

<sup>64</sup> Report cited in Arnaud, 'Rapport sur l'esclavage', ANS 2K5 26.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Adama Drabo, Bassan, 3 Aug. 1992.



boundaries governing social behavior within larger-scale village federations, corroding the relationships and institutions that had given substance to these organizations. At an even more basic level, lineage and family units were corrupted by the trade, with the commodification of village members and kin becoming increasingly commonplace.

SOUROUDOUGOU IN THE REGIONAL SLAVE TRADE OF THE WESTERN  
NIGER BEND

With an understanding of the nature of the slave trade within Souroudougou, one can place the region within the broader context of the slave trade of the western Niger Bend and western Sudan during the nineteenth century. Souroudougou had constituted an important source of slaves for markets in the western Sudan and across the desert long before the nineteenth century. Evidence indicates that slaves from the region were highly prized as mercenaries in the armies of West and North African kings, or as laborers in desert communities.<sup>66</sup>

During the nineteenth century, however, the western Sudan experienced an upsurge in the volume of the slave trade. As commodity production flourished in the economies of the western Sudan and the desert-edge, perhaps partially stimulated by the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, the demand and supply of slaves as commodities themselves and as factors of labor to fuel economic expansion grew apace.<sup>67</sup> As Martin Klein has outlined elsewhere, this increased demand for slaves was also predicated upon expanding state structures, with slave use and trading being concentrated around centers such as Segou, Jenne, Sikasso and Hamdullahi.<sup>68</sup>

The rise of a series of states in the vicinity of the western Niger bend during the nineteenth century, and the expansion of commodity markets in the middle Niger delta, the Yatenga and the desert-edge, substantially increased the importance of Souroudougou as a source of slaves. As a French commander of the circle of Dédougou observed in the 1890s, ‘Samorodougou [the colonial administrative term for Souroudougou] was a reservoir where slave traders came to provision themselves’.<sup>69</sup> Increasing

<sup>66</sup> One document observed that the Samo had been ‘très recherchés comme esclaves’ (much sought after as slaves) throughout the western Sudan and were even found in significant numbers as slaves in Morocco. See Arnaud, ‘Rapport sur l’esclavage’, ANS 2K5 26.

<sup>67</sup> One can refer here to an extensive literature. See for example: Meillassoux, *Anthropology of Slavery*, Part I; Martin Klein, ‘Slave trade in the western Sudan’; E. Ann McDougall, ‘Salt, saharans, and the trans-Saharan slave trade: nineteenth century developments’, in E. Savage (ed.), *The Human Commodity* (London, 1992), 61–88; E. Ann McDougall, ‘In search of a desert-edge perspective: the Sahara-Sahel and the Atlantic trade, c. 1815–1890’, in R. Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford, 1987); Richard Roberts, ‘Women’s work and women’s property: Household social relations in the Maraka textile industry of the nineteenth century’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1984), 229–50.

<sup>68</sup> Klein, ‘Slave trade in the western Sudan’, 41.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Rapport de l’administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l’esclavage’, 1923, ANCI 5EE61.

numbers of captives from Souroudougou flowed to nearby slave markets to the north, such as Konighon (near Jenne), Bandiagara, Mopti and locations in the Yatenga such as Ouahigouya and Youba.<sup>70</sup> From these markets slaves from Souroudougou were distributed to neighboring regions, while others continued north into and across the Sahara.<sup>71</sup> In this fashion, Souroudougou constituted an important source of slaves for the complex of trade routes identified by Klein moving south-to-north through the Bani valley and western Volta basin, providing slaves to fuel the burgeoning economic activity of the desert-edge and middle Niger delta regions.<sup>72</sup>

A French report from 1900 establishes that captives from the region were important in the trade that brought salt from Saharan mines into the Niger bend. Captain Berger, one of the first commanders of the circle of Koury [which would eventually be renamed the circle of Dédougou], described this pattern of trade in detail:

The most important center for the trade in Samo captives is the market of Ouankoro in the residence of Bandiagara. 'Dioula' salt merchants flock to this market and they accept only captives in exchange for their merchandise. Many of these unfortunate individuals are Samo. Almost all of them are then transported by way of Konighon, near Jenne, or Bandiagara before continuing on to Timbuktu. The trade in captives constitutes a source of wealth for the inhabitants of the neighboring regions of Segou, Jenne and Bandiagara. It is a precious aliment of commercial activity, paying for a major portion of the salt imported from the Sahara.<sup>73</sup>

Alfred Diban was traded for salt at the slave market of Kabara, below Timbuktu and then transported into the desert.

Many other captives from Souroudougou were probably used as family servants or laborers on agricultural plantations in nearby centers such as Barani and Ouahigouya. For example, a French report from 1901 describes numerous villages composed of 'Fulbe and their slaves' encircling Barani for a radius of twenty kilometers.<sup>74</sup> Later reports, following the abolition of slavery, indicate that many of these slaves were either Bobo or Samo who had been employed as agricultural laborers.<sup>75</sup> Concerning the Yatenga, it is clear

<sup>70</sup> Capt. Berger, 'Rapport politique', circle Koury, June 1900, quoted in 'Rapport de l'administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l'esclavage', 1923, ANCI 5EE61; Michel Izard, *Introduction à l'histoire des royaumes Mossi* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1970), II, 386.

<sup>71</sup> A French report from 1904 states that 'pas mal de captifs Samos (il y en a jusqu'à Tombouctou et Bamako) ont été libérés...' (there are numerous Samo slaves as far as Timbuktu and Bamako). This is an indication of several of the directions of dispersal for captives taken from Souroudougou. See Capt. Aymes, 'Rapport politique', circle Koury, June 1904, ANM 1E49.

<sup>72</sup> Klein, 'Slave trade in the western Sudan', 50.

<sup>73</sup> Capt. Berger, 'Rapport politique', circle Koury, June 1900, quoted in 'Rapport de l'administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l'esclavage', 1923, ANCI 5EE61. While French documents suggest that Timbuktu was the principal gateway for slaves being funnelled from the western Niger bend region into the desert, Ann McDougall's important work on the desert edge indicates that other locations to the east, such as Bamba, were also important focal points during the nineteenth century as Timbuktu's importance waned. See McDougall, 'Salt, Saharans', 65–7.

<sup>74</sup> Capt. Courjon, 'Rapport politique annuel', circle Koury, 1901, ANM 1E49.

<sup>75</sup> Capt. Haberer, 'Rapport politique', circle Koury, Feb. 1907, ANM 1E49; Capt. Bernard, 'Rapport politique annuel', circle Koury, 1910, ANCI 5EE28.

that the Mossi were involved in obtaining slaves from Souroudougou.<sup>76</sup> What is less clear, however, is whether many of these captives were kept in the Yatenga as slaves. While previous studies have tended to argue that the slave-holdings of the Yatenga Mossi were not substantial,<sup>77</sup> early colonial documents suggest that the number may have been significant.<sup>78</sup> The vibrant economy of the Yatenga during the nineteenth century, particularly in producing textile products for export to neighboring regions such as Mopti,<sup>79</sup> suggests that captive labor may have been exploited to produce these trade goods. Given the proximity of Souroudougou to the Yatenga, it is tempting to argue that many of the slaves utilized by the Mossi were from this region.<sup>80</sup>

The volume of the slave trade from Souroudougou during the nineteenth century is difficult to establish with any certainty. Calculations made by Françoise Héritier and Harana Pare convey a sense of the proportions of the trade during this period, suggesting that approximately 15 per cent of the regional population may have been enslaved. However, their calculations lack the methodological breadth to be definitive.<sup>81</sup> Of course, the volume of the regional slave trade was subject to many related factors, demand being just one. For example, the defensive prowess of village communities, particularly large ones, undoubtedly limited the trade, while periods of famine caused sharp spikes in volume. Captain Berger in late 1899 observed how famine affected local slave prices, noting a sharp reduction in price as greater numbers were introduced into the trade: 'At the moment of the harvest [October–November] captives can command a much higher price,

<sup>76</sup> Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes'; Pare, 'Société Samo'.

<sup>77</sup> See Michel Izard, 'Les captifs royaux dans l'ancien Yatenga', in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 281–96.

<sup>78</sup> Captain Noiré, for example, reported that during the summer of 1903 the principal concern for local chiefs and the French administration in Ouahigouya was 'the exodus of a large number of captives attempting to return to their natal regions [to the south]... These desertions, which by their number have worried quite a number of chiefs... were prompted in part by poor treatment or a lack of food.' The number of desertions over a period of several months ran into the hundreds. See Noiré, 'Rapport politique', circle Yatenga, June and July 1903, ANS 2G3 14; see also Anne-Marie Duperray, *Les Gourounsi de Haute Volta* (Franz Steiner, 1985), 169.

<sup>79</sup> Izard, *Histoire des royaumes Mossi*, II, 385–87.

<sup>80</sup> A local survey conducted by Harana Pare in the village of Da, located in eastern Souroudougou, revealed that almost 35 per cent of those taken as captives prior to the colonial period were enslaved in the Yatenga. See Pare, 'Société Samo', 40. Lahuec and Marchal also argue that a considerable, though unquantified, population of Samo slaves were to be found in the Yatenga. See J.-P. Lahuec and J.-Y. Marchal, *La mobilité du peuplement Bissa et Mossi: Travaux et documents de l'ORSTOM*, 103 (1979), 117.

<sup>81</sup> Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes', 499; Pare, 'Société Samo', 40. Based upon oral testimony, Héritier and Pare each charted the percentage of slave departures from a single village, thus by no means representing a comprehensive examination of Souroudougou as a whole. Nor is this figure meant to be a yearly estimate; it rather represents an estimate of the number of persons who informants can remember being enslaved. Nor can the actual population of the region for this period be known with certainty. French figures, of unknown derivation, range from 34,755 'Samos' in 1903 ('Monographie du cercle Koury', 1903, ANS 1G312), 51,952 in 1910 ('Rapport general sur la politique du cercle de Koury', 1910, ANCI 5EE28), to 162,755 in 1922 ('Rapport d'ensemble sur la situation generale du cercle de Dédougou', 1918–22, ANCI 5EE7 1).

50,000–70,000 cowries, as opposed to 10–15,000 during periods of famine. However, the traffic [in slaves] never stops...<sup>82</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, neighboring warrior states vied for access to this human wealth of Souroudougou. Much like Wasulu or the boundary regions separating centralized polities in Hausaland described by Jean-Loup Amselle and Barrie Sharpe, Souroudougou during the nineteenth century was a ‘marginal’ area, alternately falling within and outside of the fluid zones of influence exercised by a variety of state formations located in the vicinity of the western Niger bend.<sup>83</sup>

For example, the Mossi state of the Yatenga had long been involved in this region, strategically located along its south-western borders. Earlier Mossi hopes of conquering the portions of Souroudougou closest to its borders had by the nineteenth century given way to what Michel Izard has termed a *modus vivendi* of reciprocal advantage between Mossi chiefs and frontier village communities.<sup>84</sup> Izard describes a patron–client pattern of relations between the Mossi and certain large villages in north-eastern Souroudougou, involving the exchange of goods, services and other tribute acknowledging a political and in some instances military, linkage. This working relationship, however, did not preclude localized skirmishing and raiding between the inhabitants of Souroudougou and groups of mounted Mossi warriors, recounted in the traditions of many villages in the eastern and central parts of the region.<sup>85</sup>

On the north-western borders of Souroudougou, any influence exercised by the Segu-Bambara state had probably begun to wane by the early nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup> This was replaced by the rise of the Fulbe theocracy of Masina in the middle Niger delta, whose expanding radius of influence during the first half of the century at times brought Souroudougou within the orbit of Hamdullahi.<sup>87</sup> While the precise nature of Masina’s involvement

<sup>82</sup> Capt. Berger, ‘Rapport sur la situation politique du cercle Koury pendant le 2<sup>e</sup> semestre’, 1899, quoted in ‘Rapport de l’administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l’esclavage’, 1923, ANCI 5EE61. The general range indicated by Berger is confirmed by Maurice Pare of Toma, who stated that slaves generally could be acquired for 50,000–100,000 cowries. Interview with Maurice Pare, Toma, 14 Sept. 1992. However, during periods of famine slaves could be obtained for as little as one calabash of millet. Observed a French officer in 1898: ‘For a handful of millet or rice, or for several thousand cowries, one can purchase a captive (‘non-libre’)’. See Capt. Marandet, ‘Rapport no. 13 au Commandant de Région’, circle Sono, 4 Sept. 1898, quoted in ‘Rapport de l’administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l’esclavage’, 1923, ANCI 5EE61.

<sup>83</sup> Jean-Loup Amselle, *Logiques métisses: Anthropologie de l’identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (Paris, 1990); Sharpe, ‘Ethnography and a regional system’, 33–65.

<sup>84</sup> Izard, *Yatenga Précolonial*, 95. See also, Michel Izard, ‘La politique extérieure d’un royaume africain: Le Yatenga au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 87–8 (1982), 363–85.

<sup>85</sup> See Hubbell, ‘Patronage and predation’, ch. 3.  
<sup>86</sup> Fragmentary evidence suggests that the eastern limit of Segu’s sphere of influence may have been in the vicinity of Souroudougou. See Jean Capron, *Communautés villageoises bwa: Mali-Haute Volta* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1970), 1, 70–86; Izard, *Histoire des royaumes Mossi*, II, 320–28.

<sup>87</sup> The best secondary sources concerning Masina’s involvement in the western Volta region are: H. Ba and J. Daget, *L’Empire Peul du Macina* (Paris, 1962); Capron, *Communautés villageoises*, 70–86. A recent article by Youssouf Diallo also provides valuable information. See Diallo, ‘Barani: une chefferie satellite des grands états du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 34 (1994), 359–84.

in Souroudougou is also difficult to establish, the collapse of the Masinanke state in the early 1860s created an opportunity for smaller sub-regional powers in closer proximity to Souroudougou to vie for access to the region's human resources.

Tijani Tal, the nephew of Umar Tal who commanded the north-eastern province of the Umarian empire from his base in Bandiagara, attempted to establish control over the village communities of northern and central Souroudougou beginning in the mid-1860s. Tijani established an advanced post in at least one large village in the region, Louta.<sup>88</sup> According to local traditions, many captives from the region were transported to Bandiagara and then introduced into the wider slave trade of the Niger bend.<sup>89</sup> Village communities to the south of Bandiagara's sphere of influence were targeted by the Sidibe clan of Barani, Fulbe pastoralists residing to the west of the Black Volta river. By the late nineteenth century, under their famous leader Widi, the Sidibe had become particularly active in procuring slaves in the western and southern portions of Souroudougou.<sup>90</sup>

Into this complex landscape during the late nineteenth century would emerge the jihadic state of Bossé, centered along the eastern banks of the Sourou river in western Souroudougou. The charismatic leader of this small state, Al-Hadj Kari, had been influenced by the Islamic puritanism sweeping the western Sudan during the nineteenth century and sought to enlarge the domain of the isolated cluster of Muslim communities situated in the Sourou valley.<sup>91</sup> Al-Kari was adept at constructing an efficient military force with which to pursue his expansionist designs, relying on slaves procured from the interior of Souroudougou to trade for the weapons and horses his army required. However, Al-Kari's ambition to gain wider hegemony in the region was dealt a severe reversal at the battle of Sourou, to the south of Bossé. Aided by the inhabitants of smaller neighboring villages seeking refuge from the marauding forces of Bossé, the villagers of Sourou withstood Al-Kari for two years until his defeat at the hands of the French in 1894.<sup>92</sup> Outside of his limited sphere of control in the lower Sourou valley, the threat posed by Al-Kari to village communities in the interior of Souroudougou appears to have been negligible.<sup>93</sup>

However, Al-Kari's defeat during the summer of 1894 heralded the arrival

<sup>88</sup> However, evidence suggests that the Louta garrison and its commander, Usman Umaru, were not effective in establishing control in Souroudougou, at least prior to the arrival of the French in 1896. See 'Monographie du cercle de Kourou', 1903, ANS 1G312; Letter, Destenave to Co. Kayes, 16 Mar. 1897, ANS 15G189; Echenberg, 'Jihad and state-building', 540.

<sup>89</sup> See the following interviews: Sadjio Boli, Torosso, July 30 1992; Alphreide Kanama Serémé and Felix Serémé, Sumbara-Bumba, 5 Aug. 1992; notables of Koromi, 17 Aug. 1992; Kougnan, Kouani and Yessa Boro, Boussoum, 23 Sept. 1992; Kouère and Drissa Gomina, Gusseni Zazou, Bangassogo, 20 Oct. 1992. See also, Héritier, 'Des cauris et des hommes', 500. <sup>90</sup> Capron, *Communautés villageoises*, 70–86; Diallo, 'Barani'.

<sup>91</sup> Myron Echenberg's work on Al-Kari and Bossé remains the definitive source. See Echenberg, 'African reaction'; Echenberg, 'Jihad and state-building'. Important studies of the influence of the Tijaniyya in nineteenth-century West Africa include: David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (Oxford, 1985); B. G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge, 1976).

<sup>92</sup> Echenberg, 'Jihad and state-building', 551–3.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Kouni Drabo and Lassina Djiri, Dian, 7 Aug. 1992.

on the local scene of a stronger and soon-to-be dominant power. French military activity in Souroudougou commenced fitfully, but increased rapidly in intensity after 1895 as France competed against Britain and Germany for control of the West African interior.<sup>94</sup> During 1896 and 1897, French military columns crisscrossed the region numerous times, deploying artillery capable of demolishing the *banco* barricades surrounding Samo villages. Scores of Samo villages were sacked during these early missions, many of them by the brutal Voulet and Chanoine, who would gain notoriety several years later as rogue conquistadors in the central Sudan. The resulting chaos swelled the number of captives flowing into the regional slave trade.

On a conceptual level, however, the French conquest of Souroudougou during the 1890s constituted an important break with past patterns of state interaction with Souroudougou. While French actions in Souroudougou during this period more closely fit the stereotype of the predatory state model<sup>95</sup> – this image of an all-powerful state predating along its periphery with impunity – the slave-acquiring activities of neighboring states such as Bandiagara and Barani were pursued more indirectly. Though the establishment of French rule would soon bring to a close the ruinous slave trade of Souroudougou, in the immediate aftermath of the French conquest conditions were ripe for Aguibu and Widi, by now allies of the French, profitably to exploit their pre-existing indirect linkages with the region to harvest a bountiful crop of captives. The documentary record generated by the numerous French military missions into the region during the late 1890s provides an invaluable window into these established patterns of slave raiding and trading that predated the arrival of the French.

#### CONCLUSION

Captain Danoux, one of the first French officers to serve in Souroudougou, perceptively described the salient features of the transformed *espace de compétition* of late-nineteenth-century Souroudougou:

... the Samo recognize no authority, not even that of their village chiefs, who more often than not are put to death when they cease to please. The strongest command, while the weakest have all to fear, particularly being captured and sold into slavery.<sup>96</sup>

Real power in late-nineteenth-century Souroudougou resided in those who were able by dint of force or alliance with external powers to exert their will

<sup>94</sup> A detailed description of this period of conquest as it pertains to Souroudougou is provided in Hubbell, 'Patronage and predation', ch. 4. For discussions of European territorial competition in the Upper Volta region, see Anne-Marie Duperray, *Les Gourounsi*; Georges Madiéga, 'Esquisse de la conquête et de la formation territoriale de la colonie de Haute-Volta', *Cahiers du L.U.T.O.*, 2 (1981), 6–74.

<sup>95</sup> In the wake of these destructive military columns, many local men were forced into portering or soldiering for the French army, while others, mainly women and children, were taken as war booty. The ill-fated 1897 Casemajou mission to Say alone accounted for several hundred male porters from the region, none of whom were to return. Interview with Sanzié Moussa and Drissa Seri, Di, 21 July 1992; Destenave, 'L'Occupation et l'organisation', 216; Tauxier, *Le Noir du Yatenga*, 594, n. 1; Captain Noiré, 'Étude sur le Yatenga', ANS 1G326.

<sup>96</sup> 'Rapport politique', circle Koury, June 1899, quoted in 'Rapport de l'administrateur du cercle de Dédougou au sujet de l'esclavage' 1923, ANCI 5EE61.

locally. A prototypical ‘big man’ appears to have been someone who was successful at participating in banditry and selling captives into the slave trade, thereby circumventing established monopolies over wealth and authority. Some of these local ‘big men’ would parlay their connections with Aguibu Tal and Widi Sidibe into powerful and lucrative positions in the fledgling colonial administration of Souroudougou.<sup>97</sup> We have noted several such figures above, men such as Kourou Banhoro or Bere Djibo. Their rise to positions of authority within the French administrative structure in Souroudougou is compelling testimony that ‘indirect’ mechanisms of slave procurement were at work in the region during the nineteenth century.

Bandiagara, Barani and other states closely involved in the slave trade of the western Niger bend relied upon a variety of local contacts and commercial networks to procure slaves from Souroudougou. One may conjecture that similar processes were at work among other slave ‘reservoir’ populations in the western Volta region, such as the Bwa and Bobo. At the same time, the emergence of widespread banditry and a more precarious social landscape within Souroudougou bore witness to the transformation of the regional *espace de compétition* during the nineteenth century under the influence of an increasing demand for slaves in the western Sudan and desert-edge. The conjuncture of this emerging local pattern of hyper-competition with indirect mechanisms of slave procurement highlights the dynamic and central role the ‘reservoir’ of Souroudougou played in the slave trade of the western Niger bend.

<sup>97</sup> Hubbell, ‘Patronage and predation’, ch. 4.