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MOVING TO STAY : *IKLAN* SPATIAL STRATEGIES TOWARDS SOCIOECONOMIC EMANCIPATION IN NORTHERN MALI, 1898–1960*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the strategies of emancipation of former Tuareg slaves (*iklan*) in the Gao region of northern French Sudan (present-day Mali) during the late 1940s and 1950s. In the wake of the war effort and shifting colonial policy, and in spite of colonial tolerance toward vestiges of slavery, *iklan* engaged in local and long-distance migrations aimed at achieving emancipation. The article argues that the most successful spatial strategies were new migratory patterns in the Gao region through which *iklan* appropriated productive resources (herds and pastures) that were previously controlled by their ex-masters. More than labor migrations to cities, these local trajectories destabilized Tuareg hierarchies, forcing colonial administrators to address demands of the *iklan* emancipation movement.

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

In a colonial report dated April 1956, the head administrator of the Gao *cercle*, in northern French Sudan (present-day Mali), noted a trial involving a Tuareg and his captive (*iklan*; sg. *akli* in Tamajaq; *bella* in Songhay), who wanted to be officially recognized as a 'worker' under the French Overseas Labor Code of 1952.[1] This claim, which reveals the former slave's familiarity with colonial law, was the result of ten years of struggle during which an increasing number of *iklan* in the Gao region elaborated strategies aimed at socioeconomic emancipation. In northern French Sudan, the colonial administration was reluctant to promote the emancipation of slaves.[2] Until the 1950s, *iklan* were registered as *serviteurs* (servants) in their masters' families. Beginning in 1946, in the wake of post-Second World War colony-wide reforms, an increasing number of *iklan* claimed greater independence. In only ten years, this movement led to the separate registration of *iklan* families. Although legal emancipation did not revolutionize the living conditions of all *iklan*, many of whom continued to work for their masters, it constituted a major milestone in the emancipation process.

This article explores why and how this emancipation movement occurred. It shows that one of the main self-emancipation strategies of the *iklan*, the majority of whom were nomadic pastoralists tending their masters' herds,

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[1] Archives Nationales du Mali, Bamako (ANM), Fonds Récents (FR) Cercle de Gao, revue des événements, avril 1956, 1E 17 (2).

[2] M. A. Klein, 'Slavery and French rule in the Sahara', *Slavery and Abolition*, 19:2 (1998), 73–90.

was geographical mobility. Some engaged in labor migrations towards the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) or to the nearby cities of Gao and Niamey. Others stayed in the region and strategically extended their pastoral mobility in order to gain autonomy, simultaneously appropriating their masters' livestock. The central argument of this article is that, in contrast to earlier strategies of slave self-emancipation in West Africa, characterized by mass exodus or labor migrations, this local movement constituted a powerful and successful spatial strategy – that is, a kind of mobility, beyond that required by *iklan*'s previous pastoralist lifestyle, that purposefully distanced them physically and socially from their masters.[3] More than labor migrations, these local trajectories challenged the foundations of Tuareg society. They forced colonial administrators, who had tacitly tolerated slavery in this region several decades after its official abolition in 1905, to modify their policies toward nomadic populations, first by individually addressing the *iklan*'s claims, and subsequently by standardizing the independent registration of all *iklan* families.[4] By exploring this emancipation process at the interface between *iklan* spatial strategies and local colonial administrators' practices, this article offers an original analysis of the intrinsic relationship between spatial and social mobility in French West Africa, while also stressing the flexibility of the French colonial administration and its capacity to adapt to shifting local socioeconomic and political contexts.

There are, inevitably, terminological challenges in describing these processes, since naming and categorization are closely implicated in them. In Tamajaq, the word *iklan* refers to servile groups. Colonial administrators, however, systematically used the word *bella*, of Songhay origin: the *iklan* emancipation movement discussed in this article was termed the '*bella* question' by colonial officials. Following Florence Boyer, who stresses the ambiguity of the term *bella*, the word *iklan* is used throughout this article.[5] However, *iklan* covers a variety of social conditions, and becomes increasingly problematic as the process of emancipation unfolds. Because it refers to the Tuareg servile population, emancipated '*iklan*' are, by definition, no longer *iklan*. This distinction is marked here by use of the term '*iklan*' when referring to the period that precedes the separate registration of *iklan* families (including when discussing the spatial strategies that led to this policy), and the expression '*iklan* descendants' when referring to the post-registration period. Although the latter expression poses its own problems – for many *iklan* descendants, legal autonomy did not end slavery-related practices – it is used to emphasize that *iklan* does not refer to a fixed status.

[3] 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; R. Roberts, 'The end of slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914', in S. Miers and R. Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI, 1988), 282–307; 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).

[4] P. E. Lovejoy and G. Deherme, *Slavery and its Abolition in West Africa: The Official Reports of G. Poulet, E. Roume, and G. Deherme* (Madison, WI, 1994).

[5] F. Boyer, 'L'esclavage chez les Touaregs de Bankilaré au miroir des migrations circulaires', *Cahier d'Études Africaines*, 45:179–80 (2005), 774.

Before discussing the emancipation movement in detail, the following section examines the contribution of this case to the broader historical scholarship on slavery and emancipation in French West Africa. The article goes on to consider French 'nomad policy' (*politique nomade*), the *iklan*'s spatial strategies towards emancipation, and colonial responses to *iklan* mobility.

SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA: THE *IKLAN* CASE

Slavery posed major dilemmas for European administrators in colonial Africa. While in theory colonizing powers subscribed to an anti-slavery ideology, they feared in practice that massive slave emancipation would result in uncontrollable economic and political turmoil.[6] Tolerance for slavery was particularly pronounced and enduring in the remote region of northern French Sudan, where *iklan* continued to be considered slaves by both their Tuareg masters and the colonial administrators until the 1940s.[7] This situation makes their struggle for socioeconomic autonomy in the 1940s and 1950s a particularly significant case of late emancipation in Africa.

In French West Africa, anti-slavery legislation dating from 1848 was applied selectively throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, a period characterized by a demand for labor associated with the military conquest of Western Sudan.[8] In 1905, after the French established solid military and administrative control over most colonized territories, a decree formally ended the practice of slavery. The impact of this decree varied from one area to another. In the southern and western regions of French Sudan, thousands of slaves left their masters *en masse* or used labor migration as well as colonial courts to renegotiate their social condition and status.[9] In other areas, colonial officials' ongoing concerns for economic and political stability merely led to a gradual decline in slavery. In the Wolof peanut basin of Senegal, for example, where the French feared that massive liberation would have adverse consequences on peanut production, slave owners considerably influenced the application of colonial law.[10] Emancipation occurred gradually, even after the 1905 decree, as slaves became involved in labor migration,

[6] Miers and Roberts, *The End*, 7.

[7] P. Boilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh: dépendances et révoltes: du Soudan français au Mali contemporain* (Paris, 1999), 215; 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; B. S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge, 2011), 209–40.

[8] R. Botte, 'L'esclavage africain après l'abolition de 1848: servitude et droit du sol', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 55:5 (2000), 1015; Roberts, 'The end', 284–7.

[9] On the massive exodus of slaves, see Roberts and Klein, 'The Banamba'; B. J. Peterson, 'Slave emancipation, trans-local social processes and the spread of Islam in French colonial Buguni (Southern Mali), 1893–1914', *Journal of African History*, 45:3 (2004), 421–44. On labor migrations and court trials, see F. Manchuelle, 'Slavery, emancipation, and labour migration in West Africa: the case of the Soninke', *Journal of African History*, 30:1 (1989), 89–106; R. Roberts, 'The end of slavery, colonial courts, and social conflict in Gumbu, 1908–1911', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34:3 (2000), 684–713.

[10] T. R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens, OH, 2004).

joined the growing Mouride brotherhood, or developed independent economic activities.[11]

Transition towards emancipation was even slower in Mauritania, where colonial administrators continued to tolerate slavery well into the twentieth century.[12] A relatively late colonial conquest and the limited capacity of colonial administrators to rule over large nomadic areas, among other factors, explain French officials' reluctance to promote slave emancipation. Examining slavery in the Mauritanian Adrar throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Ann McDougall shows that one of the main consequences of this tolerance was the accentuation of the distinction between slaves and freed slaves (*haratin*; sg. *hartani*). The increasing ability of *haratin* to move into salaried labor – and thereby gain independence from their former masters – was indeed rooted in the continuing subservience of slaves.[13] The distinction between these two social groups remained salient into the postcolonial context, as *haratin* continued to respect a social order from which they hoped to gain materially rather than joining slaves and more recently freed slaves to challenge it.[14]

Similarly, the *iklan* emancipation movement in northern French Sudan occurred relatively late in the colonial period. However, its roots and development contrast both with the gradual emancipation in the Senegal peanut basin and with the long-term redefinition of social categories in the Mauritanian Adrar. First, until the mid-1940s, slavery among the Tuareg population of the Gao region remained almost entirely unaffected by colonial rule. Second, *iklan* themselves initiated this sudden emancipation movement. The agency of slaves and slave owners in the context of late emancipation has most often been explored in terms of reactions or responses to colonial policies.[15] In contrast, negotiations over *iklan* emancipation in Gao occurred the other way around. It was *iklan* action that pushed local administrators to adapt their policies and attitudes towards slavery.

This bottom-up emancipation process was rendered possible through geographical mobility, which *iklan* used as a way to accumulate economic capital while socially distancing themselves from their masters. Some *iklan* left their nomadic way of life to work in cities. Others extended their usual nomadic areas with the intention of appropriating their masters' herds. These local displacements were far more radical than labor migrations in the context of Tuareg pastoral societies. By hurting the interests of masters, whose main form of wealth lay in control over pastoral resources, the claims to

[11] M. A. Klein, 'Servitude among the Wolof and Sereer of Senegambia', in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI, 1977), 335–63; 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; J. F. Searing, *'God Alone Is King': Islam and Emancipation in Senegal: The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002).

[12] E. A. McDougall, 'A topsy-turvy world: slaves and freed slaves in the Mauritanian Adrar, 1910–1950', in Miers and Roberts, *The End*, 362–88; U. P. Ruf, *Ending Slavery: Hierarchy, Dependency and Gender in Central Mauritania* (Bielefeld, Germany, 1999); M. Villasante-de Beauvais, *Groupes serviles au Sahara: approche comparative à partir du cas des arabophones de Mauritanie* (Paris, 2000).

[13] McDougall, 'A topsy-turvy world', 382.

[14] *Ibid*. 384.

[15] Getz, *Slavery*.

emancipation were immediately felt and demanded a quick response from the colonial administration. Solicited by both the *iklan* and their masters, local administrators had no option but to address conflicts and respond to *iklan* emancipation strategies. Martin Klein stresses that for most slave emancipation movements in French West Africa 'the state ... understaffed and underfunded, [was] generally unwilling to attack local compromises that resulted from renegotiation of social relations'.[16] In the Gao region, the local administration was compelled to intervene to settle clashes between former slaves and masters. Submerged by the number of claims and conflicts resulting from local displacements, district administrators first managed issues case-by-case, but soon realized that a more encompassing policy was needed. This policy consisted in the separate registration of all *iklan* families, who thereby acquired administrative independence from their former masters.

Iklan emancipation was in this way 'co-authored' by the *iklan*, their masters, and local colonial administrators but initiated by the *iklan*. This co-authorship points to a major characteristic of the French colonial administration, namely its necessary capacity to adapt to local circumstances. Gregory Mann has shown that even the *indigénat* – the regime of administrative sanctions applied to colonial subjects – while '[enabling] the fiction that institutions and procedures prevailed over individuals and practices [and] that administrative capitals controlled *commandants* and their agents', in fact varied widely in practice from one region and administrator to another.[17] The response of district administrators to *iklan* local spatial strategies illustrates the flexibility of French colonial rule. The separate registration of *iklan* families was a direct response to *iklan* claims. Labor migration might have been a more common practice, but ultimately it was local displacements that brought the most dramatic status changes for *iklan* throughout the Gao region (Fig. 1).

CONTROLLING SPATIAL MOBILITY AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS: FRENCH 'NOMAD' POLICY IN THE GAO REGION (1898–1946)

Northern French Sudan was a particularly challenging region to conquer and rule. Anti-colonial military resistance from Tuareg leaders, which lasted in the Gao area until 1916, along with the inherent difficulties of administering a substantial nomadic population on a vast arid territory, led French officials to tolerate and even support the practice of slavery decades after the anti-slavery legislation of 1905. This section explores this dilemma by examining the development of the French 'nomad' policy, from the creation of a military post in Gao in 1898 to the beginning of the *iklan* emancipation movement in 1946.

The hierarchical Tuareg society that the French found on their arrival in the Gao region at the end of the nineteenth century was divided into numerous social groups which the new rulers, drawing on ideas of European

[16] M. A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998), 16.

[17] G. Mann, 'What was the *indigénat*? the "empire of law" in French West Africa', *Journal of African History*, 50:3 (2009), 352; see also I. Merle, 'De la "légalisation" de la violence en contexte colonial: le régime de l'indigénat en question', *Politix*, 17:66 (2004), 137–62.

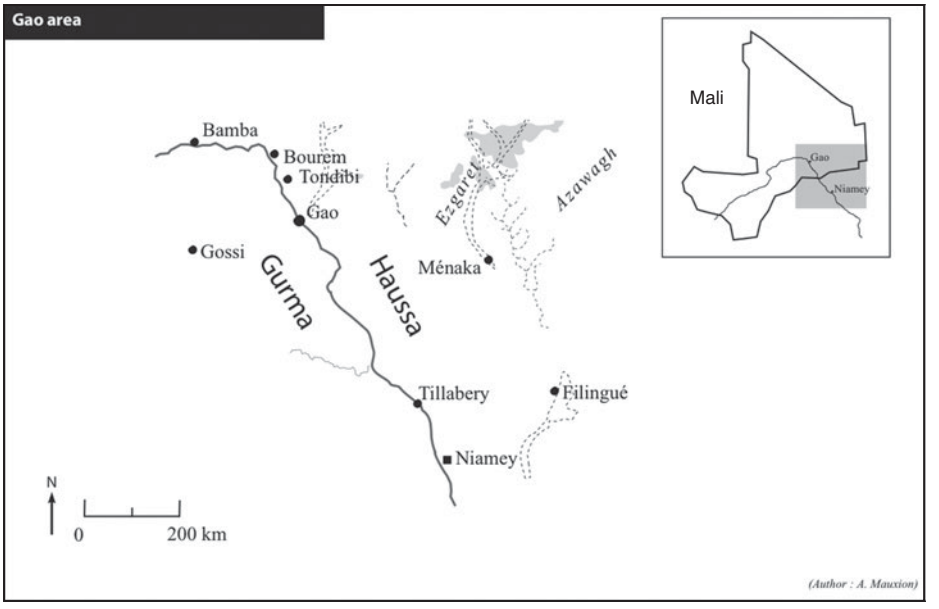

Fig. 1. The Gao area, Mali.

feudalism, classified crudely into three main categories: nobles (*imajeghen* and *ineslemen*), vassals (*imghad* and *dawsahak*), and slaves (*iklan* or *bella*).[18] The Tuareg *Iwellemmendan Kel Ataram* (a group of *imajeghen*), located mostly around Menaka, controlled the entire Gao region, including the Songhay, Arma, and Fulani populations living in the Niger River valley, in a vast political confederation founded on complex networks of dependence and alliances.[19] The goal of early French 'nomad' policy was to break up the *Iwellemmendan* confederation by consolidating the autonomy of historically 'vassal' groups and organizing the nomad population into administrative units known as *tribus*, which were subdivided into *fractions*.[20] This process was challenging for the French. In 1934, more than three decades after the creation of a military post in Gao, the Gao *commandant de cercle* wrote in a political report: 'Most nomads continue to avoid our action ... The registration of both the population and the herds must be completely redone ... Our main task is to gain the nomads' trust and to tame them as soon as we can.'[21]

Initially, colonial administrators prevented Tuareg groups from accessing the Niger River Valley. This allowed them to gain the trust of the populations

[18] Lecocq, 'The bellah question', 44–5. For a detailed analysis of the social groups which compose the Tuareg society in the Gao region, see C. Grémont, *Les Touaregs Iwellemmedan (1647–1896): Un ensemble politique de la Boucle du Niger* (Paris, 2010), 93–135.

[19] Grémont, *Les Touaregs*.

[20] C. Grémont, 'Comment les Touaregs ont perdu le fleuve: éclairage sur les pratiques et les représentations foncières dans le cercle de Gao (Mali), XIXe-XXe siècle', in M.-C. Cormier-Salem, D. Juhé-Beaulaton, J. Boutrais, and B. Roussel (eds.), *Patrimoines naturels au Sud: Territoires, identités et stratégies locales* (Paris, 2005), 257.

[21] ANM Fonds Numériques (FN), Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 2ème trimestre 1934, 1E 376.

living in the valley – many of whom were regularly subject to Tuareg raids (*rezzous*) – while weakening the economic and political bases of the *Iwellemmendan* confederation.[22] No longer able to extract goods from valley residents nor to access the river and pasturelands during the dry season (March to July), several Tuareg groups surrendered. The French then used the *Gurma* (as the ecological zone on the right bank of the Niger River is known) as a strategic place from which they could control these populations. In a political report dated 1899, the Gao *commandant de cercle* wrote:

> We will divide the nomads into two categories. Those who complied and those who did not. The former ... have been treated by us with favoritism. The *commandant de cercle* does not need to intervene once the submission is accepted. The group is counted and a nomadic area is temporarily designated in the *Gurma* while the *commandant de région* determines how much war and annual taxes should be paid, as well as what the final nomadic area will be ... Once in the *Gurma*, their taxes paid, we leave the nomads in peace. As long as the pasturelands are not overgrazed we can expect few issues from these populations.[23]

These two main strategies – preventing the nomads from accessing the river and placing most of the surrendering Tuareg in the *Gurma* – established the main principles of French 'nomad' policy during the following decades: an attempt to administer strictly defined Tuareg *tribus* and *fractions* which were restricted to clearly-delimited 'residential areas', which defined the recurrent seasonal moves of the group.[24] In 1912, the Gao *commandant de cercle* noted: 'each *tribu* now has its organization, individuality, and chief with judicial power who no longer reports to the *Amenokal* [the chief of the *Iwellemmendan* confederation] but directly to the *chef de subdivision*'.[25] The construction of several wells throughout the region supported the policy of separation of Tuareg groups by contributing to the reduction of their residential areas.

Pushing the rationale of this policy one step further, in 1909–10 the French administrator Betrix strove for the sedentarization of all the nomads in the Gao *cercle*. This project devoted particular attention to the *iklan*.[26] A similar process had already begun, with relative success, in the nearby Tillabéry *cercle* (present-day Niger). In 1908, two *iklan* groups from the Dori *cercle* who escaped their masters and moved to the Tillabéry *cercle* were freed and encouraged to become sedentary.[27] Commenting on Betrix's attempt to implement this vision in the Gao *cercle*, in 1911 an administrator mentioned

[22] In 1899, the villages of Fafa and Ouatagouna were victims of raids by the Tuareg *Iwellemendan*: see ANM Fonds Anciens (FA) Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 1899, 1E 36–37. In 1904, the villages of Gargouna, Gao, and Lotokoro were also attacked: see ANM FA Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 1904, 1E 36–37. Tuareg domination did not only rely on coercion but also on cooperation and diplomatic alliances with the population of the Niger River valley; see C. Grémont, A. Marty, R. ag Mossa, and Y. H. Touré, *Les liens sociaux au Nord-Mali: entre fleuve et dunes* (Paris, 2004), 83–130.

[23] ANM FA Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 2ème trimestre 1899, 2D 144.

[24] J. Claude, M. Grouzis, and P. Milleville (eds.), *Un Espace Sahélien: La Mare d'Oursi, Burkina Faso* (Paris, 1991), 54.

[25] ANM FA Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 1912, 1E 36–37.

[26] A. Richer, *Les Touareg du Niger (région de Tombouctou-Gao): les Oulliminden* (Paris, 1924), 234–5.

[27] ANM FA Région de Gao, rapport politique, avril 1908, 1E 36–37.

that even though it was desirable to control the nomads' spatial mobility, it was impossible to transition them to a sedentary lifestyle. The main reason, he argued, was ecological. Unlike in the Tillabéry *cercle*, located further south, the precipitation in the Gao area did not allow farming beyond the Niger River floodplain, which was already exploited by the sedentary population.[28] In fact, the only place in the Gao *cercle* where a significant number of *iklan* had been able to leave their masters and develop a semi-sedentary lifestyle during the early years of colonial rule was precisely the area located just north of the Tillabéry *cercle*, where it was possible to farm beyond the floodplain and where a number of *iklan* groups had been placed in an administrative canton for sedentary populations.[29]

After realizing that the sedentarization of nomads was not a realistic option, the French continued their administration by *tribu*, focusing on controlling residential areas, monitoring possibly subversive activities, and collecting taxes. Two main challenges made this process of administration particularly slow and difficult. First, the relationships between Tuareg groups and the influence of the *Iwellemendan Amenokal* on most chiefs were tenacious. In 1916, for example, more than ten years after having surrendered to the French administration, Fihrun Ag Alinsar, the *Amenokal* of the western *Iwellemendan*, led a rebellion against the French administration. Second, the social and spatial control that the French sought to achieve was never accomplished. Local conflicts between *fractions*, the demographic evolution of each *tribu*, and the spatial flexibility necessary for the pastoralists to cope with recurrent droughts led to the frequent rearrangement of *fractions* and *tribus*.

In this politically unstable environment, French administrators avoided addressing the *iklan* question. French 'nomad' policy largely benefited those defined by the administrators as vassals. Colonial reports during the 1920s and 1930s repeatedly mentioned the growing importance of the *imghad*. In 1920, the Gao *commandant de cercle* wrote: 'The *imghad* have become increasingly important within Tuareg society and are now wealthier than the *imajeghen* . . . We can predict that in a few years the Tuareg element of the Gao *cercle* will be mainly represented by the *imghad*.'[30] Most *imghad, dawsahak*, and other social groups previously subjects of the *imajeghen* had many *iklan*, whose living conditions did not improve with the emancipation of their masters. The main concern of the French administration was political, not moral, and during these first decades of colonial rule, the vast majority of *iklan* remained, as described by the *Gao commandant de cercle* in 1912, the 'forced herd-keepers whom [the French couldn't] liberate massively without creating uncontrollable upheavals'.[31]

The *iklan* were the most important demographic group of the *cercle*: it was reported in 1935 that 31,474 *bella* (very largely *iklan,* though there is some uncertainty in the way the category was interpreted) lived in the Gao *cercle* versus 29,598 Songhay, 11,304 Fulani, 10,261 Tuareg (non-*iklan*), and 5,536

[28] ANM FA Lettre du lieutenant colonel Seal, commandant le territoire militaire du Niger, à Monsieur le lieutenant gouverneur du Haut Sénégal Niger, 1911, 1E 36–37.
[29] ANM FR Recensement des bellas de Bourra, 1956, 1E 4.
[30] ANM FR Cercle de Gao, rapport politique et rapport de tournée, 1920, 1E 17 (1).
[31] ANM FA Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 1912, 1E 36–37.

Arma.[32] . The French were worried about the sudden emancipation of such a large group, and when they mentioned the *iklan* in reports it was most often for strictly political purposes or to comment on their poor living conditions. Discussing the situation of the few *iklan fractions* who were able to become independent during the early years of colonial rule, and noting how 'poorly administered' they were, the Gao *commandant de cercle* concluded: 'Our interest is to not separate the *iklan* from the Tuareg. The role of the *iklan* should be to lead the herds under the authority of the nomads'.[33] When an open conflict between *iklan* and their masters occurred, the French often supported the latter. In 1938, when a Tuareg master asked the administration to bring back some of his *iklan* families who had moved away in order to avoid forced recruitment, the French gathered the scattered *iklan* families in question.[34] Administrators sometimes described the *iklan*'s 'miserable state, pitiful physiology, inferior status from a human perspective', as well as how 'the Tuareg – *imghad* and *imajeghen* alike – have a profound contempt for their captives, without whom they cannot live', but these comments never led to any major political initiative in favor of this large population.[35]

Tacit tolerance of slavery by colonial authorities, originally considered necessary to establish military and administrative control over the region, continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century as an incentive to foster pastoralist groups' cooperation.[36] Far from undermining slavery, Bruce Hall argues, colonial rule in the Niger River bend encouraged tighter control over slaves by pastoralist leaders. This point is central to understanding the legal and economic situation of *iklan* during the 1940s when, decades after the abolition of slavery in French West Africa, they suddenly began to claim greater independence from their masters. From the standpoint of colonial administrators, *iklan* had literally no property. They tended their masters' herds and were registered as servants on their masters' family certificates. From the standpoint of the pastoralist elite – which Hall discusses based on an extensive collection of Kunta scholar Shaykh Bay's legal opinions – *iklan* remained slaves. Although they could, in theory, own what they earned on their own time, they were unable to bequeath it.[37] These elite views were rooted in their interpretation of Islamic law, as well as in their realization that slavery had been maintained under colonial rule.

This *status quo* was increasingly challenged in the years immediately following the Second World War and the new 1946 French constitution. This change did not come from new legislation but rather from the spread of progressive political ideas by newly created political parties and the growth of an intellectual African elite in the nearby city of Gao. Increasingly aware of their condition and their capacity to change it, a significant number of *iklan* openly challenged their masters by engaging in labor migration and extending their usual grazing areas. These strategies profoundly affected the foundations

[32] ANM FR Cercle de Gao, rapport politique annual, 1935, 1 E 17 (I). The demographic report of 1935 is the first one that the French considered reliable for the entire Gao *cercle*.

[33] ANM FR Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 1920, 1E 17 (1).

[34] ANM FN Cercle de Gao, bulletins de renseignement, 1M 238.

[35] ANM FR Cercle de Gao, rapport politique, 3ème trimestre 1932, 1E 17 (1).

[36] Hall, *A History*, 220.

[37] Hall, *A History*, 224–37.

of the colonial administration by calling into question the integrity of Tuareg political formations, the assigned boundaries of residential areas, and more generally the relations of domination and dependence between Tuareg masters and *iklan*.

IKLAN'S SPATIAL STRATEGIES TOWARDS SOCIOECONOMIC EMANCIPATION (1946–60)

In asserting control over their spatial mobility and eluding the control of their ex-masters beginning in the later 1940s, *iklan* were at the same time accumulating economic capital. *Iklan* moved in different directions with different purposes. Some went to nearby towns or to the Gold Coast to seek employment opportunities, while others modified their pastoral circuits either to join other *tribus* where they could develop independent economic activities, or to hide their masters' herds. This section shows that local moves constituted the most destabilizing spatial strategies toward socioeconomic emancipation for both the Tuareg masters and the colonial administration.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, several factors such as the burgeoning urbanization of the colonies, a growing Western-educated African elite, and the active participation of African populations in the Second World War led France to reconsider its position and role in Africa.[38] The constitution of the Fourth Republic, voted on 27 October 1946, replaced the *Empire Français* with the *Union Française*.[39] A major consequence of this shift was the creation of territorial assemblies in French overseas territories, of which half of the members were elected. Africans were also given the possibility of creating political parties. *Union Soudanaise–Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (US-RDA), the party that became the main political force leading to the independence of French Sudan, was founded in 1946. Postwar reforms did not directly address slavery among the Tuareg communities of northern French Sudan, but they prompted the circulation of progressive social and political ideas in the most remote areas. US-RDA played a particularly significant role in this process. Local and regional leaders of this new political party found a powerful electoral base in the *iklan* populations. By the late 1940s, their ideas 'reached even the most remote wells [of the Gao region]'.[40] During the legislative elections of 1951, to the surprise of colonial administrators, *iklan* in the Gao *cercle* voted massively for US-RDA, including in nomadic areas.[41] More generally, US-RDA rose, in only a few years, from in 1948 '[a party] that has very little influence on the masses' to in 1951 'the most

[38] F. Cooper, 'From free labor to family allowances: labor and African society in colonial discourse', *American Ethnologist*, 16:4 (1989), 745–65; G. Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC, 2006).

[39] J.-R. de Benoist, *L'Afrique occidentale française de la Conférence de Brazzaville (1944) à l'indépendance (1960)* (Dakar, 1982), 70.

[40] J. Clauzel, 'Evolution de la vie économique et des structures sociales du pays nomade du Mali–de la conquête française à l'autonomie interne (1893–1958)', *Tiers Monde*, 3:9–10 (1962), 300.

[41] Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix en Provence (CAOM) Fonds Privés (FP) E. Schmitt, *Le problème des serviteurs: une solution*, Centre de Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane (CHEAM), 1257 (12 janvier 1954).

organized and dynamic party in the region'.[42] From 1951 onward, it won all of the electoral competitions in the Gao *cercle*.

In a report on the '*bella* [*iklan*] question' dating from 1954, the *commandant de cercle* Jean Raynaud identified the political reforms of 1946 as the starting point of the *iklan*'s claims:

> The new constitution spread the news of the abolition of slavery across the region. This interpretation is quite curious because it supposes that the 1875 constitution legitimated slavery, or at least tolerated it... This 'new abolition' of slavery, conceived as such by the population, brought about a massive exodus of the *bella* towards Niger.[43]

Beginning in 1946, a significant number of *iklan* in the Gao region chose to migrate as a way to distance themselves – spatially and socially – from their masters. The most important destination was the regional town of Gao, where *iklan* could find employment as workers on construction sites. In 1947, the Gao *chef de subdivision* mentioned: 'recruiting workers in Gao is no longer an issue, because in addition to the regular labor migrants from the villages [of the valley], many *bella* [*iklan*] left their *fractions* following the news of last year's reforms'.[44] The population of the *bella* neighborhood in Gao doubled between 1951 and 1954.[45] This *iklan* migration to Gao only amplified the spread of US-RDA ideas throughout the region, as it served as a powerful vector for US-RDA's message to the *iklan* who remained in the *fractions* and *tribus*. Some *iklan* also moved to Niamey, located further south on the Niger River, where they were able to find employment opportunities as workers, as well as to the Gold Coast, following a well-established pattern of Songhay migration.[46] As mentioned by the Gao *chef de subdivision* in 1948, the masters usually did not oppose them: 'they know that they are unable to prevent them, and that most *bella* return'.[47]

Labor migration was not the only way in which the *iklan* used spatial mobility to emancipate themselves. At least three distinct local migration patterns appeared or developed during the late 1940s and 1950s. First, some *iklan* left their masters to join other *fractions* or *tribus*. These movements, although not new, became more frequent. In 1952, a group of *iklan* from the *Kel Mehiga fraction* (*Kel Es Suq tribu*) who had been victim of 'severe exactions and bad treatments' left their masters to live among the *Kel Temokassin* (*Kel Egheris tribu*).[48] Second, some *iklan* moved to develop activities allowing them to become more economically independent. In 1949, several *iklan* families among the *Tengaregadash tribu* moved away from their masters to settle closer to the valley, where they subsisted by gathering wild

[42] Archives du Cercle de Gao, Gao (ACG) Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique annuel, 1948; ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique annuel, 1951.

[43] ACG Rapport sur la question Bellah, par le commandant de cercle Raynaud, 1954.

[44] ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport économique, 1947.

[45] ACG Subdivision de Gao, fiche de recensement, Gao ville, 1954.

[46] J. Rouch, 'Migrations au Ghana (Gold Coast): enquête 1953–1955', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 26:1/2 (1956), 33–196. The first report of this Songhay migration in the colonial archives dates from 1926: ANM FR Rapport politique, cercle de Gao, 1926, 1E 17 (1).

[47] ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique, 1948.

[48] ACG Lettre du *chef de subdivision de Gao* au *chef de subdivision d'Ansongo*, 1955.

plants.[49] After two years of negotiations led by the French administration, these *iklan* finally moved back with their masters under the condition that they would farm millet around water reservoirs and only give a small part of the harvest to their masters. Nine years later, in 1958, the Gao *chef de subdivision* noted that due to the increasing leniency of the *Tengaregadash*, no major conflicts between masters and their *iklan* occurred after the compromise.[50] Finally, some *iklan* moved away from their usual residential area in order to hide part of their masters' herds or to openly claim ownership rights over them. The Gao *commandant de cercle* explained: 'The severity of the problem is not so much that the *bella* left . . ., but that they did not leave alone. They brought their masters' herds with them.'[51]

Who moved, and what did these migrations mean to the *iklan*? First, not all *iklan* performed the same activities in Tuareg society. Jean Gallais distinguished three categories of *iklan* in the *Gurma*: the *iklan daw ehan* who lived with their masters and performed domestic tasks; the *iklan n egef* or *iklan n tenere* who led the herds; and the *iklan n'debe* who mostly farmed around water reservoirs.[52] Colonial reports frequently stressed the difference between the social conditions of the *iklan* who lived with their masters and those who did not. While the former commonly suffered harsh treatment, the latter enjoyed more latitude in their mobility and activities. This was the case with the *iklan n egef*. Due to their pastoralist activities they lived in separate nomadic encampments and only occasionally saw their masters.[53] Regional migration was mainly carried out by these mobile and relatively independent *iklan*. By extending their pastoral areas, they sought to emancipate themselves while simultaneously appropriating their masters' herds.

Regional migration, especially when it involved the appropriation of herds, was the most destabilizing *iklan* emancipation strategy for both Tuareg masters and the French administration. More than the other forms of spatial mobility, including labor migration, it shook the foundation of Tuareg social and economic organization. As masters lost their followers and economic capital, their social status was jeopardized. By hiding or seizing their masters' herds, the *iklan* did not move to leave, but rather to stay in the Gao region and confront their masters. Colonial reports of conflict negotiations and trials provide windows into how some *iklan* experienced this emancipation process. The two following cases illustrate the complexity and stakes of these struggles.

In September 1955, Ibrahim, an *akli n egef* from the *Kel Temokassin fraction* (*Kel Egheris tribu*) fled from his usual residential area with several

[49] ACG Cercle de Gao, bulletin trimestriel de renseignement, 3ème trimestre 1949.

[50] ANM FR Subdivision de Gao, rapport du recensement de la tribu *Tengaregadash*, subdivision de Gao, 1958, 1E 17 (2).

[51] ACG Cercle de Gao, rapport sur la question *Bellah*, par le commandant de cercle Raynaud, 1954.

[52] J. Gallais, *Pasteurs et paysans du Gourma: la condition sahélienne* (Paris, 1975), 46–7. Jean Gallais specifies that these categories are not fixed, and that an *iklan* could move from one group to another, sometimes seasonally. See also E. Bernus and S. Bernus, 'L'évolution de la condition servile chez les Touaregs sahéliens', in C. Meillassoux, *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 33–9.

[53] CAOM FP F. Reeb, *Les noirs au sein de la société touarègue*, CHEAM, 1291, 9 avril 1948.

hundred goats and sheep. His father's master, who claimed to be the owner of the herds, filed a complaint to the colonial administration against Ibrahim. Several people were interviewed as part of the investigation.[54] The religious leader of the *Kel Temokassin fraction* stressed that Ibrahim stole the herds. Ibrahim's uncle confirmed this version: 'Neither Ibrahim nor his parents have ever owned even one animal.' Ibrahim's father himself confessed that he felt profoundly betrayed by his son. He indicated a few locations where he thought his son might have gone. In his opinion, Ibrahim crossed the river to hide the animals in Haussa, among the *Sheriffen tribu*, where members of his mother's family lived. The chief of the *Sheriffen tribu* confirmed that Ibrahim came to Haussa to live among his maternal family, although he did not know where exactly.

Although archival documents do not record the outcome of this conflict, this collection of transcribed interviews raises two major points. First, by the mid-1950s, such investigations were common throughout the Gao region. In order to arbitrate the many conflicts initiated by *iklan* or their masters, the colonial administrators needed to collect substantial information about the families and their relationships. Both *iklan* and Tuareg masters were asked to comment on various conflicts and state their opinions. These investigations thereby created new spaces for *iklan* to reflect on their condition. Second, not all *iklan* necessarily agreed on the necessity to strive for more independence. The opposition between Ibrahim and his uncle and father is not an exception. In many cases where herds were hidden, it was indeed members of the *iklan* community who indicated to the administrators where the animals could be found; the interviews are evidently the product of complex processes involving pressure from masters and the reluctance of elders to challenge established relationships, as well as the desire for self-emancipation.

The second case concerns the *iklan Norben* (*Kel Egheris tribu*). In August 1955, reacting to their *iklan*'s claim over the herds, a group of *imghad* masters went to the *iklan* encampment to remove the herds. For the first time in the Gao region, the *iklan* refused and fought.[55] Several people were injured, and a trial was held in Gao. The physical resistance of the *iklan Norben* explains the particular dimension that the '*Norben* affair' took in the region.[56] The trial opposed the claimant Azeidar, who led the *imghad* expedition to the *iklan* encampment, against 13 *iklan*. Azeidar first explained to the court that the herds at the *iklan Norben* encampment had belonged to his family for several generations.[57] The *iklan*, he argued, did not have any rights to the animals, and until recently this fact had never been questioned. He therefore accused the *iklan* of trying to steal his animals. Two of the thirteen *iklan* defendants, Nafissao and Azigzane, formulated the main defense arguments:

> Nafissao: I am not a *bella* [*iklan*] of Azeidar. We, the *Norben*, have never been herders for the *Ikaolaten imghads* [Azeidar's *fraction*].

[54] ACG Twelve transcribed interviews, dating from January 1957 (more than one year after Ibrahim left the *Kel Temokassin fraction* with the animals).

[55] ANM FR Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique, 1956, 1E 17 (2).

[56] M. Winter, 'Slavery and the pastoral Twareg of Mali', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 9:1 (1984), 4–30.

[57] ACG Cercle de Gao, Trial report, 11 juin 1956.

The judge: But until 1952 you were registered among their family, and none of the animals were registered in your name . . .

Nafissao: It is because they were more powerful than us . . .

The judge: Who are you, then, if you are not a *bella*?

Nafissao: I am a Fulani. Our family is from Al-Kasba, near Bahondo (Bamba) . . . The *Iwellemmendan* of Menaka attacked our ancestors and took a woman as a hostage. They gave the woman to the *Ikaolaten* . . . We are all descendants of this woman.[58]

Like Nafissao, many *iklan* who strove for independence during the 1950s refused to be categorized as *iklan* or *bella*. Some used stories of their lineage to claim another identity. Others claimed to be Songhay. Yet, assuming this claim and achieving independence required accumulating economic capital. Azigzane, another defendant, developed the *iklan* argument regarding ownership of the herds:

Azigzane: All of the animals counted by the *chef de subdivision* in my herd are mine. None of them belong to Azeidar or another *Ikaolaten*.

The judge: How did you acquire them?

Azigzane: Through my own work; I collected wild plants, which I sold. I also sold wood. Part of the herd also comes from my sister's dowry.[59]

The *iklan* who moved to Gao, who sold wild plants or who worked in Songhay villages for several months each year, were increasingly able to buy animals. A notable from the Gao region who was asked, as part of this trial, to comment on the relationship between the *iklan Norben* and the *Ikaolaten imghad* pointed to this possibility. Although this practice remained limited, he admitted that, in some *iklan* families, it was difficult to make the distinction between the master's herd and what the *iklan* had acquired personally through their own work. During conflicts, some *iklan*, like Azigzane, did not hesitate to claim personal ownership rights over the totality of the herds.

The court recognized that the *Norben* were the *iklan* of the *Ikaolaten imghad*. Yet, given that French law proscribed relations of servitude, that the relationship between Tuareg masters and *iklan* had evolved under French rule, and that some *iklan* had recently been able to acquire some animals as a result of their own labor, it was decided that the herd be divided: 102 cows, one calf, 589 goats and sheep, four donkeys, two camels were attributed to Azeidar; and 96 cows, 30 calves, 1828 goats and sheep, and 40 donkeys to the *iklan Norben*.[60] In addition, the *iklan Norben* were organized into an independent *fraction* and were encouraged to move away from their residential area in order to avoid further conflicts with their former

[58] ACG Cercle de Gao, audience foraine publique par le tribunal du 2e degré de Gao concernant le différent Imrad Ikaolaten/Bellah Norben, 11 juin 1956. [59] Ibid.

[60] This strategy was particularly common among the *iklan* who moved towards the Niger River Valley and adopted a more sedentary lifestyle: see ACG Cercle de Gao, bulletin trimestriel de renseignement, 3ème trimestre 1949. We see here how problematic the terms *bella* or *iklan* become as the emancipation process unfolded: see footnote 5.

masters.[61] This decision was in line with the broader *iklan* policy that the French developed during the mid-1950s. The following section examines this policy by clarifying how the French understood the *iklan*'s progressive emancipation and responded to it.

FRENCH RESPONSES TO *IKLAN* MIGRATION AND CLAIMS IN THE GAO *SUBDIVISION* (1946–60)

The management of the '*bella* [*iklan*] question' by colonial administrators in the Gao region did not result from a general policy elaborated in Bamako – the capital of French Sudan – but rather from local practical reactions to *iklan* claims. Jean Clauzel, who was a colonial administrator in northern French Sudan during the 1950s, mentioned that '[the *iklan* policy] was not a real and coherent reform, elaborated and imposed by the central administration, but rather a series of more or less concerted measures taken by the administrators and officers in the region'.[62] The testimonies of several other ex-colonial administrators support Clauzel's perspective.[63] More perhaps than in other regions of West Africa, due to the geographical distance to the administration headquarters and the particular challenges of administering nomad populations, at the margins of the Sahara, colonial administrators needed to adapt official French policy to local socioeconomic and political realities. Focusing on the Gao *subdivision*, this section shows that emancipation was a bottom-up process, initiated and sustained by *iklan*. Administrators were mostly concerned with migration because it generated conflicts over the control of herds. By standardizing their responses to this issue, they amplified the consequences of *iklan* resistance through mobility.

During the early years of the *iklan* emancipation movement, labor migration to Gao, Niamey, or the Gold Coast was the most accessible way for the *iklan* to emancipate themselves. The French administration merely noted the growth of the *iklan* population of Gao, without trying to limit this phenomenon. Within *fractions* and *tribus*, however, the colonial administration continued to maintain the *status quo* by supporting the masters. Yet rising conflict between *iklan* and their masters pushed the administrators to face the issue. In a report dated 1955, the Gao *chef de subdivision* explained:

> The entry of the *bella* [*iklan*] population into the civic, economic, and even political life of the region is, within the nomad population, and most importantly among the *imghad tribus* located in the *Gurma*, the revolution of recent years, if not the last months. Numerous, prolific, robust, dynamic, and able to adapt to the most difficult situations, but aspiring to a better life and freedom, the *bella* ... are confronted with an overly rigid Tuareg society and will certainly play an increasingly important role in the pastoral life of the *subdivision*.[64]

[61] ACG Subdivision de Gao, revue mensuelle, juin 1956.
[62] Clauzel, 'Evolution', 301.
[63] E. Bernus, P. Boilley, J. Clauzel, and J.-L. Triaud (eds.), *Nomades et commandants: administration et sociétés nomades dans l'ancienne A.O.F.* (Paris, 1993).
[64] ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique, 1955.

The *imghad tribus* located in the *Gurma* were indeed the most challenged by the *iklan* question. In 1955, the nomad population of the Gao *subdivision* was divided into seven *tribus: Ibohanen, Shamanamas, Kel Assakane, Sheriffen, Tengaregadash, Kel Gossi*, and *Kel Egheris*. Without entering into the complex history of each *tribu*, it is useful to clarify and contrast how different patterns of *iklan* resistance developed among each of them. The *iklan* represented a small percentage of the *Shamanamas* and *Ibohanen*, and the *iklan* question was almost nonexistent within these *tribus*.[65] Among the *Kel Assakane* and *Sheriffen tribus*, most *iklan* who sought to emancipate themselves left for Gao or another town, without openly confronting their masters.[66] The religious leadership among both *tribus* explains this tendency: several colonial reports stressed that the *ineslemen* (nobles specialized in religious affairs) had an overall better relationship with their *iklan* than the *imajeghen* and *imghad* groups, because of their greater flexibility as masters and the religious prestige that they had among their *iklan*.[67] Among the *Tengaragadash* tribu, as briefly mentioned in the previous section, a compromise was found between masters and *iklan* after a two-year exodus of the latter. It is among the *Kel Gossi* and *Kel Egheris tribus*, both under *imghad* leadership and located in the *Gurma*, that the *iklan* question profoundly destabilized the colonial administration. In these *tribus*, the *iklan* did not only leave their masters; they confronted them by trying to appropriate the herds, hiding them in remote locations, or selling them on markets distant from their residential areas. Trying to explain this phenomenon, administrators blamed the weakness of the leadership, the scattering of the population, the particularly difficult living conditions of the *iklan*, and their sheer numbers.[68]

The *iklan* question became a concern for French administrators for two main reasons. First, the uncontrolled liberation of such a large population was a threat to the regional socioeconomic and political organization. Correspondingly, US-RDA leaders in Gao saw in this movement an opportunity to destabilize the administration and gain electoral and political support. Facing growing claims from both *iklan* and their masters, *commandant de cercle* Raynaud took the initiative of elaborating an *iklan* policy, the main goal of which was to provide a fair response to *iklan* demands while retaining a coherent social and economic system.[69] What is remarkable about this decision is that it was a local administrative response to *iklan* emancipation

[65] ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport de tournée, 12 septembre 1950; ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport de tournée, 7 mai 1956.

[66] For the *Sheriffen*: ACG Subdivision de Gao, revue mensuelle de renseignement, novembre 1956; For the *Kel Assakane*: ACG Subdivision de Gao, compte rendu de tournée, 2 mai 1956.

[67] ACG Subdivision de Gao, compte rendu du recensement relatif à la tribu *Kel Assakane*, 1956. This particular relationship between *ineslemen* and their *iklan* has also been observed in other areas of northern Mali and Niger. See Clauzel, 'Evolution', 297 and 299; and Boyer, 'L'esclavage', 782.

[68] ACG Note sur la tension entre *Bellas* Norbène et Imrad, fraction Ikaolaten, par le chef de subdivision Henri Leroux, 24 Aout 1956; ACG Subdivision de Gao, revue mensuelle, décembre 1956.

[69] ACG Cercle de Gao, rapport sur la question *Bellah*, par le commandant de cercle Raynaud, 1954.

strategies, not a top-down imposition. The new policy addressed the two main claims of the *iklan* regarding ownership of the herds and their social status, as explained by the Gao *chef de subdivision*:

> A one-way solution applied without discernment to the entire region would be counterproductive. Many debates and case-by-case negotiations would be necessary to regulate the issue. We need to keep punishing the *bella* [*iklan*] who appropriate their masters' herds, but at the same time register some of these herds in their name even though we know they belong to the masters ... [About] the distribution of the family certificates, which the *bella* await as a freedom certificate, ... we will give them to the *bella* who prove that they are able to pay taxes.[70]

A census of all the *tribus* of the Gao *subdivision* from 1954 to 1956 allowed French administrators to put this policy into practice. For the first time, *iklan* families were registered separately from their masters and most household heads received a family certificate. The *chef de subdivision* who conducted the census noted, for each *akli*, whether or not he was in conflict with his master. In addition, masters were required to allow newly autonomous *iklan* descendants to register part of their former masters' herds in their own name, and a distinction was made on the registration list between the herds that the *iklan* descendants owned and those they continued to tend for their former masters. When a master declared that some of his herds were missing and accused *iklan* of having hidden them, a note was also written on the registration list, thereby allowing the master to retrieve the animals if they were found. Finally, when *iklan* actions against former masters took an organized and collective form, independent *iklan* fractions or subfractions were created. This comprehensive census constituted a turning point in French *iklan* policy.[71] The information collected provided administrators with the evidence necessary to arbitrate future conflicts case by case. From 1956 onwards, the *iklan* question is less visible in colonial reports. Many conflicts persisted and some were durable, but the complaints came equally from former masters and *iklan* descendants, and solutions were relatively easily found and enforced. Many *iklan* descendants continued to leave their *tribu* to work in town, but this remained largely tolerated by administrators.[72] It was the subversive 'moving to stay' strategy that triggered a more comprehensive colonial response. The attention it received from the administration contributed to *iklan* socioeconomic emancipation throughout the Gao *cercle*.

[70] ACG Subdivision de Gao, rapport politique, 1953.

[71] The *Sheriffen tribu* was registered in 1954: see ACG Compte-rendu de la tournée de recensement, tribu Cheriffen, octobre 1955. The *Ibohanen, Shamanamas, Tengaregadash, Kel Gossi, Kel Egheris* and *Kel Assakan tribus tribu* were registered in 1955. ACG Compte-rendu de recensement, tribu Ibohanen, 7 mai 1956; ACG Fiches de fractions, tribu Chemenamas, 1955; ACG Rapport de recensement Kel Rheris, 1955; ACG Comte rendu relatif au recensement de la tribu Kel Assakane effectué du 7 au 17 octobre 1955, 2 mai 1956; ANM FR Cercle de Gao, rapports politiques annuels, 1956, 1957, 1E 17 II.

[72] The Gao *chef de subdivision* noted during a census among the *Kel Egheris tribu* in 1958 that in three years only the total population significantly decreased (from 3,771 to 3,487 inhabitants; −7.5 per cent). He explained this decrease by the massive departure of *iklan* for Gao, Niamey, and the Gold Coast.

Carefully conceived *iklan* strategies, integrated within the broader French 'nomad' policy, were indeed applied to *iklan* of all the *tribus* and *fractions*, regardless of whether or not they moved or tried to emancipate themselves. During the census of the *Kel Assakane tribu* in 1956, the Gao *chef de subdivision* wrote:

> Many *bella* [*iklan*] families never claimed anything, but on principle, and also to prevent future claims, I had to require the masters to register some of their herds in the name of their *bella* . . . Although among this *tribu* the *bella* do not seem yet to be ready for the change, the census was done the same way as among the *Kel Gossi*. I provided distinct family certificates to each *bella* household's head.[73]

The French administration was left with no choice but to legitimate the emancipation movement resulting from local migrations by standardizing the independent registration of *iklan* families in colonial records.

CONCLUSION

1946 constitutes a turning point for the social and spatial organization of Tuareg society in the Gao region of northern Mali. Until then, colonial officials ruled over Tuareg populations by dividing them into distinct administrative units and controlling their residential areas. This policy largely ignored *iklan*, most of whom were registered among their masters' families and continued to serve them as they did before French conquest. From 1946 onward, however, *iklan* progressively emerged as new political actors. They were able to distance themselves both socially and economically from their masters by moving away from them.

In only ten years, the different spatial strategies deployed by *iklan* in order to emancipate themselves led to the legal recognition of their independent status and ownership of some herds. This emancipation movement happened through a combination of two main factors. First, growing numbers of labor migrants to Gao, Niamey, and the Gold Coast brought back new ideas and discourses. *Iklan* who went to Gao and Niamey were exposed to the growing activities of the US-RDA and were able to convey a progressive political message to their families. Those who moved to the Gold Coast and returned provided a window into how people lived in this British colony; this external influence was a central motor to the emancipation process. The second main factor was internal to Tuareg society. An increasing number of *iklan*, stimulated by the spread of new political ideas, challenged the authority and domination of their masters by moving locally and appropriating part of their masters' herds. The *iklan* policy that French administrators developed in response to the conflicts generated by these local moves was generalized and applied throughout the region, leading to the actual independence of the majority of *iklan*, backed by legal measures.

Official access to a legal status separate from their masters' authority did not revolutionize the living conditions of most *iklan* descendants, many of whom continued – and still continue in many families – to live with their former

[73] ACG Subdivision de Gao, compte rendu relatif au recensement de la tribu *Kel Assakane*, 2 mai 1956.

masters and work for them. Yet, it constituted an important step in a slow process of socioeconomic emancipation that, stimulated by various events such as a series of droughts during the 1970s and 1980s, and several rebellious movements among the Tuareg population, intensified during the late twentieth century.[74]

[74] Lecocq, 'The bellah question'.

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