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Abstract

This study examines the historical linkages that developed between experiences of enslavement, the legacies of slavery, and ideas of freedom before and after abolition in the early twentieth century in an area of southern Senegal known today as the Kolda region. In the Fulfulde language, spoken by the majority of the population, there are several terms and expressions to talk about freedom. The first is *ndimaaku*, which people tend to equate with nobility and dignity. This is the freedom of the olden days of slavery, when the capacities and qualities of the male or female freeborn stood in stark contrast to those of the slave, and being free meant not having been a slave in the first place. The second term is *heɓtaare*, i.e., freedom in the sense of tranquility, economic well-being, and a general ease in life and social relations. The expression *jeyaal-hoore mun* conveys a sense of independence, self-mastery and autonomy, while *heɓtugol hoore mun* literally means to retrieve one’s head, the center of individual thought and capacity for independent action. Politically, *heɓtugol hoore mun* stands for the end of colonial rule and the achievement of national independence. Socially, it refers to

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the emancipation of subordinated groups, like the youth and women, and it describes slaves who freed themselves from their masters. Drawing from archival sources and oral history, this essay attempts to reconstruct the discursive reconfigurations of local ideas of freedom within the context of the political and social changes that affected the Kolda region in the late nineteenth century, the early colonial period, and the years before decolonization. Each historical period had its own actors, dynamics and complexities in which slavery and then legacies of slavery played a role in the definition of freedom and the entitlement of people to its benefits. As demonstrated here, however, liberation paved the way for other forms of subjugation.

Keywords

freedom – slavery – emancipation – Fulbe – southern Senegal

Introduction

What is meant by “freedom” is one of the least documented aspects of past and present African social life. There are of course exceptions, such as the seminal study of Paul Riesman on the construction of self and society amongst the Peul Jelgobe of Upper Volta (today Burkina Faso), or Harri Englund’s ethnography of human rights activism in Malawi.¹ Otherwise, Africa looms largely as the continent of unfreedom: the slave trade, colonial subjugation, Cold War dictatorships, the apartheid regime, civil wars, environmental disasters, and contemporary façade democracies all compound this image. Both anthropologists and historians have stressed African resilience to historical adversities, and theorized agency “not in terms of dependence and independence, but interdependence and intersubjectivity.”² Many have indeed described interrelatedness as a historically consolidated strategy of survival—a way to distribute


individual success to social networks and communities that in turn provide refuge in times of need. Freedom is the unwelcome topic of these discussions, one which only new scholarship on African nationalist movements and decolonization has begun to assess as “a word-in-motion” across historical contexts and circumstances.3

Most of the contribution of African slavery studies to the historicizing of freedom has come from studies that prioritize the meanings of slavery, the variety of slaves’ conditions and the post-abolition consequences of African slavery pasts.4 This study attempts to place the analysis of freedom in the foreground by focusing on the part of southern Senegal that was called the Upper Casamance during French rule and is today known as the Kolda region. The objective is to explore the historical linkages between enslavement, the legacies of slavery and changing ideas of liberty in three historical periods: the late nineteenth century, the early colonial period, and the years of decolonization.

Historians have produced a wealth of knowledge on the pre-colonial Kolda region, but the twentieth century remains partly unexplored.5 Until the sec-

3 Emma Hunter, Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 136.
ond half of the nineteenth century, Mandinka was the vehicular language for the entire area south of the Gambia River. Because of political changes and population movement, Fulfulde then became dominant. The shift was caused by the political collapse of Kaabu, the loose confederacy of small Mandinka states that since the fifteenth century controlled the lands between the middle and upper reaches of the Gambia River and the northeastern part of the Bissau-Guinean region, where in the 1850s its capital Kansala was located. None of the travelers who crossed southern Senegambia in this period ever visited it, although they paid respect to the Almamy of Bundu and to that of the Fouta Djallon. The two Imamates controlled the flow of hinterland trade towards the coastal and riverine European settlements, and viewed Kaabu as their frontier

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6 Philip J. Havik, Silences and Soundbites: The Gendered Dynamics of Trade and Brokerage in the Precolonial Guinea Bissau Region (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 123.


of expansion. This external pressure added to Kaabu internal difficulties. Historians have explained the crisis of the confederacy within the context of the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and the parallel development of commercial groundnut cultivation in the regions south of the Gambia River. The first deprived the Kaabu Mandinka elite of their major source of revenue, while the second placed wealth to buy European weapons into the hands of commoners. Another important factor was Islamic reformism. While one part of the population followed traditional cults, the other was sensible to the proselytism of Islamic preachers who urged the separation of Muslims from unbelievers’ settlements after centuries of peaceful cohabitation. These were the first moves towards the Islamic wars that tore Senegambia apart in the second half of the century. The most dangerous internal enemies of the Kaabu confederacy were the Muslim Mandinka, who supported Fouta Djallon, and the Fulbe communities that dwelt in Kaabu lands. In the eyes of Bundu and Fouta Jallon, all of these were natural allies.

Emmanuel Betrand Bocandé, a French resident in the Casamance between 1849 and 1857, noted that the influence of Mandinka chiefs depended on the number of foulacounda—Fulbe villages—under their control, as these villages were a source of milk, meat and young men who fought alongside Mandinka youths. Bocandé also described the heavy presence of Fouta Djallon people in the western areas of Kaabu as much as sources of the same period reported regular raids of the Imamate along the middle and upper reaches of the Gambia River. Mud walls and stockades encircled all large Mandinka settlements, and caravans employed their own militia to protect men and goods.

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Large-scale hostilities started around 1850, when Labé, the northern province of Fouta Djallon, mobilized an army of nearly six thousand men to defeat Berekelon, one of the strongholds of Mandinka rule.\(^{19}\) Then, the joined forces of Fouta Djallon, Bundu and their local allies destroyed Kansala in 1867.\(^{20}\) While the British, French and Portuguese prepared colonial occupation, the peripheral leaders of Kaabu asserted their autonomy in the wake of collapsing Mandinka hegemony.\(^{21}\)

One of these leaders was Alpha Molo Balde, also known as Molo Eggue, a convert to Islam and ally of Bundu and Fouta Jallon, who in the early 1870s began to negotiate military and economic collaboration with the British and the French.\(^{22}\) The former were stationed at McCarthy Island, a commercial outpost established in 1823 that was located about 250 kilometers from the coast in the middle of the Gambia River. The French were at Sedhiou, the fort they constructed in 1838 on the north bank of the Casamance River. In 1875, Molo’s army swept across the southern bank of the Gambia River from east to west, and then moved south into Guinea Bissau.\(^{23}\) Under his military leadership, the western part of the Kaabu Confederacy became Fuladu, which in Mandinka means “the land of the Fula.” All sources insist on the fact that Molo was of slave origins. When he died in 1881, his son Musa Molo Balde established himself as Fuladu’s legitimate leader, thanks to French military support. This collaboration, marked by treaties signed in 1883 and 1896, ended in 1903, when Musa left his capital of Hamdallay, located north of the contemporary city of Kolda, to seek refuge in the part of Fuladu that he had ceded to British Gambia in 1901.\(^{24}\) Fuladu ended up splitting into the British districts of Fuladu West and Fuladu East, the French Upper Casamance, and the Portuguese region of Gabu.

The first section of this study reconstructs the vision of freedom that Molo and Musa subscribed to by drawing on ethnography—specifically early accounts on Fuladu and Fulbe social organization that were written by the British and French on the basis of local information\(^ {25}\)—as well as oral history,

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\(^{21}\) Carpenter, *Sovereignty*, 33.

\(^{22}\) Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS), Dakar, IG-193, *Notice historique sur le poste de Sédhiou (de 1838 à 1883) par M. Adam, 1891, 14–15 and 21–26*; Gambian National Archives (GNA), Banjul, C50 1/141, Despatches to Sierra Leone, no. 34 (30 Mar. 1875), n. 12 (19 Jul. 1875).


\(^{24}\) Rôche, *Histoire de la Casamance*, 237–263.

\(^{25}\) ANS, IG 75, Mission Liotard 1887–1888; ANS, IG-193, *Notice historique sur le poste de Sédhiou*
collected both in The Gambia and Senegal since the 1960s. It also delves into the Fulfulde vocabulary of freedom and slavery, as there is no way to understand the concreteness of both without some historical semantic analysis. The late nineteenth century, which historians describe as a time of massive enslavement for the whole of West Africa, offered opportunities for social emancipation to part of the servile population of Fuladu. The second section explains how this process was halted in the colonial period, despite the

26 Much of this oral history is kept at the archives of the Research and Documentation Division of the National Centre for Arts and Culture of Banjul (The Gambia). My personal collection consists of ethnographic materials and historical narratives that I collected between 1992 and 2017 on both the Gambian and the Senegalese side of the border on issues such as the careers of Molo and Musa, colonial chieftaincy, forced labour, political parties and independence, slavery, the slave trade and the legacies of slavery, mobility and migration. Printed sources include Sekene M. Cissoko and Sambou Kaoussou, Recueil de traditions orales des Mandingues de Casamance et de Gambie (Dakar: Ifan, 1969); Gordon Innes, Kaabu and Fuladu: Historical Narratives of the Gambian Mandinka (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1976); Matt Schaffer, ed., Djëns, Stars, and Warriors: Mandinka Legends from Pakao, Senegal (Leiden: Brill, 2003).


1905 abolition of slavery in French West Africa. Under the Republican motto of liberty, equality and fraternity, the French administration became the unwitting supporter of social and political restoration of the former master class over freed slaves and slave descendants. The third section explores the battles for citizenship of the 1950s. The political leaders of this period pressed for liberation from colonial rule in terms of emancipation from slavery. As Mary Nyquist explains, such metaphorical usages have a long history worldwide, “none of which arises from concern for those who are actually enslaved.” In contexts where the legacies of slavery are perceptible in daily life, like the Kolda region, these discourses often acquire a literal turn, and battles against external and internal subjugation tend to overlap.

As made clear by a census carried out for the first development plan of Senegal, freed slaves and slave descendants constituted more than half of the population of the present Kolda region in the late 1950s. This situation opens a window on the emancipation struggles that developed locally in relation to anti-colonial mobilization and debates over citizenship. Leopold Sédar Senghor and his close political associate Mamadou Dia are widely recognized as the undisputed protagonists of this period. Many of the old militants I met while conducting fieldwork, however, thought otherwise. Their hero was Yoro

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Kande, a young schoolteacher who built upon the historical tradition of Molo and Musa to raise the civil awareness of—and a sense of historical agency among—freed slaves and slave descendants. One of Kolda’s public secrets is that Yoro himself was of slave ancestry: thanks to his initiative, decolonization again opened the local debate over the meanings of freedom and slavery. The time of Molo and Musa, the early colonial period, and the period of Yoro’s involvement in the political mobilization that led to the independence of Senegal in 1960, shared similarities but were also quite different: each period had its own actors, dynamics and complexities in which slavery and subsequently its legacies played a role in the discursive reconfigurations of freedom. I hope that this anthropological history paves the ways to appreciating the variety of ways in which ordinary people moved along the uneven paths of emancipation and experienced the unfreedom that was consequential to the conquest of freedom.

Emancipation through War in the Second Part of the Nineteenth Century

Combining early colonial reports with oral history, historians have long explained the emergence of Fuladu and Molo’s political success in terms of the ethnic cleavage between the Kaabu Mandinka and the Fulbe. The former ruled the land; the latter had economic power. Outraged by Mandinka pillaging, the Fulbe capitalized on the support of Fouta Djallon and Bundu to liberate themselves.

Boubacar Barry and Martin Klein have integrated this vision by underlining Fulbe internal hierarchies. Although Bertrande-Bocandé described foula-counda as homogenous communities under patriarchal authority, hierarchy did matter, in particular that between the freeborn and the slave. The only

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35 Barry, La Sénégalie, 171; Klein, Slavery, 146–147.
37 For instance Gaspard Théodore Comte de Mollien, Voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique: aux sources du Sénégal et de la Gambie, fait en 1818, par ordre du gouvernement français, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie de Mme Ve Courcier, 1820); Hecquard, Voyage sur la côte. The contri-
Mandinka term for freedom is *foroyaa*. In Molo’s time, this kind of freedom was the hereditary status of men and women (sing. *foro*; plur. *forolu*) who were part of the ruling elite, trading or Muslim religious families, and professional endogamous groups of bards, leatherworkers and blacksmiths. The opposite of *foroyaa* was *jongyaa*: slavery. The slave was called *jongo* (plur. *jongolu*); the same term tellingly served to indicate “mixed” or “impure” materials such as the alloys of gold or silver with other metals. Referring to the Fulbe that dwelled in Kaabu lands, the Mandinka spoke of *fula foro*—free or “pure” Fulbe—and *fula jongo*—slave or “impure” Fulbe, a distinction also reported by early French and Portuguese sources on Fuladu, as well as by oral history.\(^{38}\)

Fulfulde vocabulary on freedom is richer. There are at least three interrelated ways to speak about freedom.\(^{39}\) The first is *ndimaaku*, a term that in this period had the same meaning as *foroyaa*: it meant freedom in the aristocratic sense of hailing from prestigious families. It also identified freemen (plur. *rimɓe*; sing. male *dimo*; sing. female: *fuldeɓo*) as not being slaves.\(^{40}\) The latter were called *macchuɓe* (sing. *maccuɗo*) or *jiyaaɓe* (sing. *jiyaaɗo*), together with a variety of other terms that reminded them of their subjection to *rimɓe*.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) Research and Documentation Division, National Council for Arts and Culture, Banjul (The Gambia), Recording 475\ a and b, 9 May 1978, Al Haji Kawsu Sillah, Fuladu History.


\(^{41}\) For women the term is *korɗo* (plur. *horɓe*), while *kaaɗo* (pl: *haaɓe*) can be used for both men and women, as much as the two terms that describe the condition of the slave: *maccungaaku* and *njiyaagu*. The specific meanings of these words change according to historical periods and Fulfulde communities. In the Kolda region, *jiyaaɗo* is more used than *maccudo*, and Ngaidé (*L’esclave*, 92, fn. 132) remarks the change of significance that the term acquired since Molo Eggue’s times. Today, *maccudo* stands for the captive or the chattel slave, while *jiyaaɗo* is often translated as serf or slave descendant, like in Guinea Conakry. *Jiyaɗo*, however, can equally mean, and probably meant in the past, the newly acquired slave. See M. Bazemo, “Une approche de la captivité par le vocabulaire chez
The second word that conveyed a sense of freedom (but also autonomy, self-sufficiency and independence) was *heɓtaare*. *Mi heɓtima* means “I am fine”—indicating no worry, hunger, illness, or conflict—while *mi heɓtaaki* is used for “I am restrained,” or “I am pressed.” Herders of Molo’s time sought *heɓtaare* when they selected a place to stay with their cattle: a site that was far from farmers (so as to avoid conflict over spoiled crops), close to water and grassy areas, in harmony with the spiritual entities of the territory, and safe from cattle thieves and slave raiders. In this perspective *heɓtaare* implied a lack of restraints but also a positive conception of freedom in the sense that John Christman proposes: the person had the economic and social capabilities to handle one’s life at its best.\(^42\) The expression *jeyaal-hoore mun*, literally “the property of one’s head,” describes the sense of self-autonomy that the individual achieves with full adulthood: the ability to formulate purposes and turn them into action in the awareness of being part of a larger social environment that demands respect for its rules and feelings. This kind of self-mastery is one of the pillars of *ndimaaɓu* freedom. The *dimo* of Molo’s times took care of other people’s needs, and the *heɓtaare* of his life was in principle the *heɓtaare* of all the people that lived under his protection. The *fuldebbo*\(^43\) acted kindly towards all people,

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\(^{43}\) Literally “the Fulbe woman.” This is an epithet that even today many women of slave origins do refuse to accept, in the conviction that it is not for them, as much as men of the same condition do not like to be called “pullo,” which is an equivalent of *dimo*.
confronted stoically the adversities of life, helped kin and kindred, and ensured that the new generations learned the values of ndimakuu.

Macchuɓe in principle never achieved jeyaal-hoore mun. Throughout the West African “archipelago” of Fulfulde-speaking communities, the symbol of their condition was boggol—the rope.44 This is why oral history, when narrating about Molo, uses the expression: “Molo is the one who cut the rope of slavery.”45 In this context, boggol meant the overall subjection of the Fulbe to the Mandinka as much as rimɓe’s control over their jiyaɓe. The version of


Fuladu history narrated by Mohamadou Falai Baldeh, Molo’s great-grandchild, strongly emphasizes that the *rimɓe* acquired slaves from the Mandinka and together with them oppressed the *jiyaɓe*.46

The wealthy Fulbe were ruling the *fula jongo* with the help of the Mandinka. It seems that the Mandinka had entrusted all the Fulbe areas to them, and that they were advising the Mandinka. This is how they came to have slaves. The wealthy Fulbe would go to villages, capture children there and bring them to their town, to raise them up. When they grew up, they worked for the Fulbe and were referred to as *fula jongo*.47

Degrees of *jiyaɓe*’s subjection varied. There was the tight rope that physically prevented the newly acquired slave from escaping, as well as the loose one that linked slave descendants to their masters’ families or turned members of other ethnic groups into Fulbe dependents.48 Some *jiyaɓe* lived in their masters’ households, especially if they were young and unmarried. Some others dwelled at a short distance. Still others—as was the rule in Fouta Djallon—built up separate communities: these were more serfs than slaves in strict terms, though this nuance did not matter in *rimɓe*’s eyes. Molo’s rope was apparently of the loose type: he grew up close to his master, Samba Eggue Balde. It is controversial whether his father was a chattel slave, as suggested

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46 Mohammadou Falai Baldeh began to assemble this version in the 1950s from the recollections of other family members and his personal researches in the former lands of Fuladu. He was repeatedly interviewed by Bakary Sidibeh, then head of the Gambian Cultural Archives, and by Francis Leary and Joyce Bowan in the 1970s, two of the leading scholars in the historical study of Southern Senegambia. In a collection of several tapes, Baldeh reconstructed the whole history of Fuladu. Sidibeh continued his research on this topic in the 1980s. Baldeh’s tapes are in the oral archives of the Research and Documentation Division, National Council for Arts and Culture (Banjul, The Gambia). Sidibeh assembled all Baldeh’s transcriptions, and turned them into a manuscript history of Fuladu: Mohammadou Falai Baldeh, *Fuladu History*, unpublished manuscript, Bakary Sidibeh’s private archive, Banjul, The Gambia. I am grateful to Sidibeh for letting me see this text. Part of the information is published in Sidibeh, *A Brief History*. I first met Mohammadou Falai Baldeh in the 1990s: Interview with Mohammadou Falai Baldeh, locality of Yoroberikunda (The Gambia), 27 Oct. 1994, 10 Nov. 1994, 8 Dec. 1994, 28 Dec. 1997. On Molo’s origins, see also Quinn, “A Nineteenth Century Fulbe State,” 428.

47 Baldeh, *Fuladu History*.

48 For a case similar to Fuladu, see VerEecke, “The Slave Experience,” 30.
by Samba Eggue’s descendants, or a stranger, as according to Mohamadou Falai Balde’s version. Both could be right, as the categories of maccudo and jiyaaɗo embraced the war captive, the chattel slave, the child of a different ethnic group entrusted to Fulbe herdsmen, and the stranger who was not dimo and sought integration into Fulbe communities without ever being considered Fulbe, despite mastery of the Fulbe language and habits. All the descendants of these people were macchuɓe (or jiyaaɓe), and their subordinated status spilled over generations. They conquered relative heɓtaare, especially if they lived, like Molo, in separate communities, but always under rimɓe protection. The dimo donated cattle for the life-cycle ceremonies of his jiyaaɗo, and the offspring and milk of that cattle belonged to the jiyaaɗo, but if kept within the herd of the dimo it could be disposed of by the dimo without discussion. The same could happen to the cattle of the dimo wives and children. The jiyaaɗo reciprocated by cultivating the dimo’s fields, and by giving a share of his crop, if he settled alone.

Each social category needed the other: the rimɓe could not do without the labor force of the jiyaaɓe, whilst the jiyaaɓe relied on rimɓe pastoral riches during the hard times of the rainy season. Their relation also had moral implications: “there could not be a dimo—as some elders say today—with a jiyaaɗo by his side.” The generosity of the former related to the dependence of the latter; their respective personalities integrated the other. The crucial point is that the relative heɓtaare of some jiyaaɓe never meant ndimakuu: purity of origins. One had to be born dimo in order to learn and display ndimakuu freedom, and only a dimo was a true Fulbe: dimo and pullo—the term to indicate the Fulbe man—were interchangeable. Did Molo and Musa ever claim this kind of freedom for themselves?

This is a delicate topic because today, if asked about ndimaaku, some jiyaaɓe change the subject, as they fear the shame (hersa, called seemtende in other parts of the Fulbe archipelago) which results from entering into a discussion that does not really belong to them. Being hersa one of the core qualities of ndimaaku, they show in action (but not in words) their sound knowledge of the

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49 Interview with Saba Ndyaye Balde, Kolda, 4 Feb. 2014.
50 Baldeh, Fuladu History.
51 Interview with Manga Sabally, locality of Kanjaye, Department of Velingara, Kolda Region, 8 Jan. 2016.
kinds of restraints that this kind of freedom implies, certainly the self-restraint of not trespassing the thresholds that keep human harmony in place. Oral history provides a clue to this aspect thanks to well-known episodes in which Molo and Musa commented on slavery, enslaved other people, freed their own subjects from slavery and tamed the political ambitions of rimɓe. Their intention was to claim ndimaaku through actions rather than words. First, rimɓe used their tight social networks to ransom their enslaved relatives. Molo and Musa freed their enslaved subjects, and they enslaved rimɓe to break down their sense of social superiority. Second, a carefully orchestrated politics of marriages, handled by rimɓe women, consolidated the cohesion of freemen over time. The preferred partner was always a cousin, either from the maternal or paternal side. Men could marry slave women and women from other ethnic groups, as purity of origins depended on the social qualities of the father. Molo and Musa forced the boundaries of rimɓe endogamy, and sources remark upon Musa’s habit of seizing the daughters of freemen. Even the conflict between Molo and Samba Eggue that led to Samba’s death around 1880 resulted, according to Samba’s descendants, from Molo asking for Samba’s daughter for Musa and Samba’s adamantly refusal.

Third, Molo and Musa’s military initiatives allowed several jiyaɓe to achieve a degree of heɓtaare that would have been unthinkable even a generation earlier. Mohammadou Falai Baldeh’s version states that Molo urged the rimɓe to let their jiyaɓe participate in the struggle. Military campaigns and raids began as soon as crops were ready, and continued throughout the dry season. Fighting enhanced the social cohesion of combatants as much as their emancipation: after having taken their share, Molo and Musa (who acted as his father’s right-hand man) redistributed the booty in grains, cattle and women to their fol-

56 The most famous episode is that of Sellu Koyada Mballow. See Innes, Kaabu, and Sidibé, A Brief History, 100–101.
57 Interview with Bouly Sabally, Locality of Sare Bossejo, Department of Velingara, Kolda Region, 15 Jan. 2015.
58 Interview with Saba Ndyaye Balde, Kolda, 4 Feb. 2014; Rôche, Histoire, 129.
59 Baldeh, Fuladu History.
lowers. Men of slave origins thus had a chance to establish their autonomous hamlets without relying on rimɓe’s support: having a wife was difficult in those times of polygamy, more so for a jiyaado, who had to wait for his master to get one for him. A new model of freemen emerged based on the idea that the qualities of a person did not depend on ancestry but rather destiny, moral and physical strength, and to some extent sacrifice. As with other nineteenth-century European and North Atlantic ideas of liberty, these possibilities were not available to all human beings but were rather restricted to adult men, the only ones entitled to the benefits and the social and political responsibilities of freedom. The novelty of Molo and Musa’s message lay in the fact that each man had the right to develop his potential to advance economically, socially and politically. The freeman of their times asserted his leadership over a network of wives, children, relatives, dependents and even slaves, and fully participated in the decision-making of the local community.

Power Restoration in the First Part of the Twentieth Century

Molo and Musa’s attacks to the enclosures of ndimaaku sparked innumerable conflicts. Molo was alive when rimɓe military leaders challenged his authority. Together with Samba Eggue’s episode, oral history reports other incidents in which both he and Musa struggled with rimɓe over the concreteness of freedom. It seems that at a certain point even Fouta Jallon asked Molo to hand the leadership of Fuladu over to a dimo. This was illustrative of the rimɓe’s way of thinking: having served the purpose of overthrowing Mandinka hegemony, the jiyaado should now step back. On this issue, Musa made his position clear after Molo’s death in 1881. The treaty of military collaboration that he signed with the French in 1883 helped him sever the ties with Fouta Djallon, which his father had subscribed to. He played this strategy for the next twenty years: drawing on the external power of the Europeans and manipulating their rivalries in order to strengthen his position in Fuladu. By serving French military interests, he pushed his influence eastward and southward. Each battle produced captives, whom he either traded to the northern parts of Senegal and to Fouta Jallon or assimilated into his entourage and army. Under these circumstances of generalized warfare, even as the meaning of freedom was

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60 Carpenter, Sovereignty, 37.
61 Rôche, Histoire, 129; Sow, Mutations politiques, 61–62.
changing, so was slavery becoming more and more a temporary condition caused by war or poverty that did not stain future generations. Oral history reports Musa having made statements in this direction on several occasions. In 1903, his departure for British Gambia initiated another process of change, as the French took over control of Hamdallay and liberated the captives and slaves he left behind. A village de liberté was set up in Kolda, and the freed slaves were put to construction works: the residence, prison, and all else that was necessary to transform a settlement of a few hamlets into the base of the French administration of the Upper Casamance. By 1909, the year in which the French definitely settled in Kolda, the French Resident had established the tradition of celebrating the 14 July anniversary of the French Revolution by raising the flag and singing the Marselleise. His reports were written on letterhead that carried the motto “République Francaise. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.” There was a page for taxes, another for court cases and prisoners, and one for horses (their health condition, their names and those of their grooms). The scanty references to slaves show that even before the 1905 decree they had begun to ask for freedom certificates: they were recent captives who either returned to their home communities or sought a place where to settle in the largely underpopulated lands of Fuladu. French officials only marginally delved into local ideas of slavery to observe that slaves performed all of the hard work. British reports of the same period cast light on the tendency of colonial officials to minimize the importance of slavery in the social life of Fuladu Fulbe: “In the first place, slaves are always adopted, their time is their own and they may acquire property or may even inherit their master’s property; in fact, they are in no sense slaves, although they are not regarded as freeborn people [...]

64 Rôche, Histoire, 299; ANS 2G5 30, Sénégal, Cercle de Sedhiou, Poste d’Hamdallay, Rapports mensuels d’ensemble 1905.
65 ANS 2G5 30, Sénégal, Cercle de Sedhiou, Poste d’Hamdallay, Rapports mensuels d’ensemble 1909.
69 ANS, 1G 330, Charles de La Roncière, Coutumes du Sénégal, 1907, Coutumes peulhes.
It is a curious fact that a Fullah will, without hesitation, when asked tell one whether is freeborn or not.”

The most significant process set in motion by colonization was not the liberation of the slaves but the reassertion of the old legacy of \textit{jiyaɓe} and \textit{rimɓe} cohabitation and hierarchical collaboration that occurred over the trend of liberation set in motion by Molo and by Musa. Literature on French West Africa provides ample evidence of how colonial officials tried to minimize the impact of abolitionary regulations on the ground. In the case of the Upper Casamance, there is no trace of any effort made to inform the population about the end of slavery or of the slave trade. Even more relevant for the analysis of \textit{jiyaɓe} and \textit{rimɓe} relations is the fact that by asserting their leadership over the legacies of Musa, whom they started to depict as a tyrant feared by the population beginning in the 1890s, the French ended up indirectly supporting the restoration of \textit{rimɓe} power. One of the major written sources on the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of Fuladu is a report written in 1904 by the French Resident Charles de La Roncieré. In it, there is evidence that Molo and Musa made concessions to the economic and social power of the \textit{rimɓe}. For instance, Musa exempted the \textit{rimɓe} villages from the \textit{corvées} that had become part of Fuladu social life because of the 1896 treaty with the French. The French needed porters to travel through Fuladu, and Musa became responsible for road maintenance: the \textit{rimɓe} villages did not participate in this effort, just as they did not join the gangs of men and women who cultivated Musa’s fields of millet and groundnuts near his capital Hamdallay.

At the same time, Molo and Musa’s repeated attacks on \textit{ndimaaku} produced their results. In a way similar to the British report quoted above, de La Roncieré reported that the \textit{rimɓe} had learned to let powerful \textit{jiyaɓe} marry their daughters, and in order to acknowledge the children of these unions they had even started to say that \textit{ndimaaku} depended on the mother, rather than on the father.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{70} Tenant Stanley, \textit{Notes on the physical distribution}.
\bibitem{73} \textit{ANS}, Dakar, 1G-294, Charles de La Roncieré, \textit{Travail d’hivernage, Historique du Fouladou} (1904).
\end{thebibliography}
It was under the umbrella of the French civilizing mission that local ideas of freedom and slavery as hereditary conditions gained a renewed strength.

French officials in this period believed that Africans were inferior to French people. Nonetheless, this difference had gradients; some groups were closer, while others were more distant from the French. The French liked the Fulbe: their physical appearance—tall, lean and light-skinned—set them apart from other Senegambians and their aristocratic manners impressed French officials, even those with Republican ideals and an anti-feudal stance. The Fulbe they talked about were the rimbe, because they came to share the rimbe’s view that the jiyaabe were not truly Fulbe, and were eternal outcasts of Fulbe society. For de La Roncière, the fula jongo, whom another French official, Liotard, had described some years before as a combination of Mandinka and Fulbe virtues, was instead a man of all races. His list of Fuladu regions and influential men distinguished between chiefs of noble or slave origins. All were Musa’s men, as Musa had followed Molo’s line to entrust several areas of Fuladu to the control of the rimbe in exchange for heavy tributes in cattle, and to nominate men of slave origins and members of other ethnic groups to positions of responsibility. The perspective of de La Roncière was different. In the fear that Musa would later try to return to the Upper Casamance, he distrusted men too close to him, preferring instead rimbe influential personalities, whose support he thought he could reasonably gain even if they had been loyal to Musa. There was some wisdom in this perspective. Rimbe resented the seizing of their cattle even more than that of their daughters, and some herding families had moved to the north bank of the Gambia River precisely to avoid Molo and Musa’s requests of cattle in support of the army.

One particular passage of de La Roncière opens a window on the repositioning of the rimbe vis-a-vis the jiyaabe. The French Resident remarked on Molo’s slave origins and downplayed his political leadership by depicting him as the companion of two free Fulbe: “three among them, having nothing more to lose, decided to fight the oppressors. They were Coly Demo of Sabary, Samba Eggue of Dialaba, and Molo Eggue—after known as Alpha, of Soulabally. Two among them were freeborn Fulbe (fula forolo), Molo Eggue was a Fulbe born in slav-

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ery (Foula dion), but his reputation as elephant hunter made him a precious attendant in the eyes of the others.”

Representatives of influential rimɓe families subscribed to this view, which has today become the Kolda version of Fuladu history. Mohammadou Falai Balde’s version, as well as oral history from The Gambia, expose instead the tensions between Molo, Musa and the rimɓe. By putting Molo behind, and not in front, de La Roncière was giving voice to a cry that has long resonated throughout the Kolda region at election time: “jiyaadǝ lamatako,” or “the jiyaado cannot lead.” Politicians have used it strategically to pit their jiyaabé constituencies against rimɓe candidates. In de La Roncière’s time, the same cry served to undermine the political, social and economic upgrading that some of the jiyaabé enjoyed under Molo and Musa. It took time but chiefs of jiyaabé origins either lost their position or were unable to establish a line of descendants that retained the powers given to them by Musa. In addition, the end of warfare eliminated one of their main sources of revenue. It is true that the jiyaabé were more competent farmers than the rimɓe, but as made clear by the Roland Portères’ Mission of the 1950s on the problems of Senegalese agriculture, the cash-crop economy of groundnuts created “a new class of serfs, or perhaps it would be better to say ‘slaves.’” Portères was talking about the groundnut basin, the region north of the Gambia River where commercial agriculture expanded more significantly thanks to the collaboration between commercial companies, the colonial state and the Muslim religious elite. The social structure of the Upper Casamance was different: religious leaders were few and their influence confined to their agricultural settlements. Influential men there instead included traders, representatives of European commercial companies, rimɓe canton chiefs and cattle-owners. Thanks to the labor of jiyaabé—which they obtained in exchange for cattle, milk and millet during the difficult months of the rainy seasons, when granaries were empty and peasants toiled in the fields—the latter had caught up with commercial groundnut cultivation, and their herds benefitted from the vaccination campaigns of the colonial state. With the exception of the canton of Kamako, all of the chiefs

76 ANS, Dakar, 16-294, Charles de La Roncière, Travail d’hivernage, Historique du Fouladou (1904).
77 Ngaidé, L’esclave, 87 fn. 111.
were *rimɓe* by the 1950s. Through their kin, kindred and close associates they controlled the lower apparatus of the colonial state and economy: the “sons” of chiefs acted as tax collectors, rural constables, census officials, and served in the ranks of the *Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance* (*sip*), the early French West African version of cooperatives.\(^{80}\) The *jiyaɓe*, who belonged to the chieftaincy houses and their social networks, enjoyed some of their masters’ privileges; the others stayed at the bottom of the Upper Casamance social ladder—a hungry workforce of peasants that experienced all the coercion of *indigénat*, i.e. the special penal code for French colonial subjects.\(^{81}\)

Oral history uses three terms to explain how people turned into *jiyaɓe* before colonization: through capture (*nanngugol*), purchase (*soodugol*), and asking for refuge (*moolagol*).\(^{82}\) Only the latter remained in use after abolition as part of the experiences of the numerous immigrants from Portuguese and French Guinea, many of whom were of slave ancestry, who sought *heɓtaare* in the Upper Casamance.\(^{83}\) The other term, which applied to post-abolition *jiyaɓe*, is *terima*, a Mandinka word typical only of the Fulfulde spoken in former Fuladu territories.\(^{84}\) It means “friendship” between people and families linked neither by capture nor purchase yet positioned as *jiyaɓe* and *rimɓe*. It was easy to slip again into subjection by establishing relations of dependence with powerful *rimɓe* or with the canton chiefs, for whose protection individuals and communities negotiated, either forced by circumstances or voluntarily. The peasant with relations could try to pay his children off from military conscription or forced labor: he could have a role in *sip*, and hope to hide some of his cattle from the sharp eyes of the tax collector. The man without relations, instead, was an easy prey for the coercive system put in place by the French administration after having freed the indigenous population from the arbitrary rule of Musa and the chains of slavery.

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Senegalese Independence and the Real End of Slavery

In 1948, Leopold Sedar Senghor and his close political associate Mamadou Dia left the Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) to establish the Bloc Democratique Senegalais (BDS). One year later, Senghor visited Kolda. Although he received a limited response from a rural population that colonial officials described as largely apathetic, this was the real beginning of politics in the Upper Casamance.

Until this moment, discussions in metropolitan France and its overseas dominion that touched upon the two fundamental institutions of French domination, forced labor and the indigénat, had hardly reached the region. The Constituent Assembly of the Fourth Republic abolished forced labor in 1946. The indigénat broke down because of reforms that had been enacted for at least two decades, the last being the 1946 Lamine Guéye Law, which granted citizenship to all inhabitants of French overseas colonies. This was not yet the era of universal franchise, which arrived with the Loi Cadre of 1956. Senegal’s voting rolls, nonetheless, increased “from 45,000 to 130,000.”

Rural notables, employees of commercial companies, soldiers, veterans, and an array of people who “shared the attribute of having written evidence of who they were” entered the political stage.

The BDS immediately won the peasantry. In their effort to capitalize on the patronage networks of the colonial period, Senghor and Dia “bargained with and made promises to rural notables and influentials.” In the groundnut basin, they sought the support of Muslim religious leaders. In the Upper

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86 ANS, 2G50–100, Sénégal, Subdivision de Kolda, Rapports politiques trimestriels, 1950.

87 Hesseling, Histoire Politique, 161.

88 Frederick Cooper, Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

89 Frederick Cooper, Citizenship, 137–138.


Casamance, they approached traders, based in Kolda and in Velingara (the administrative and commercial center near the border with The Gambia), canton chiefs, and educated young men who served as teachers or low rank civil servants. Some of the latter adhered to the *Mouvement de Force Democratique de la Casamance* (MFDC), a group of Casamance intellectuals founded in 1947 to mobilize against the marginalization of the region in national politics. MFDC lamented that the SFIO had never truly consulted the regional electoral base before choosing its candidates for the Casamance. The support of the movement was crucial to the BDS victory at the 1952 elections of the Territorial Assembly. The secretary of the movement was Yoro Kande, the son a migrant from Portuguese Guinea who had settled in a small *jiyaabe* village founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by people from various places, including Musa’s residence in Hamdallay. After having attended the rural school built by the canton chief, Yoro continued his studies in the French Sudan. After World War II, he started teaching in Bignona. While in the Casamance, he entered the MFDC. In 1951, he asked to be posted to Kolda. There, his political career began.

The BDS candidate for Kolda was Abdoulay Diop (known as Michael Diop), who traded in cattle and groundnuts. Because of cattle, he knew the *rimɓe* herders of the region. Because of his trade in groundnuts, he became familiar with the challenges of the average peasant. Food distribution or debt cancellation could win the vote of any farmer. Diop was also friendly to the Diao, one of the influential *rimɓe* families on the eastern side of the Kolda region. Some say that Yoro became the candidate for Velingare because he was a relevant figure within the MFDC. However, others underlined that the canton chief himself recommended him because of his education. At the time nobody really understood how radical he was. The Velingara side of the Upper Casamance was one of the areas where the dependence of the *jiyaabe* on the *rimɓe* was strongest. Difficult to access, it was a commercial frontier for Gambian traders, an underpopulated territory suitable to groundnut cultivation and cattle herding. *Rimɓe* villages were economically strong but few in number. The *jiyaabe* largely outnumbered them: it was only a matter of putting history in motion again. His *jiyaabe* ancestry linked Yoro to the majority of the population whose needs he

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felt as his own. Though educated—and thus accustomed to a different style of life—he slept in villages, drank the villagers' water and shared their basic food. There was millet but not the abundance of milk typical of rimɓe communities. People relied on groundnuts, leaves, wild fruits and manioc to make sauce. When Yoro started his political mobilization for the 1952 elections, the people did not even know that forced labor had been abolished almost eight years before. There was no radio in the rural areas and nobody could read a newspaper. The news he carried was therefore revolutionary. “Mi saltima”—I refuse—became the slogan of his militants who stopped working at the request of colonial officials and canton chiefs. As a member of the Territorial Assembly, Yoro inspected colonial construction sites to see how workers were treated. He advised people on how to develop their families, he sought jobs for his militants, and he urged them to educate their children. His political campaigns struck at the core of rural inequalities in order to destabilize rimɓe political and economic leadership: the jiyyaabe who continued working for the rimɓe should do so only if remunerated. For elders who were young in those days, this was the real end of slavery, not 1905. In the recollections of Bassy Dia, who lived through that historical period, independence made the difference: “Before, I would have given all your daughters in marriage but you as well could do what you liked with my family without complaints from anybody. My rimɓe are the Mballo of Kulinto. Madia Mballo was the owner of my parents, he did as he liked with us.”

Though many elders of Bassy’s generation admired Senghor more than any other president of Senegal, he did remain a distant personality: he did not speak Fulfulde, and people listened to his discourses through interpreters. Yoro, instead, mastered the language. Fulfulde is rich in metaphors that stem from the long association of the Fulbe with the bush. For instance, the rimɓe are associated with the small red monkeys, and the jiyyaabe with the bigger black ones. Yoro used ordinary daily expressions, such as the simple morning greeting honopindom (are you well awake?) to instill in the people a sense of growing awareness or even enlightenment, which in Fulfulde is pinnal. The act of retrieving one’s independence—hettugol hore mun—passed through a change of mentality: the jiyyaabe had to look directly in the eyes of the rimɓe

95 Interview with Bassy Dia, locality of Koulandiala, Department of Velingara, Kolda Region, 17 Feb. 2017. One of the people in the room was a dimo; when Bassy says “you,” he refers to this man.  
96 Interview with Mamadou Abdoul Diallo (Boboyel), Kolda 7 Feb. 2014.  
97 Interview with Aliu Baldé, Kolda 13 Feb. 2014.
and show that they were brave, strong, and that they were the founders of Fuladu. Did they ignore that Molo had the same origins as them?

Elizabeth Schmidt has observed how this generation of African politicians revived local traditions that their French education had taught them to despise. For Yoro, there was an additional element: by definition people without history, the jiyaabe were the people who had made Fuladu. In 1957, his militants gained over thirty-four seats in the General Assembly of the Société Mutuelle Production Rurale (SMPR) for the Kolda Subdivision, one of the manifestations of the SIP in the 1950s. The victory was a local refraction of the radical reforms that Mamadou Dia, at the leadership of Senegalese government after the Loi Cadre of 1956, was trying to promote in the agricultural sector. The SMPR were to become real cooperatives in order to empower the peasantry against the interests and pressures of foreign commercial companies and rural patrons. The key to such developments was the method of rural animation, which entrusted local intellectuals like Yoro with the responsibility of making people aware of the freedoms and rights attached to their new status as citizens. This “populist revolution from below” troubled the rural notables and patrons who supported Senghor and Dia.

Dia’s efforts to boost rural change increased after the achievement of independence in 1960, and as a reaction, the Muslim religious leaders of the groundnut basin began to plea for his removal. Kolda was a multi-ethnic town where


each group sought social and economic promotion through participation in national politics. Peasant empowerment was not a priority for the city dwellers. Their dissatisfaction with Yoro’s populism was matched by that of the rimɓe and of the trading elite whom jiyaaba accused Yoro of racial politics. In the words of one of the participants in the political battles of those days, “he helped only his people.” In 1962, Senghor had Mamadou Dia arrested after a confrontation between their respective supporters. Dia was Fulbe, and his downfall affected Fulbe politicians like Yoro as well as trade unionists, leftist intellectuals and leaders. All of them were set aside by the party and in the majority of cases posted to positions in the civil service in other parts of the country. For the jiyaaba and the rimɓe of the Kolda region, it was the beginning of another historical phase. Relations of collaboration continued, but they were remunerated. All free citizens of the Republic of Senegal, they stood together at the bottom of a highly centralized political structure, which in the day-to-day reality of rural administration did not truly disown its colonial legacies.

**Conclusion**

Crawford Young’s review of African ideas of freedom underlines the difficulty of generalizing across the richness of languages, cultures and social organizations. Indigenous itineraries are as relevant as exogenous notions that have influenced the African intellectual universe thanks to “colonial occupation, Western education and Christian missions.” The case of the Kolda region is exemplary in this respect. Molo and Musa reframed the relations between freedom and slavery within the context of a turbulent period of economic, political and

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102 Interview with Hogo Mballo, Kolda, 5 Feb. 2014; Interview with Mamadou Abdoul Diallo (Boboyel), Kolda 7 Feb. 2014.


social innovations. The outcomes were controversial. On the one hand, they were late actors of the long age of enslavement: in their military campaigns, they captured hundreds of men, women, and children, trafficked in slaves and profited from slave labor. At the same time, they fully participated in the age of emancipation. They were not abolitionists but rather men who tried to conquer freedom according to the standards of their times. Under the cover of colonial rule, the rimbe reestablished their social privileges. For sure, colonization provided opportunities of emancipation to men of the likes of Yoro Kande, which researchers focused on the end of slavery in Africa have often emphasized. But it also meant also the daily oppression of peasants, and most importantly the stiffening of indigenous social hierarchies under the overarching umbrella of colonial ones.

Elizabeth Schmidt has argued that the struggles for citizenship of the 1950s were more than top-down politics, as battles against the power structures of colonialism had already unfolded on the ground. The legacies of slavery played a role in the decolonization of British Gambia and Sierra Leone, and in the northern regions of Cameroon, which shared with the Upper Casamance the fact of being predominantly Fulbe areas, they brought into the national struggles the diverging aspirations of former masters and slaves. The former looked forward to restoring the practices that colonial abolition had swept away; the latter sought further emancipation.106 Also in Fouta Djallon, which colonization had turned into one of the provinces of French Guinea, slavery played its part in regional politics. Here, the pre-colonial elite of freemen continued to dominate politically and freed slaves and people of slave descent amounted to one-quarter of the population.107 The figures of the Upper Casamance, as mentioned in the introduction, were even higher. Unlike in French Guinea, however, the BDS of Senghor and Dia never meant to destabilize regional hierarchies, and eventually Senghor and Dia parted precisely because of Dia’s radical perspective on the economic and political empowerment of the peasants. While Guinea abolished chieftaincy immediately after independence in 1958, Senegal really managed a slow transition from a hereditary chiefship to professionally trained civil servants by transforming the canton chiefs into chefs


d’arrondissement. For the Kolda region, two of these chiefs hailed from prestigious rimɓe families that by the time of decolonization had clearly understood the importance of French-style education. The origins of Yoro and the climate of populist reforms that developed under the leadership of Dia helped the resurgence of Molo’s emancipatory spirit. On the eastern side of the Kolda region there are today many jiyaabe villages, which were founded at the time of independence by jiyaabe who, thanks to economic benefits provided by state intervention in the agricultural sector, finally decided to achieve jeyal-hoore mun in the full sense of the expression.

The lesson learned from this historical reconstruction moves beyond the entanglement of the historical grassroots of freedom with slavery and its legacies. It discloses unfulfilled emancipatory projects, and carries along the echo of people’s aspirations for the world-to-be and of their attempts to shape themselves under changing and unpredictable circumstances. The underlying message is simple. The problem is not to understand how African societies reacted to the implanting of Western ideas of freedom and got rid of slavery, but rather of capturing the processes through which, in their own ways and following their own agenda, they have been active participants in discussions about freedom and slavery. This local narrative pulses at the rhythm of world history.