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| Institution: SOAS University of London | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 28 - History | | |
| Title of case study: Empowering Communities with Ascribed Slave Status in Mali and Internationally to Fight Discrimination and Stigma | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 – 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Dr Marie Rodet | Reader in the History of Africa | 2011 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 - 31 December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research carried out at SOAS has raised awareness of the history of internal slavery in Mali, transmitted hitherto lost history between elders and the younger generations and exposed enduring discrimination against populations with ascribed status as descendants of former slaves. The research project has helped 6,000 community members and 500 school children in Mali to grapple with this history through film screenings, song, dance and eloquence competitions. A village in Western Mali has co-produced a comic book on slavery. The research also gave anti-slavery activists the tools to re-start work on criminalizing descent-based slavery in Mali, and it led to a US asylum case being decided in favour of the Malian claimant.</p> | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Populations stigmatized on the basis of being of “slave descent” are amongst the most vulnerable to economic uncertainties and to modern slavery. In West Africa, this is also due to the fact that the history of internal slavery is still a taboo subject. Descent-based slavery and its legacies continue to prevail in most communities of the west and south of Mali, notably in Kayes, which was a major transit zone of slave caravans in the nineteenth century. The region has experienced waves of emancipation since the official colonial abolition of 1905. Since 2001 Mali has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and hence has committed itself to the abolition of slavery. Indeed article 5 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, 1981 highlights the human rights obligation against slavery. Yet populations with ascribed “slave status”, a social status imposed upon them by the historical ruling class on the sole suspicion that one of their ancestors may have been enslaved, are still discriminated against and stigmatized. Since the coup d’état in 2012 in Mali, political efforts such as a national law criminalizing slavery - due in 2016 and which would give appropriate legal tools to prosecute perpetrators of descent-based slavery - have been paused.</p> <p>Research conducted by Dr Marie Rodet (Senior Lecturer in the History of Africa at SOAS since 2011) has 1) analysed historic accounts of slavery, resistance against slavery and emancipation in the period 1890 – 1940 in the Kayes region; and 2) explored how this historic knowledge can be mobilised as a resource to fight for human rights and against contemporary forms of exploitation, including modern slavery, in Mali today. Key scholarship of African slavery tends to deny historical changes in the institution and the existence of resistance against an intrinsically violent institution. This limits the effectiveness of those analyses to examine contemporary challenges of further exploitation faced by those communities. Prior scholars have also often analysed Kayes as a region which would have experienced only few slave departures following the 1905 colonial abolition of slavery. Dr Rodet’s research has revealed that this is because rebellions against slavery in the Kayes region have paradoxically left only very few traces in the colonial archives and more generally in the history of the region [3.4]. Dr Rodet’s research has</p> | | |

instead focused on the mostly orally transmitted cultural heritage of formerly enslaved populations in Kayes and how once they obtained their freedom, they managed to form independent communities in Mali, such as the Diambourou [3.1; 3.2]. Dr Rodet demonstrated earlier studies underestimated women's participation in this exodus and liberation [3.5; 3.6].

Collecting and examining of the specific history of rebel villages in the Kayes region, has revealed how formerly enslaved populations managed to rebuild autonomous communities and social networks, and thus to overcome legacies of slavery through the remembering of self-liberation on their own terms [3.1; 3.4; 3.5]. After having collected more than 150 testimonies about the history of slavery by descendants of formerly enslaved populations from 2008 to 2009, in 2010 communities started to directly tell their history through the making of a documentary film. For the first time descendants' memories were given the space to be expressed in the official public sphere, and their voices heard outside their communities [3.2]. The result was a 23-minute documentary *The Diambourou*, created in partnership with visual artist, Fanny Challier, which was released in 2014 [3.1]. At the time of writing, 90 per cent of the film's protagonists have died, making the film a unique audio-visual record and resource on slavery and emancipation.

Dr Rodet has also examined the cultural dimension of the diaspora - through music and religion [3.5]. This aspect has long been observed in the Atlantic world, but it has received only scant attention within the context of emancipated slave communities in West Africa. Music as a trigger of emotions emerged during the making of the documentary as a powerful medium to convey the trauma of enslavement and the extraordinary, embodied resilience against the slave condition to the screen. Nostalgia and emotions associated with traumatic history were transmitted even if original musical / cultural practices changed and adapted in the new environment throughout time. The theme of family separation was also part of these traumatic memories [3.3].

In February 2020, Dr Rodet was awarded a GBP1,400,000 ESRC-GCRF research grant (2020-2023) to deepen her research and impact among populations with ascribed slave status in Mali to raise the visibility of past and present internally displaced populations escaping slavery and support their active political, social and economic work in securing sustainable livelihoods.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Marie Rodet et Fanny Challier (2014): "*The Diambourou: Slavery and Emancipation in Kayes – Mali*". The film can be accessed online here: <https://vimeo.com/245704289> (English); <https://vimeo.com/245704895> (French). **Selected at the following Film Festivals:** Cinema des Foyers (2016), EthnograFilm (2016), CIRESC (2014), 4ème Festival International de Films de Chercheurs en Sciences Humaines et Sociales: Terrains, écritures et trajectoires (2014).

3.2 Rodet, Marie (2020), "Documenting the History of Slavery on Film in Kayes, Mali", *Journal of Global Slavery* 5: pp 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2405836X-00501009> **Peer-reviewed**

3.3 Rodet, Marie (2010) "Mémoires de l'esclavage dans la région de Kayes: Histoire d'une disparition," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 197: pp 263–291. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.15854> **Peer-reviewed**

3.4 Rodet, Marie (2013), "Listening to the History of Those Who Don't Forget," *History in Africa* 40, s27-29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2013.26> **Peer-reviewed**

3.5 Rodet, Marie. "Escaping slavery and building diasporic communities in French Soudan and Senegal, c. 1880–1940," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48(2)(2015), pp 209–237. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44723365>. **Peer-reviewed**

3.6 Rodet, Marie (2014) "'I Ask for Divorce Because My Husband Does not Let Me Go Back to My Country of Origin with My Brother': Gender, Family, and the End of Slavery in the Region of Kayes, French Soudan (1890-1920)", in G Campbell and E Elbourne (eds) *Sex, Power and Slavery: The Dynamics of Carnal Relations under Enslavement*. Athens: Ohio University Press, pp 182-202. ISBN: 9780821420973. Submitted to REF2021. **Peer-reviewed**

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Rodet's research has benefited communities in the Kayes region of Mali, including teachers, schoolchildren and members of the wider population, helping transmit stories of elders to the

younger generation and raising positive awareness and understanding of their own history. It has also benefited a local Malian NGO, provided new tools to anti-slavery activists in Mali, created teaching tools, and influenced the outcome of an asylum case in the US, as well as raising awareness of the history of internal slavery in Mali and internationally

Impact on local communities, school children and NGO Donkosira in Kayes, Mali

With the support of her local partner - Mali-based NGO Donkosira - Dr. Rodet screened the documentary film *The Diambourou* [3.1] in February 2017 in the villages where it had been filmed. More than **6,000 people** in total attended these screenings with a majority of children and adult women [5.1a p7]. Audiences were encouraged to tell their own histories during after-screening Q&A. In Bouillagui for example, a man from the public explained that his grandmother told him how slave merchants would insert spines in slaves' feet at night to prevent them from running away. Another young man explained how people from outside the village would call him a slave because he was from Bouillagui and how he had once started a fight because of this. Others realized through the film the level of their own denial of this history and experienced mixed feelings of shame and pride when watching [5.1a p7-9].

In February 2018, the film was shown to approximately **500 children in local schools** in Kayes. In the follow-up discussions after screenings with pupils and teachers, it was clear that the film had made a deep impression. Pupils expressed a desire to know more about the topic and address the issue. Their comments included: "I want to know more about the history of slavery even if it makes me cry from the start to the end" [5.2a, p22]; "If I had the means, I would help you to inform the public more and fight against slavery" [5.2a, p131]; "Through those stories, we can get inspired about how to fight against slavery... This film allows me to know more about the history of my country, it also gives me ideas and courage to fight just like [the slaves] fought for their freedom." [5.2a, p135]. Awareness was also raised of the derogatory connotations of "Diambourou" as pupils did not know of its historical meaning. One pupil said "... I can no longer use the term "Diambourou" in a derogatory way. No, they are our grand-fathers, grand-mothers who were driven out of their villages and sold into slavery...From today on, I will use this term as a pride and no longer as an insult" [5.2a, p158].

These screenings put in the spotlight populations who have long been marginalized in Mali because of their ascribed status as descendants of formerly enslaved populations. They raised awareness **among young generations** about the need to fight against discrimination and exploitation, including modern slavery. One participant noted: "Indeed, the younger generations have understood, and slavery is one of the darkest and most unhappy pages in our history" [5.1a, p8]. Villagers recognised that the documentary was a powerful tool and vehicle for history and memory transmission in their communities and beyond. One teacher noted "This documentary retraces the life of the great-grandparents not only [of] students, but also some of their teachers. As such, it was very useful for students and teachers" [5.2a p27].

After the screenings, it became clear, however, that the documentary was not enough and a partnership with **local NGO Donkosira has been formed to sustain work to protect rural knowledge**. While a national school strike thwarted plans in 2019, in January 2020, a school eloquence competition was organised, in which approximately 100 children took part. Further community engagement in 2020 was cut short by COVID-19 lockdowns and curfews, school closures and curbs on travel. A song and dance competition was rearranged after the COVID-19 related lockdown and soon after the schools re-opened in November 2020 [5.3]. 100 children participated and it was attended by more than 300 people. These competitions deepened participants' understanding of stigma and trauma [5.3]. Likewise, work was paused, but then re-started post-lockdown in October 2020, on a graphic novel [5.4a] and an animation film. Dr. Rodet and Donkosira partnered with a **local graphic designer** to develop a graphic novel to be distributed in local schools and to facilitate class discussions on the topic. The graphic novel – of which 500 will be printed and sent to 10 schools – is about the history of a rebellion against slavery which led to the creation of the new village of Bouillagui by formerly enslaved populations. The novel was co-produced by the local community of Bouillagui who were fully engaged in the process of narrating the history of their village and of introducing fictional elements to produce historical

interpretation. Their inputs, edits, and critical evaluations have shaped the graphic novel and boosted their own creativity and heritage practices. As testified by Donkosira: “[The villagers] are proud to leave this trace for their descendants because it’s important that anyone knows their origins” [5.3]. On the storyboard, the villagers added some dialogues to make it more credible such as “Eh Allah, what are we going to do?” when we see a woman complaining about the famine in the village [5.4b p2]. The graphic novelist himself learned much from the co-production process: “It’s a part of history that I knew little about as it’s very badly taught in school ... I like the fact that I was directly in touch with the Bouillagui villagers, that I was able to meet them in their village before starting to work on the graphic novel. I think it puts the villagers to contribution and allows fidelity to the diverse narratives told in the novel” [5.4c]. This work also had a positive impact on Donkosira who has been able to reinforce their action capacities, making them a crucial stakeholder in Kayes for awareness campaigns towards the young generations against slavery. The General Secretary of Donkosira states: “...this partnership has made it possible to strengthen our capacities in this area and to broaden our fields of activity in an innovative way” [5.3].

Supporting anti-slavery activism in Mali and internationally

With the recent increase of violence against populations with ascribed status as descendants of formerly enslaved populations in the Kayes region, the documentary film has experienced a second life as an anti-slavery activist tool. The film has helped to bridge the gap between endogenous historical fighting against slavery and contemporary anti-slavery activism in the Kayes region and in the diaspora in Europe, who have played a large part in creating and funding the **anti-slavery movement Gambana/Ganbanaaxun**, a transnational Soninke diaspora organization based in France and particularly involved in the “Kayes slavery crisis”. The film has become a hit on social media. Since it was uploaded on the web in December 2017, the film has been viewed in more than 27 countries with a majority of viewing in countries where the Malian (and Soninke) Diaspora is very present (France, Spain) and in Mali. The views especially increased following Dr. Rodet’s engagement in 2018 with Gambana/Ganbanaaxun, who regularly reposted the link on their Facebook page. Following a screening event with Gambana/Ganbanaaxun in Paris on 26 October 2019, the video was viewed online 738 times within 24 hours. The screening and the following conference/debate [5.6b and d] were crucial for the Gambana/Ganbanaaxun activists as it offered them a unique platform at EHESS, a prestigious university in France and thus intellectual legitimacy in their transnational fight against slavery in West Africa. As a Gambana / Ganbanaaxun activist explained: the film helped “to create unity and fight against division, so that we prevent others from dividing us, [the film has helped] to bring the combat to its term because it is the memory of people who already fought against slavery and liberated themselves.” [5.6a]. The activist also highlighted that the President of activist movement Ganbanaaxun Fedde asserted that the film screening and conference “have permitted more visibility [in the academic circle] while we face an important issue of denial even by our own intellectuals. Conference series and TV programmes were listed on our action plan since 2010. [So] the conference has helped us to put this action plan in place. Until then, we mostly communicated through WhatsApp vocals in the Soninke language and it was clearly not sufficient as it limited our impact and the visibility of our combat beyond our own community”. [5.6c]. As of 31 July 2020, there have been 2,786 views in France, 403 in Spain and 370 in Mali [5.5]. In total, since 2017 the film has been viewed online 5,079 times.

Influencing the outcome of a US asylum case

In early 2019, Dr. Rodet appeared as an expert witness in the asylum hearing of a man from a family with ascribed slave status in Western Mali, who was seeking asylum in the US. **It was the first time that descent-based slavery has been used as the critical underpinning argument for asylum by a Malian national** from Western Mali, and the successful outcome was a direct result of Rodet’s input. The public defender representing the claimant wrote: “The immigration judge found her [Rodet’s] testimony to be credible and reliable and ultimately granted my client relief from deportation to Mali as a result” [5.11].

Improving teaching on slavery and raising media and public awareness

The production of teaching and awareness tools has also been prolonged in the form of a web documentary entitled “Bouillagui – A Free Village” [5.4e]. The web documentary was screened in

Bouillagui in November 2020 and is already being used internationally as a teaching tool at the university level. Also, in November 2020, more than 40 University lecturers from across Europe and North America attended a webinar by Dr. Rodet to discuss using the documentary as a public history tool. A History professor at **Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts** spoke of her use of the web documentary in the classroom stating: "...it gives us voices that otherwise are really, really difficult for us to transmit particularly to students...It was so powerful for them and I'm so glad that this is now a tool in the arsenal to be able to open up these conversations" [5.4di, dii].

In May 2019, Dr. Rodet advised TV5 - the international francophone channel – prior to its broadcast of a special news piece on the violence and discrimination suffered by people with ascribed slave status in Mali. **The journalists' and network's own understandings were greatly enhanced**, as one journalist testified: "In my case, the work of a researcher allowed me to better tackle a sensitive subject, which continues to be debated in Mali. In that sense, it was essential in my eyes" [5.7]. The 30-minute piece featured key community members and activists and accurately portrayed the current political and social dynamics of stigma and discrimination and led to **healthy debate when it was made available on Youtube**. One commentor noted how fundamental knowledge of historic and contemporary slavery was: "For me it is a problem of national education so children must go to school; it is very important" [5.8]. Rodet also appeared on TV5 news network in France in October 2019. During her interview the broadcast featured clips from her documentary The Diambourou. The broadcast brought awareness of this issue to a broader range of people. More than 18K people watched the interview live on the TV5 Facebook page. One viewer wrote in a comment: "Bravo for this big spotlight on an often taboo and very hidden phenomenon" [5.9g]. The official launch of Marie Rodet's current ESRC-GCRF project in Mali in June 2020 was reported by the leading national Malian newspaper L'Essor, while the ceremony was also live screened on the project Facebook page, reaching 3200 and 4200 people respectively. More recent activities reported on the project Facebook page reached more than 12,500 people and 825 engagements within the first week of posting [5.10a p1 and p4].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1. Esclavage Interne Kayes 2017 CAN Report 2017 **a)** French; **b)** English translation of pp7-9
- 5.2. Rapport d'étude des réponses aux questionnaires, 2014, **a)** French; **b)** English translation of comments on pp 22, 27, 131, 135, 141, 158
- 5.3. Email from NGO Donkosira, Nov 2020 (French, English)
- 5.4. Impact of comic and film on community and audiences
 - a.** Storyboard: https://www.academia.edu/42832650/BD_Bouillagui_un_village_libre
 - bi)** Photos of community consultation and **bii)** Graphic novel storyboard with community notes
 - c)** Email from Graphic novelist (French and English)
 - di)** Webinar hosted by Rodet on "Bouillagui – A Free Village": <https://vimeo.com/478738839> and comment at time code 00:51:32-00:52:35 **dii)** transcript of comment
 - e)** "Bouillagui: A Free Village" (film) - <http://bouillagui.soas.ac.uk>
- 5.5. Vimeo analytics report – 31 July 2020
- 5.6. Evidence of impact of conference on anti-slavery movement Gambana_Ganbanaaxun
 - a)** transcript of video statement - (French and English) and; **bi)** Clips of Q&A at Conférence-Débat autour du film documentaire Les Diambourou, EHESS Paris 26 Octobre 2019 <https://vimeo.com/465155768?activityReferer=1> (French) and **bii)** transcript (French); **c)** Email from President of Gambanaaxu Fedde (French, English) and; **d)** Conférence-Débat autour du film documentaire Les Diambourou report: **di)** French; **dii)** English
- 5.7 Letter – Journalist, TV5 in French and English **a)** French **b)** English
- 5.8 Mali : Kayes, l'esclavage en héritage, TV5 news 13 May 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT-UvGOQho8> (French)
- 5.9 Screenshots of Facebook shares and comments on Rodet's interview on TV5 news (a-g)
- 5.10 Facebook Insight Data: **a)** 26 Sept 2020 post data; **b)** Key metrics post 26 Sept 2020
- 5.11 Letter - Public Defender, Center of Immigration and Justice, Vera Institute of Justice