

Marriage is the Arena: “Inside” Stories of Genealogical Purity and Slave Ancestry from Southern Senegal (Kolda region)

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Abstract

The choice of a marriage partner is one of the contexts in which racial arguments about the human difference between slave and master descendants are more likely to manifest themselves in contemporary Senegal. By drawing on oral history and ethnography from the Fulfulde-speaking context of the Kolda region, this article explores the dynamics that spark up when girls and boys hope to marry across the boundary between the two social categories. The discussions that follow provide an occasion to share recollections associated with the history of slavery and the slave trade across different generations. They also reveal concrete worries about the extension, solidity and development of family and political solidarities in post-slavery Senegal.

Keywords: Senegal, Marriage, Family Networks, Slave-descendants, Fulbe.

Introduction

When Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president and “father” of the Senegalese nation, used the emotionally charged term “race”, he addressed the long history of domination through which external slavers and European colonizers stripped Africans of their freedom and dignity. Processes of racialization and experiences of anti-black racism developed at the frontier between Africa and the rest of the world. From his perspective, Africans had to react by rediscovering and appropriating the universal values associated with their own “race” (Aberger 1980, pp. 276-277; Mabama 2011, p. 6).

In line with the common wisdom that sees “race” as a typical (and highly contested) Western concept emerging out of the history of the Atlantic slave trade and the late nineteenth century conquest of Africa, Senegalese public opinion continues to share Senghor’s perspective. In principle, racial discrimination is an experience that Senegalese people endure when they move out of their own country, while a culture of equality and hospitality

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facilitates integration within the country, as mentioned in the government response to the questions raised by the United Nation High Commissioner in preparation for the Durban Review Conference held in Geneva in 2009¹. “Race” nonetheless can be conceived of, in the broadest sense, as a historical and social construction of human difference, like Bruce Hall (2011, p. 9) has done. Its place in African internal history is thus a legitimate (and challenging) research question.

Across West Africa, the nineteenth century witnessed an increase in internal enslavement and the use of slaves to meet the demands of expanding commercial agriculture (Klein 1998, p. 41; Lovejoy 2011, p. 136). From these circumstances, the twentieth century inherited the pervasive social idea that slaves’ human inferiority spills over to their descendants (Botte 1994, pp. 121-122; Klein 2005, pp. 840-841; Rossi 2009). The twentieth-first century is trying to take stock of this. In the opinion of Senegalese historian Ibrahima Thioub (2012, p. 11), the discriminative role played by “race” in the Atlantic world has been taken on by genealogical purity in West African contexts. As slaves and their masters were hardly discernible in chromatic terms, ideologies of blood and origins fulfilled this function and naturalized enslavement as an inheritable human condition that neither manumission nor colonial abolition could ever erase. The display of freeborn/noble ancestors became the sign of a man (or woman) of quality (see also N’gaïdé 2003; Klein 2005; Schmitz 2006), while people classified through local terms for “a slave” coped with the consequences of a stained social pedigree, whether or not their ancestors were slaves.

Historical and sociological evidence collected in the aftermath of Senegalese independence supports Thioub’s argument. At the time, the social boundaries between ancient masters and their freed slaves did matter, either in the rural areas (Pélistier 1966; Silla 1966; Wane 1969) or in the rapidly growing peripheries of the capital city, Dakar (e.g. Thoré 1964; Diop 1965). Governor Ernest Roume’s Decree of 1905 had outlawed the slave trade and slavery throughout French West Africa without emancipating slaves: children born to slave parents after its promulgation were not free (Klein 1998, pp. 136-140). In some areas of Senegal, indigenous forms of slavery continued well into the colonial period and slaves understood that there was a possibility of claiming autonomy from their masters only at the time of decolonization. Even this was contentious. The freeborn/nobles of

1 République du Sénégal, 25 Mars 2008, Note A/S réponses au questionnaire établi par le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux Droits de l’Homme adressé aux états membres en application de la décision pc.1/10 prise par le comité préparatoire de la conférence d’examen de Durban a sa première session, <https://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/pdf/replies/Senegal.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2019). The Durban Review Conference is the official name of the 2009 United Nations World Conference Against Racism, also known as Durban II.

the 1960s disdained intermarrying with freed slaves and their children, and stayed away from "caste" people as well². In spite of the fact that the 1959 Constitutional Law had underlined that "all citizens were equal before the law ... without privilege arising from locality, birth, person or family" (Fall 2007, p. 18), masters' claims over their slaves ranged from practices such as deciding on slave marriages to requesting their labour assistance during the agricultural season. Former masters expected their "slaves" to provide assistance with heavy domestic chores during ceremonial activities, and the "slaves" seeing this as a part of their social legacy, complied eagerly with such requests. Some masters went as far as claiming their slaves' property at the time of their (slaves') death (Badji 2006, pp. 260-274). While a freeborn man could take a wife with a slave background, the marriage of girls beneath their status caused commotion.

Insults related to slave ancestry occasionally stir up national and local political debates even in the twentieth-first century, and marriage between master and slave descendants remains a sensitive topic³. Although recent scholarship has highlighted increasing attention being paid in Senegalese marital choices to financial aspects and fewer concerns about family background and social origins (Hannaford and Foley 2015; Kringelbach 2016), family discussions about appropriate matches are as lively as ever in rural Senegal, as well as in cities and in the diaspora (Bass and Sow 2006; Dial 2008, p. 70; Buggenhagen 2012, pp. 121-122).

2 In Senegal, and other countries of Francophone West Africa, the term "caste" identifies professional endogamous groups (namely bards or griots, blacksmiths and cobblers) that were part of the pre-colonial social stratification as much as freemen and slaves. These groups were classified as free, and could own slaves as much as the freemen and the slaves themselves. Unlike freeborn, however, they could not hold positions of authority and play leadership roles. In that, they were similar to slaves. Their position in society was intermediate, and they tended to preserve their professional skills and cultural heritage by marrying within their social category. For "caste" in West African history see Tamari 1997, for "caste" discriminations in contemporary Senegal see Mbow 2000.

3 A good example is the recent dispute between former President of Senegal Abdoulaye Wade and the incumbent Macky Sall. When in 2015, Wade's son Karim came to court on charges of corruption, Wade insulted Sall by calling him a slave descendant. Then an inquiry carried out by the newspaper *Monde Afrique* in Sall's home village came to the conclusion that he was not of slave ancestry. On the contrary, his ancestors owned slaves, as if being a master-descendant could be a point of honour (https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/03/20/chez-les-esclaves-de-la-famille-du-president-senegalais-macky-sall_4598251_3212.html). During the presidential campaign of 2019, Sall himself felt compelled to comment on Wade's claims: "Those who know the Fouta and its history, which apparently does not apply to President Wade, know who I am and where I come from. They know that my family roots are in the Toro and the Nguénar; they know for sure that I come from a lineage of noble, renowned and prestigious warriors. This fact is history." (https://www.leral.net/Macky-Sall-Esclavage-anthropophagie-La-verite-sur-mes-origines-Reponse-a-Abdoulaye-Wade_a237833.html).

A closer look at four marital “inside stories”, drawn from research carried out in the southern part of Senegal (Kolda region) over the last five years,⁴ helps this article account for the social crisis that often develop out of the aspirations of youths of freeborn/noble and slave ancestry to intermarry. By keeping a privileged eye on slave voices and perspectives, recent studies on the legacies of slavery carried out in this part of West Africa⁵ have fallen short of documenting how the long-standing worry of people of freeborn/noble ancestry about living up to the social expectations historically associated with their status plays out in concrete situations. The analysis I propose is built from the perspective of the freeborn/nobles because it was through close acquaintance with their family networks that the four stories emerged. The point of view of slave descendants is woven through the narrative, and this becomes more evident in the conclusion, where I give some of their opinions about intermarriages with master descendants. The term “inside” qualifies the four stories as neither completely private nor public, but somewhere in between family matters and issues of broader social concern.

In Fulfulde, the majority language of the Kolda region, freeborn/nobles are known as *rimbe* (sing. *dimo*), while slave-descendants, regardless of the actual status of their ancestors, are referred to as the *jiyaabe* (sing. *jiyaado*) (Bellagamba 2017, pp. 84-85; 2018a). After the end of slavery, lineage endogamy has helped the *rimbe* to ensure their cohesiveness against the *jiyaabe*, who in many rural areas outnumbered them.⁶

4 Research in the Kolda region was funded by the European Research Council under the auspices of the ERC project 313737 – Shadows of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond: A Historical Anthropology. My gratitude and affection goes to all the people, who participated in the research, as friendly informants, committed fieldwork assistants, hosts concerned for my well-being. Between 2014 and 2017 over two hundred in-depth interviews were carried out with men and women of freeborn/noble and slave ancestry in the cities of Kolda and Velingara, and in the eastern part of the region on topics such as the abolition of slavery, the relations between freed slaves and representatives of the master class in the colonial period, the political developments at the time of Senegalese independence, contemporary cohabitation (and tensions) between people of freeborn/noble and slave ancestry. All identities have been anonymized. Elhaji Baldé, whom I thank for his friendly assistance and support, made all translation from Fulfulde to French. If not otherwise acknowledged, translations from French into English are mine. I dedicate this essay to the memory of El Hadji Buba Michael Baldeh, who guided my first steps in the Fulbe world of the Upper Gambia and Southern Senegal.

5 For instance Pelckmans 2015 on Fulfulde-speaking groups of Mali, Rodet 2010 on communities of run-away slaves in the border regions between Mali and Senegal, Gaibazzi 2016 on the Soninké communities of the Upper Gambia.

6 Fulbe endogamy (and isogamy) are largely discussed in the historical and ethnographic literature on Fulfulde-speaking communities throughout Western and Central Africa, starting with the seminal analyses of Marguerite Dupire (1963; 1970; 1972). Marrying girls within the same agnatic group helped pastoral Fulbe of the past, as much as Fulfulde semi-sedentarized or sedentarized communities, to retain human and material resources in-

Evidence in this respect covers the whole twentieth century, starting with the 1904 notes of Charles de La Roncière,⁷ the first French colonial resident in this part of Senegal, who described the *rimbe* as "jealous of their race"⁸. Geographical and historical research carried out in the 1950s and 1990s (Pélissier 1966; Fanchette 1999; N'gaïdé 1999) kept underlining the endogamy of the *rimbe*. Today, freeborn/nobles are to a large extent all connected thanks to the overlapping bonds that marriage has created among individuals and families. When questioned, *rimbe* youths vehemently protest against parental control over their marriage choices. Parents, for their part, declare that the traditional practice of selecting the first spouse for their children is waning away. "I leave my children free to choose," remarked Mamadou, my friend and research partner. Over 90% of the population of his village – Sare Goto – consists of *rimbe*. Because of the preference of both the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe* to settle separately, this is a peculiarity shared with other neighbouring rural communities.

In any case Mamadou's liberalism cannot ensure that if his children make the "wrong" choice, family havoc would not arise: as both his two wives are daughters of prestigious *rimbe* families, they are not ready to accept either a daughter- or son-in-law of slave ancestry. In addition, Mamadou takes pride in acting as a match-maker between the sons and daughters of his

side the same network of kin and kindred. Male exogamy, on the other hand, could ensure territorial and political alliances. Dupire's conclusion was that endogamy – whether performed inside the patri-lineage or at the broader level of Fulbe ethnicity – had to be considered "temporary measure linked to the preservation of some kind of power, especially the political one". For Laurent Barry (2000), consanguineous marriage resulted out of a dislike of intermarrying with people one did not really know. Roger Botte (1994) in the case of Fouta Jallon and Lotte Pelckmans (2012) for the Fulbe of the Harare region (Mali) have described freeborn/noble endogamy avoiding people of slave ancestry as a strategy to retain prestige. See also Stenning (1959, pp. 41-46) on the pastoral Fulbe of Northern Nigeria during the 1950s. More recent analyses of Fulbe marriage include De Brujin (1997), Ciavolella (2010), and Furth 2005.

7 ANS, 1G 294, Charles de La Roncière, *Travail d'hivernage, Historique du Fouladou* (1904).

8 For the French colonizers, "race" meant a inheritable combination of physical and moral qualities that explained the natural diversity of African populations and their historical conflicts (Glasman 2004, p. 125; see also Dulucq, Klein and Stora 2008). Louis Léon César Faidherbe, governor of the Senegal colony between 1954 and 1965, considered races, and not states, the basic units for understanding African history. His collaborators and the successive generations of colonial officials mapped the physical appearance, the history and the habits of Senegalese populations, as much as their attitude towards French rule (e.g. Faidherbe 1859; Bérenger-Féraud 1879). On the colonial representation of the alterity of the Fulbe and the mystery of their origin in relation to other African populations see also Monteil (1950), Brasseur and Brasseur (1978), Robinson (1992), Pondopoulo (1996). How much colonial racial discourses appropriated and strengthened internal Fulbe processes of differentiation has been demonstrated by historians (Robinson 1985, pp. 86-97; Hall 2011).

rimbe acquaintances: he spots the right girl in terms of the *rimbe*'s criteria of family, beauty and character. This is a good example of how strong collective feelings against the mixing of *rimbe* and *jiyaabe* family lines can override individual egalitarian attitudes. Before detailing the four marriage stories, the following pages introduce on-going arguments about the difference between the *jiyaabe* and the *rimbe* from the perspective of representatives from both groups. Each of the four stories opens a window onto the various ways in which issues of genealogical purity and slave ancestry interweave with individual life trajectories, family histories and gender. Expectations for a marriage that is respectful of the historical boundary between the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe* are in fact higher for girls than for boys, and girls more than boys suffer the consequences of boundary-crossing. The stories of "Demba and Bintou" and "Modou and Mariama" concern marriage between a *dimo* and a woman of slave ancestry. "Aisha and Moustapha" and "Jenneba and Youssuf" are, in contrast, cases of female hypogamy, the most difficult circumstance to accommodate because it often results in the alienation of girls from both their families and their in-laws.

Three questions drive the conclusion. Is marriage a privileged arena for socializing the racial legacies of slavery and the slave trade across generations? What is the position of the *jiyaabe* on inter-marriages with the *rimbe*? Are the racial arguments expressing other kinds of worries? As the four stories show, these arguments apparently shed light on, and provide a language for, broader societal issues relating to the extension, solidity and development of family and political solidarities in post-slavery Senegal.

In each other's eyes: the *rimbe*, the *jiyaabe*, the reciprocal difference

Throughout West Africa researchers have reported silences, omissions and even public censorship with regard to the legacies of slavery (Rossi 2015; Bellagamba 2017). In the Kolda region, multiple sensibilities and experiences display a great diversity of positions in relation to the slave past. Lack of consensus does not imply the complete erasure of these discussions from social and political life, however. Both the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe* talk of their past association with slavery and are ready, if asked, to provide their personal opinion on the evolving relationships between the two groups. I will now attempt to illustrate how the reciprocal difference is constructed in interaction by describing the perspective of Mamadou, and his *jiyaabe* elderly friends Dembayell and Samba, who helped me understand the social and political trajectory of the *jiyaabe* at the local and regional level through their family and personal recollections. Coumba is a *kordo* (plur. *horbe*), i.e. an elderly woman of slave ancestry, while Ibrahima is a young *dimo* from the village of Sare Goto, whose marriage Mamadou recently facilitated.

Colonial censuses of the 1950s estimated that half the population of the Kolda region consisted of *jíyaabe* (N'gaïdé 1999, p. 152; Fanchette 2011, p. 93). The term disappeared from official discourse after independence from France was achieved in 1960. Fostering the peaceful cohabitation among the multiple components of the nation was one of the principal objectives of Senghor (Hesseling 1985, p. 81-82; Smith 2006), under whose guidance the racial classifications inherited from the colonizers lost their administrative significance. Today, for Mamadou, Dembayell and Samba, being called "racist" would equate to a betrayal of republican ideals. In their eyes, the term "racist" describes a person who helps only his own people, and neither the *jíyaabe* nor the *rimbe* should indulge in this deprecable attitude once they are wealthy or powerful enough to assist less fortunate fellow men. "Race", which they express through the broad term of *leñol*,⁹ conjures instead the possibility to claim "descent" either from freeborn/noble ancestors or enslaved ones: it evokes the importance of family background, social origins and associated emotions of affectiveness, mutuality and closeness in the construction of moral and social selves in a way comparable to what Philip Burnham (1972; 1996) and Paul Riesman (1977, p. 127; Riesman and Szanton 1992, pp. 16-17) observed during the 1970s among the Fulbe of Northern Cameroon and the Jelgooji Fulbe of Burkina Faso respectively.

Belonging to either *leñol fulbe* or *leñol jíyaabe* is patrilineal. People on the side of the *leñol fulbe* see themselves, and are considered by the *jíyaabe*, as the offspring of the freeborn/noble families who inhabited this part of Senegal at the end of the nineteenth century. Some hailed from Northern Senegal, and crossed the Gambia River. Others came from the peripheries of the Fouta Jallon Imamate, at the border between contemporary Guinea Conakry and Guinea-Bissau. Although they were semi-sedentary, they retained pastoral work, and today they are among the wealthier cattle-owners in the rural areas of the Kolda region. *Leñol jíyaabe*, on the other hand, are the children of slaves, and an array of other people who fall roughly into three groups.

The first group claims that their ancestors participated in the political struggles which in the second part of the nineteenth century resulted in Alpha Molo Balde, and then his son, Mussa Molo, establishing their military control over the Kolda region and neighbouring areas of The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. These leaders had a *jíyaabe* background¹⁰. The second con-

9 *Leñol* is a broad term, which contextually qualifies the patri-lineage as well as the clan, the tribe, the ethnic group and the nation (see Dupire 1970; Furth 2005; Ciavolella 2010). In the Kolda region, it has the broader meaning of people sharing the same ancestry.

10 For historical details see Carpenter (2012), Bellagamba (2017). After Alpha Molo's death in 1881, the son Mussa Molo successfully strengthened his hold on the territories stretching from the middle and upper reaches of the Gambia River to the northeastern part of Guinea-Bissau by playing off the conflicting colonial interests of the French, the British and the Portuguese. Once they achieved the full control of the modern-day Kolda

sist of slaves and slave descendants from neighbouring Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry: the first was a Portuguese colony, the second was known as French Guinea. Living conditions were harsh in both colonial territories in comparison with the Kolda region, where the population was scarce and land abundant. Throughout the colonial period, crossing the border into southern Senegal worked as a strategy of social emancipation. The fact that it often ended in new forms of subordination to the *rimbe* families that controlled the areas in which these immigrants settled did not stop people from trying to achieve social mobility through geographical one. Last but not the least, the category of *jiyaabe* includes the children of immigrants from other ethnic groups seeking assimilation into the Fulbe culture and way of life, whom the Fulbe have welcomed but never fully integrated (N'gaïdé 1999, pp. 153-154; Fanchette 2011, p. 35).

Even though today not all *jiyaabe* have histories of enslavement in their family tree, once entrapped into this kind of differential inclusion into Fulbe ranks, it is hard to sort out. As Samba explained: “you are *jiyaado* because of inheritance. Whatever your father was, you become like him”.¹¹ According to Mamadou, “when the physical appearance of a newcomer was misleading, our elders used other evidence: they looked at the way a man stepped into a room. If he entered with the right foot, he was a *dimo*. If he used the left foot, he was a *jiyaado*.”¹² Matter-of-factly, Dembayell underlined: “We belong to the blacks ... This is why we mix with other ethnic groups ... the Fulbe, on the other hand, refuse to mix with the blacks, because they have a fair complexion.”¹³ “You can see that we are different, even our bodies are different,” emphasized Samba, as he pointed to Momadou’s tall and lean figure.¹⁴

Remarks on the physical dissimilarity between the *jiyaabe* and the *rimbe* go as far as teasing each other that they are the black and the red monkeys which roam the rural areas of the Kolda region. Red ones, which are actually green (*Chlorocebus sabaeus*), are small and lean, and sport a golden, green-flashed fur: they epitomize the clear-coloured skin and lean features that led French colonial officials to classify freeborn/noble Fulbe as being in between the “white” and “black” races of Senegambia (Glasman 2004, pp. 124-125). Black monkeys (Guinea baboon: *Papio papio*) are comparatively darker,

region in 1903, the French rushed to dismantle Mussa Moló’s power structure. Resentful of the many acts of submission Mussa had imposed on them, the *rimbe* welcomed the new situation as propitious to the re-establishment of their political, social and economic leadership over the *jiyaabe*. By the end of World War I they achieved the control of the majority of the canton chieftaincies and stood as mediators between the colonizers and the populace (Bellagamba 2017, pp. 88-90).

11 Interview with Samba, locality of Goundaga, 17/02/2014.

12 Conversation with Mamadou, Fieldwork Notes 2017.

13 Interview with Dembayell, locality of Saré Bouda, 15/01/2015

14 Interview with Samba, locality of Goundaga, 17/02/2014.

bigger and sturdier, three qualities stereotypically associated with slaves in the history of Fulbe communities throughout Western and Central Africa (Bellagamba 2018b, p. 101): the *rimbe* describe the *jiyaabe* as strong-built; the *jiyaabe* reciprocate by pointing to the *rimbe*'s feeble physical constitution that make them unsuited to agricultural labour.

Whereas the younger generation favours today the blurring of the social boundary between the *jiyaabe* and the *rimbe* under an encompassing Fulbe identity, the older *jiyaabe* are often proud of their background. Coumbayell vigorously declared: "I am a *kordo* with black knees!"¹⁵ "Black knees" refer to agricultural labour: when people cultivate in the traditional way, they bend over with their left elbow on the upper part of their left knee, so as to be steady while the right arm raises and lowers the short hoe which is their main agricultural tool. After a while, they shift the hoe to the left arm, and bend over resting on the right knee. Because of rubbing, the skin over the knees hardens and darkens. Like Dembayell, Coumbayell supported a friendly representation of past relationships with the *rimbe*. Samba, instead, preferred to underline the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the *jiyaabe*. "Hogga, our grandfather, was a companion to Musa Molo," he recollected.¹⁶ In his words: "The Fulbe negotiated with the colonizers, courted them, and associated with them, while the *jiyaabe*, as a rule, they do not negotiate with anybody ... We inherited this behaviour from Musa Molo."¹⁷

Here, Samba referred to the fact that French administration favoured the *rimbe*'s leadership over the *jiyaabe*. Whatever emancipation some of the latter had enjoyed under the leadership of Alpha and Mussa Molo, it ended with colonial rule: this was a period of reconstituted subordination towards the freeborn/noble Fulbe, who controlled the majority of the canton chieftaincies and therefore the interface of communication between colonial administrators and the populace. During the discussion, Mamadou behaved tactfully. Like all *rimbe*, he is proud of his genealogy but also worried that mentioning it, especially in front of the *jiyaabe*, may be taken as a sign of the arrogant and haughty nature, which the *jiyaabe* consider stereotypical of the freeborn/noble Fulbe. Being mocked when he steps into a *jiyaabe*'s household or village is a common experience for him. Though he is a tall man, he is sometimes addressed as "*pullel*" – little *pullo* (i.e. Fulbe man, used as an equivalent of *dimo*) a way to hit indirectly his most sensitive spots, such as lacking the wealth and cattle historically associated with his social status. Mamadou keeps his family going by combining agriculture and a small income as a journalist for a local radio. Occasionally, NGOs or government bodies hire him as an *animateur* to raise rural awareness on health and so-

15 Interview with Coumbayell, locality of Kouankané, 4/01/2016.

16 Interview with Samba, locality of Goundaga, 17/02/2014.

17 Interview with Samba, locality of Goundaga, 17/02/2014.

cial issues. The ways the *jiyaabe* tease him resembles a joking relationship, i.e. a ritually established way to create connection between two originally conflicting, and hierarchically positioned, parties, by making reciprocal fun of the stereotypical negative qualities associated with one's social or ethnic identity. Yet, as observed by Etienne Smith (2004, p. 203), although slavery is the historical matrix of a number of contemporary West African joking relationships, not all the boundaries created by enslavement have necessarily turned into joking relationships. Mamadou dares not reciprocate the friendly insults of the *jiyaabe*. Like the other *rimbe*, he is well aware of belonging to a minority against which the *jiyaabe* can easily perpetuate their long history of subjection, especially in local politics, when *jiyaabe* and *rimbe* candidates contest for the same position.

During the local elections of 2014, for instance, in some communities close to Sare Goto *jiyaabe* militants skillfully played on the *rimbe*'s pretension to genealogical purity and political leadership to stir up the *jiyaabe* constituencies in favour of a candidate with the same, *jiyaabe* background. Stories of *rewbe fulbe* (sing. *debbo pullo*, meaning freeborn/noble Fulbe woman) marginalized in local development associations by *horbe* and women of other ethnic groups sticking together are also common. If a *debbo pullo* attempts to gain leadership, the others readily accuse her of being haughty. When Mamadou corrects his own children about the need to address the *jiyaabe* politely and on equal terms, he thinks about these day-to-day confrontations. There may be resentment because of histories of subordination, but also because old relationships of hierarchical collaboration have been breached. During one of our conversations, Coumbayell expressed her irritation to Mamadou in this way: "Today the *rimbe* have abandoned the habits of their parents, you stopped donating to the *jiyaabe*, and by doing so you have killed your own *ndimaaku*."¹⁸

Ndimaaku is the quality of being *dimo*, i.e. a freeborn/noble man, and one of its outward expressions is generosity. The counterpart of the labour the *jiyaabe* provided to the *rimbe* during colonial times was gifts in the form of cattle, cloth and assistance at critical junctures of the life cycle. This kind of exchange has disappeared today: young *jiyaabe* generations resent the little services that the old people like Dembayell or Coumbayell perform during the *rimbe*'s ceremonies or on other special occasions, and young *rimbe* and *jiyaabe* are trying to establish mutual relationships oblivious to the legacies of slavery, although their attempts are not always successful.

"My best friend is from that side of society," explains Ibrahima, who hails from the same village as Mamadou. "I do not want to either listen to or repeat any remark about the *jiyaabe*" he continues; "it is old people's

18 Interview with Coumbayell, locality of Kouankané, 4/01/2016.

rubbish!"¹⁹ His personal trajectory is nonetheless revealing. When he was younger, he sired a son out of marriage with a girl of slave ancestry from a nearby settlement: he proposed to the girl, but her parents refused, as they did not wish to have any relationship with Ibrahima's *rimbe* village. Ibrahima's father, on his part, was so outraged that he expelled him from the household to carve his life as best he could in Dakar, where Ibrahima found support in the friendship of an older neighbour of slave origins, who patronized him along with other poor urban youths. Today, after eight years of absence, Ibrahima has accepted to marry the girl whom his father selected for him with the assistance of Mamadou. When I met him in 2018, he welcomed me with an ironic question: "Did you see how they arranged me?"

He was happy, mostly because his father and Mamadou's commitment to find him a bride was in itself a sign that the days of ostracism were ending. His family and the broader village community were ready to make a fresh start, and his father had finally agreed to welcome Ibrahima's now eight-year-old son into the family. The vicissitudes of Demba and Bintou detailed below developed along a similar line of filial piety: for a while Ibrahima disagreed with his parents but an arranged marriage laid the ground for reconciliation. Demba also complied with the desires of his parents: he put family before his personal desires. The other three stories, in contrast, represent situations in which individual agency prevailed. Historian Thomas Holt (2002, p. 10) has invited scholars to enrich their understanding of the historical and social construction of race through studying its potential meaning "in shaping lived experience": race *is* the work race *does* in concrete socio-historical situations. All together, the four stories help us to put racial arguments about the difference between the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe* into the flux of social life and see them as the result of an interactive process shaped by all participants in the situation. Social origins do matter but the ways they show up in marital stories is at variance with past family experiences of the social boundary between the two social categories. In other words, the significance of genealogical purity and slave ancestry is concrete and always historically situated.

The Four Stories

Demba and Bintou

Demba and Bintou's story is a good example to start to see how marriage discussions can pave the way to the emergence of discourses on slave ancestry, which stand onto the margins of daily life. In 2013, Demba – a young

19 Fieldwork notes 2017, conversation with Ibrahima.

man in his early thirties – fell in love with Bintou, a girl from his village and a descendant of a *jiyaado* originally owned by his great-grandfather. Demba's parents refused even to discuss such a marriage. Demba lived with them and looked after the family fields and cattle. In spite of the changes under way, marriage remains a step towards maturity in contemporary Senegal (Hanford and Foley 2015, p. 208). Lacking economic autonomy, Demba had very little to negotiate: his brother lived abroad, and the arrangement was that Demba would help his parents on a daily basis, while the brother would give financial support. In such a predicament, he could not ask his mother to share her house with a girl who was not her choice. In fact, Demba's wife was meant to relieve the elderly woman of heavy domestic chores. Demba abandoned the idea of marrying Bintou, who eventually married a man of the same social background from a nearby settlement, where she moved. Demba got engaged to the daughter of one of his father's best friends. In order to entice Demba, his father went as far as endowing the girl with cattle, in principle a responsibility that Demba himself should have met.

It was a good match in terms of physical appearance and social origins. Both the bride and the groom displayed the elegant features and the fair colour that the villagers appreciated as a sign of the *rimbe leñol*. Unfortunately, the couple did not suit each other in terms of character and expectations. After a year, and a baby boy, the whole village knew that Demba and his wife quarrelled every other day.

It was around this time that issues of genealogical purity and slave ancestry cropped up. In the eyes of the village youths, it was evident that Demba's arranged marriage could not work: elders had to stop interfering with the marital choices of the younger generation. Growing rumours in the village prompted Demba's mother to action. She called Ndilla, one of the few bachelors in the village, who was definitely in favour of free choice in marriage. In a confidential manner, she dropped her recollection of Bintou's slave background into the stream of rumours. Bintou's grandfather had overstepped the boundaries of his servile position. One of his less recommendable habits had been that of marrying girls from other villages without the consent of their parents. He had always avoided retaliation but his behaviour had bequeathed a gloomy lot to his children, who never enjoyed a happy married life. For one reason or another, their partners deserted them one after another. Their economic situation was bad as well. The wealth that Bintou's grandfather had accumulated rapidly dissipated after his death. In this way, Demba's mother justified her rejection of Bintou. Knowing the girl's family history, she had to prevent Demba from following a path doomed by an unlucky legacy. At the same time, she was also passing on to the village youth one of the strongest Fulfulde stereotypes associated with the slave, that of a human being unable to rule his appetites and whose achievements are always ephemeral. The rumours stopped. Demba and his

freeborn/noble wife learned to find a sort of equilibrium in their unhappy marriage: the girl would spend long periods with her parents. Demba would go and bring her back after apologizing for the quarrel that made her leave in the first place. The village youth talked to him: he was married now, and even if it was not to a girl of his choice, he had to try and perform his husband role as best as he could. Obedience to parents was, after all, a virtue, and his peers expressed respect for the way he played the part of the obedient son. All the discussions about Bintou's grandfather calmed down, along with references to the negative human qualities associated with slave ancestry.

Modou and Mariama

Racial arguments of the type emerging out of Demba and Bintou's story have political implications at the local level. After decades of submission to *rimbe*, the 1950s anti-colonial struggle provided the *jiyaabe* with an opportunity to fight back. Since then, the awareness of their demographic advantage – and resentment for the humiliations endured – has fed their political engagement. Modou and Mariama's vicissitudes exemplify some of these dynamics, as Modou – a *dimo* – was the nephew of a renowned chief of the late colonial period, while Mariama's father had been one of the political militants of *jiyaabe* background. The confrontations the two had at the time of decolonization cast a shadow onto Modou and Mariama's intention to marry. The two met while they were students in Dakar in the early 1990s. Modou was completing a doctoral degree, and Mariama was studying to become a teacher. They fell in love, and when Mariama finally accepted Modou's proposal for marriage, her father tried to dissuade her: "Bring whoever you like, even a cripple, but not a *pullo bossejo*."

The expression *pullo bossejo*, a red Fulbe man, refers in principle to a freeborn/noble fulbe. *Balejo*, black, stands for *jiyaado*, although everyone knows there are dark-skinned *rimbe* and clear coloured *jiyaabe*. Modou belonged to a prestigious *rimbe* family. Mariama's father feared that his daughter would never be at home among her in-laws, which echoed the opinion on intermarriages with freeborn/nobles that Fouta Jallon fathers of slave ancestry expressed to Roger Botte (1994, p. 122; see also Derman 1973; Furth 2005) during the 1980s and 1990s. The women of Modou's family were equally negative: his two "mothers", i.e. his own biological mother and his father's other wife, as well as his maternal and paternal aunts, raised issues of genealogical purity: they did not want to mix with Mariama's father. The family genealogical tree included several marriages with women with a slave background. Modou's case was special because he was not choosing his second or third wife, like his predecessors, but his first one. For his "mothers" and

aunts, the welcoming of Mariama looked like a kind of social debasement. In addition, Modou's education made him a highly prized bachelor in the eyes of close and distant family members whose daughters were of marriageable age. All his extended family felt disappointed. The real problem was the clashes that Mariama's father and Modou's paternal uncle had had during their days of political engagement as young men. After the independence of Senegal, the two became emblematic of two different political genealogies: Modou's uncle represented the freeborn/nobles' capacity to assume responsibility for the people under their care, while Mariama's father became a symbol of the *jyaaabe*'s historical agency and struggles for equality. The memory of these events was recollected by Modou's "mothers" and aunts. Claiming that *rimbe* canton chiefs had exploited the *jyaaabe* under the blind eye of the French, as Mariama's father did at the height of the 1950s nationalist struggle, was untrue and unfair in their eyes. Modou's family praised his paternal uncle, the chief, as their hero: the man always behaved correctly towards his subjects, and throughout his life he constantly assisted people from all walks of life. Building on these arguments, Modou's "mothers" and aunts tried to stop the marriage but Modou and Mariama, both intellectuals and economically independent, would not take "no" for an answer. In spite of his initial reaction, Mariama's father ended up supporting her choice, and helping the newlyweds as best he could. Their first house was built on land he gave to his daughter. After all, he was an intellectual, committed to freeing his rural fellowmen from the shackles of traditional beliefs.

Today an aging couple, Modou and Mariama have taken great care to keep the two families apart over the course of their married life. Modou assisted his family and Mariama assisted her own, with neither one of them interfering in the respective choices of the partner. This arrangement proved wise. Following the path of her father, Mariama rapidly distinguished herself as a feminist activist. Modou became a renowned political personality. Neither ever hid from either their friends or their children the troublesome beginnings of their marriage story. Instead they used them to exemplify the hard-to-overcome prejudices they fought in their private lives and in their public roles as intellectuals and civil society actors.

Aisha and Mustapha

People classified as *jyaaabe* do not necessarily have a slave background. Historically, imputations of slave ancestry continued to expand the category of the *jyaaabe* once the days of enslavement were over. In the eyes of the *rimbe*, behaviour is crucial to support an initial suspicion of a slave past. This happened in Aisha and Mustapha's case. Mustapha was not a *jyaaado* but he belonged to one of the ethnic groups from which the Fulbe in this

part of Senegal took slaves in the nineteenth century. The way he treated Aisha further reinforced her family's conviction of his tainted blood.

I met Aisha in the house of Modou and Mariama, where she lived for a short period in 2014. Aisha was a single, working mother, who was struggling to raise her three children. Her story hit at the core of women's struggles to establish their agency in marriage in the face of family expectations. Marital choices are often driven by a plurality of reasons, some of which "may not be entirely conscious or articulated" (Kringelbach 2016, p. 159). Discussing her marriage with me, Aisha rationalized it as a combination of desire and stubbornness which had overcome any rational consideration about Mustapha's socio-economic standing. She met him in the early 1990s, when she was just out of high school. Parents in the Kolda region often describe pre-marital sex as an epidemic that destroys girls' chances to properly settle in life and leaves illegitimate children around who never truly belong to the household in which they grow up. Aisha was one of these girls. Her parents quietly accepted the pregnancy, even though the whole situation was extremely shameful. Fortunately, she was their youngest child, and there were no risks that her misbehaviour might affect the marriage prospects of her siblings, as is often the case because people do not like to see their children marry into families which are known for their moral lassitude. In the eyes of Aisha's parents, Mustapha was an unsuitable match because of his Bambara background. They had to capitulate when the couple begot a second child out of wedlock: it was felt that the man had better take up responsibility for his offspring.

Aisha's real difficulties began because her parents were not the only ones resisting the marriage. Her mother-in-law was equally outraged. In her eyes, Mustapha had been forced to marry because of Aisha's reckless behaviour. The disciplining of this highborn girl became a point of honour for the woman. Like many young couples, Aisha and Mustapha lived with her. Daily interaction meant insults, beatings and hard work for Aisha. Mustapha harassed her as well. While she was pregnant with their third child, he left for Europe. Instead of assisting Aisha and their three children with remittances, he took a second wife, one of whom his mother approved. Aisha, who still lived with the mother-in-law, took the situation into her own hands and ran away. She settled temporarily with her parents, although her father ostensibly refused to speak to her. For several years, she worked, first in an internet café and then later in a local NGO. In 2016, pressure from their children, now teenagers, caused her and Mustapha to remarry.

Proud of having re-gained her husband after years of solitude – an extremely unhappy social condition in Senegal (Kringelbach 2016, p. 162) – Aisha kept showing Mustapha's photo to friends and relatives. Behind her back, family and friends commented how black, heavily built and ugly the man looked. All these are stereotypical physical qualities that freeborn/no-

ble Fulbe associated with the figure of the slave. Aisha, even after three pregnancies, was lean and fair; Mustapha stood as her opposite. His behaviour towards his wife matched his physical appearance: everybody recognized the ruthless way in which he treated Aisha, and there was little hope that he would now prove worthy of her. Many asked how Aisha could have fallen in love with him in the first place. The unhappiness of her marriage was a consequence of having followed love and passion instead of her parents' advice. "When a girl follows a path that is not recommended, it is only suffering that follows," one of her kin explained to me. In 2017, Aisha fell seriously ill and all her extended family members mobilized to provide medical treatment. Mustapha sent a ridiculously small amount of money on the grounds that he was out of work. No member of his family supported Aisha in this difficult moment: discouraged and tired, she considered her marriage with Mustapha over once and for all.

Penda and Yusuf

Aisha was after all a fortunate lady. She never lost the support of her parents and family in spite of her love for Moustapha. Girls who act recklessly in their parents' eyes often risk being cast off. Penda was in this predicament when I met her in 2017.

Marrying a migrant is a preferred choice for contemporary Senegalese girls, especially if he is abroad with a regular job. The hope is that the husband will assist the wife to migrate as well. However, this kind of union has negative sides: husbands are jealous of left-behind wives and try to control them by all possible means (Hannaford 2015); the girl may be compelled to live with the mother-in-law, who would claim control over incoming remittances and blackmail her by reporting her behaviour negatively to the son. In addition, the wives of migrants spend long periods alone, as their husbands tend to visit only for a month or two every other year. Penda's decision bucked the trend in this respect. Since childhood, her prospective groom was Buba, the son of a paternal aunt whose husband lived in France. Buba had joined his father in Europe and found a job. Penda had grown up with her paternal aunt – Buba's mother – so as to be trained in her duties as a daughter-in-law. When their marriage was officialized at the mosque, Buba did not come as he lacked the money for the air-ticket. He nonetheless got ready to take his wife abroad by looking for a suitable flat and preparing the papers which, in addition to their marriage registration, would add weight to the request for family reunion. It was when he came home for the transfer of Penda into his paternal household – the ceremony sanctioning the real beginning of the marriage – that he discovered her infidelity. She had fallen in love with Yusuf, who was educated and had a good position

in a state company, and eloped with him. There was a traditional aspect to this move, as girls in the past indicated the man of their choice by moving into his family's home for one night. The day after, the parents would meet to arrange the marriage. Penda followed this path. Because of Yusuf's slave ancestry, however, her parents refused to agree. Yusuf married her, but in reaction, her parents cast her aside. From their perspective, not only did Penda betray Buba, but also did it with the most unadvisable category of man – an emancipated *jiyaado* who, in their eyes, took pride in doing what had always been forbidden to him. One of her family members explained: "I think the *jiyaabe* seek this kind of marriage because they are a sign of prestige. Once they get education and money, they can aspire to grab what has been always denied them: the *debbo pullo*. Unfortunately for the girls, these marriages never work."

In 2017, Penda was living with a distant cousin on the periphery of Dakar. She was pregnant and alone, as Yusuf – the husband – did not care either for her or for the child. Her parents refused to give her assistance, on the grounds that she had shamed the family by refusing to marry Buba. Being illiterate and without resources, she survived through the support of younger family members indignant about the attitude of her parents: they provided housing, daily food and medical assistance in the hope that she would be readmitted soon into the family ranks. The strongly conservative position of her parents was thus countered by the openness of her sisters and cousins.

Conclusion

Taking a cue from Thioub's (2012) remarks on genealogical purity as a key component in West African processes of racialization of slave descendants, this article has tried to account for the many, often indirect ways in which racial arguments about the human difference between the descendants of yesterday's masters and slaves slip through the cracks of Senegalese republicanism and Muslim piety (which insists on the equality of believers before God). In the Kolda region, marriage provides the opportunity to open the Pandora's box of the tension underlying the historical coexistence of the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe*. Although the people involved in these marital discussions may not share any relationship as former masters or slaves, this kind of situation provides a fertile ground for handing on the legacies of slavery from older to younger generations: in these circumstances young people become acquainted with a set of reciprocal stereotypes and grievances between the *rimbe* and the *jiyaabe* they would have never imagined possible in their daily lives. Is marriage a privileged arena for socializing the racial legacies of slavery and the slave trade across generations? This was the first

question posed in the introduction as leading to these concluding remarks. The answer is positive. Marriage and the social crises that follow individual marital choices provide an arena for building up and sharing discourses on the slave past across generations.

These discourses in turn affect people's experiences and relationality: when issues of genealogical purity and slave ancestry begin to be stirred up, individuals are pushed to take sides. They may ignore or contest the ensuing racial arguments (as Modou and Mariama did), but they cannot stop them becoming socially relevant, precisely because racial arguments are able to ignite discussion.

The second question regarded the *jiyaabe's* perspective on intermarriages with the *rimbe*. All four stories show the *jiyaabe's* dislike of the *rimbe* in one way or another. They also testify to their participation in the *rimbe's* efforts to keep up the reciprocal social boundary. "It takes two to reproduce and reconfigure the ideology of slavery", Lotte Pelckmans remarked when discussing Fulfulde families in Mali (2015, p. 289). This is also the case for the Kolda region.

Dembayell, who in all other respects was a supporter of peaceful coexistence with the *rimbe*, when I questioned him directly about intermarriage, expressed his preference for having his daughters married either into other *jiyaabe* families or to non-Fulbe; the first would strengthen internal cohesion and the other would build alliances with representatives of other ethnic groups. He also defended parental rights to recommend a spouse for their children, a position that demands contextualizing. Dembayell could well recollect the days when the *rimbe* directed the marriages of their slaves: just as young people in the past were supposed to submit to marital choices made by their parents, male slaves having the possibility to marry was an act of benevolence on the part of the master. After all, the master could claim a slave girl for himself – as a second or third wife – instead of giving his *jiyaado* the possibility of making a little family. Dembayell's grandfather married a woman that his master bought precisely for this purpose. His own father married the daughter of another *jiyaado* whom the master selected and provided with a dowry on his behalf: the husband was in fact expected to provide the bride with some cattle to start her own herd in support of the family economy. Dembayell's marriage was arranged by his parents, who in this way expressed the autonomy from the *rimbe* that they had achieved. It was in the 1960s, on the eve of Senegalese independence. His position on male hypergamy (or female hypogamy, if seen from the side of the *rimbe*) was conservative. Talking about freeborn/noble women, he said: "How could the man control her arrogance? ... She will look down on him and his relatives, and she will certainly never submit to her husband's will. From his point of view as an older man, a husband not obeyed by his wife was not

worth his salt²⁰. "In addition," Dembayell continued, "a child from such a marriage could never aspire to a position of responsibility, as the other *rimbe* would reject him because of his origins ... he could not even live in a *rimbe* family. He would be like a monkey or a dog."²¹

Indirectly, the stories of Aisha and Pemba make it clear that families despised by the *rimbe* for being part of the *jiyaabe* can, in turn, take exception to the marriage of their sons to freeborn/noble women. For a man of slave ancestry, this kind of marriage is certainly an avenue of emancipation; but the kind of ostracism and isolation that Penda's vicissitudes exemplify make it clear that the husband will be never welcomed on friendly terms among his *rimbe* in-laws: the prospect of a durable and solid relationship is simply absent in these cases, which is one of the reasons why young people like Demba or Ibrahim end up agreeing with the choice of their parents.

The third question raised in the introduction is the most important: did all these discussions about genealogical purity and slave ancestry are significant of other kinds of worries? One of the classic anthropological ways of studying marriage is to work back through family genealogies. The results often show a significant gap between people's desires about marriage and individual lives as they unfold in reality: rules, after all, become tangible through acts of transgression. Families that are overtly defensive of their genealogical purity may display a significant rate of "undesirable" marriages in their genealogical tree as a result of contingency, and also of a political strategy of alliance with other groups in the same territory. However, people who are in the process of marrying, along with their relatives, look forwards. In this sense, marriage is about the future of individuals and society at the same time: it is the proper context wherein the racial legacies of slavery manifest their historicity, i.e. "the fundamental relationality of knowledge of the past" (Stewart 2016, p. 79). People constitute the past of slavery through their discourses and practices, while the historical times in which they live, as well as frameworks that have a longer history, shape their thoughts, feelings and experiences: they act in the present in light of their future expectations. In contemporary Senegal, economic challenges, changing life-styles and rising inequality have made social debasement (Dia 2015) a crude reality that leads family networks to strive for cohesiveness in the face of what is widely perceived as increasing individualism and waning communal collaboration: all the racial arguments about the *jiyaabe* and the *rimbe* that the four stories convey are part of broader on-going discussions about who should help whom and under which circumstances. Endogamic marriage ensures that

20 This gendered perspective of marital relationships, as Dinah Hannaford (2015) has shown, is also widespread among members of the Senegalese diaspora, who use mobile phones and internet connection to keep their spouses under constant vigilance from abroad.

21 Interview with Dembayel, locality of Saré Bounda, 19/02/2014.

moral, social and material resources will circulate among people who are already related in one way or another. Individuals connected by multiple and overlapping bonds are a guarantee that the resulting network will be cohesive. This was the choice of Ibrahima and Demba, one which remains crucial in a country where families provide the backbone of social welfare. Taking alternative marital paths has its own advantages as well. The promise is that of a companionate marriage in which man and wife will be the prime movers of their future loyalties and social responsibilities. Modou and Mariama were successful in this respect.

“Appeals to race ... are always arguments made about the world that that are not wholly shared or agreed by everyone in a particular milieu” (Hall 2011, p. 117). Plurality and experimentation are part of the picture as these appeals relate to, and speak for, other social issues. It is clear that the four stories, and the other examples presented in the course of this article, are part of a lively conversation on the extension, solidity and development of family solidarities which cut across Senegalese society. Local politics influence the relationships between the *jiyaabe* and the *rimbe* with the latter struggling to maintain their historical position of social prominence. The four stories also mediate in daily life the fragments of a history of slavery that all parties involved consider to some extent significant in what they have become today: by discussing this conflictive past they try to shape what they will be tomorrow.

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