Chapter 4
The Demography of Western Saharan Slavery

An aspect of bīẓān slavery deserving particular attention is the demographic significance of slaves in bīẓān society. Available data on the slave trade in the western Sudan strongly suggests an increase in slave sales towards the interior of Africa subsequent to the closing of the Atlantic trade and new waves of enslavement in the course of several ǧihāds. Bīẓān, strongly involved in the trans-Saharan slave trade, and having a significant resource – salt – at their disposal, entered the trade in slaves along the desert-edge and across the Sahara, and acquired slaves on a new scale. The use of slaves within the western Sahara varied according to a wide range of variables. Demographic data underscores the assumption that ḥassān and zwāya had different interests in slaves, and consequently acquired them in different numbers and for different purposes. As demographic material differentiating between men and women at the desert-edge is scarce and elusive, hypotheses on gender differentials between sūdān and bīẓān are difficult to prove with regard to historical times. Colonial records and contemporary demographic data, collected in a number of villages in the region of Achram-Diouk, and focusing on status as well as sex, however, provide insights into how relations of power affected, and continue to affect sūdān women differently from sūdān men.

Africa and the Slave Trades

Expressing the significance of African slavery and slave trade in numbers is a difficult, but crucial undertaking in the attempt to gain a proper understanding of the impact this practice of social deprivation had on African societies. Difficulties in such an approach arise for numerous reasons. African slavery and slave trade was not a monolithic system, but composed of different, partially overlapping and interdependent elements. Many African societies – though not all – practised slavery, and slavery itself, though sharing major common features, was subject to highly varying practices. The use of slaves could range from a marginal to a predominant characteristic of the society concerned. The African slaves' conditions varied too. In some cases they

Table 1: Estimations of Atlantic, Oriental and Inner-African Slave Trade

	Estimates (thousands)			
Destination	Manning[a] (1500-1900)	Manning[b]	Austen[c] (1500-1900)	Austen[d] (650-1910/20)
Atlantic	12,000	10,000	11,500	
Orient	6,000	5,000	6,700	17,000
Africa	8,000	15,000		
dead in Africa	4,000			

a: Manning (1990b: 257).
b: Manning (1990a: 171). Unfortunately there is no information regarding the time-span covered by this estimate.
c: Calculation of the slaves traded into the three trade systems from about 1500 to 1900 on the basis of data provided by Ralph A. Austen (1981: 136), which corrected former estimates upwards (cf. Austen 1979: 65ff.). More recently the volume of the so-called "Islamic" slave trade (trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Swahili Coast) was corrected downwards (cf. Austen 1992: 229, 235).
d: Austen (1981: 136). While trans-Saharan trade according to this estimate ended in 1910, the Red Sea and Swahili Coast trade continued until 1920.

lived much like their masters, while at the other extreme they had to work on plantations. As using slaves depended on having the means to acquire them, African slavers depended on an inner-African slave supply. Both war and trade were sources of new slaves. Throughout West Africa, a trade network developed. Communities which specialised in the trade with slaves and other commodities were supplied by warriors specialised in living off the production of this human commodity. Although they concentrated entirely on the inner-African market, the development of this association of trading and raiding societies cannot be explained without reference to external incentives and influences. Africans not only became slaves of other Africans, but also constituted the stock traded to two other major regions of slave use: the Americas and the Arab-Oriental world.[1]

The question to what extent the Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent population drainage, or else inner-African factors contributed to Africa's current underdevelopment is a highly sensitive issue given its political connotations, and is until today disputed among scholars (cf. Klein 1990; Manning 1990a,b; M'Bokolo 1998; Rauzduel 1998). One important means to apprehend the dimensions of the distinct but interconnected slave trades are estimates of the number of slaves traded. These figures, although still tentative, and equally subject to theoretical assumptions, make it possible not only to differentiate between internal and external factors, but to unravel the dynamics arising out of the interaction between the distinct slave trade systems (cf. Table 1).

The numbers estimated for the three major trade destinations, the Atlantic, the Arab-Islamic Orient, and the sub-Saharan African continent, are subject to different levels of error tolerance. While the estimates of the Atlantic trade proved to be quite robust, and rely on a number of sources (cf. Curtin 1975a, b; Richardson 1989), they are already much more spurious for the Oriental trade, where evidence is generated both directly and indirectly (cf. Austen 1981, 1992). The African trade in fact is almost undocumented, and the few estimates provided by Patrick Manning (1990a,b) therefore remain contested. Despite these many limitations, the numbers presented in Table 1 reveal that all three slave trades were of significant size. The transatlantic slave trade, rather short-lived and with a major peak between 1700 and 1850, drew about twelve million Africans off the continent. Although the estimates of the Oriental trade are less certain, evidence is strong enough to state that a number of slaves, comparable to those of the Atlantic trade, were brought from sub-Saharan Africa to the north of the continent and southern Asia. This continuous flow continued over a long time-span from 650 to 1900, and only came to a peak during the nineteenth century. The average annual rate of slaves entering the Atlantic and Oriental trade thus differed considerably; 24.7 thousand slaves taken to the Americas per year opposed to 13.4 thousand transported annually to North Africa, the Near East, the Red Sea and South Asia (cf. Austen 1981: 136; Manning 1990a: 83).[2] Slavery and the slave trade within sub-Saharan Africa probably preceded the Oriental trade, but had many different configurations.

The scholarly debate on this topic focuses on the impact external factors, i.e. the Atlantic and Oriental trade, had on African societies, and hence African slavery. Patrick Manning's computer simulation of African demography suggests the strong impact the Atlantic slave trade had on the evolution of the population of the western African coast, while the oriental slave trade, mainly fed by the Savannah and Horn, only slowed down population growth. While these estimates have some plausibility with regard to the overall number of slaves and population development, they nevertheless rely heavily on several theoretical, and hence debatable assumptions used to build the simulation model, and fail to explain the many variations in the slaves' sex ratio and the regional variations of slave density occurring within the time-span observed (cf. Klein 1992: 39ff.; Manning 1990a: 81ff.).[3]

Tracking the interdependencies between the distinct slave trade systems and African slavery from the desert-edge perspective of the western Sahara is fascinating because the region was involved in both the trans-Saharan and the Atlantic slave trade, and was a destination of the African slave trade as well. The trade of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa might have antedated the Islamic conquest of North-Africa from 667 AD on, but only from the 11th century does direct evidence of slave trade on the western Saharan route, linking the western Sudan and Morocco exist (cf. Austen 1981: 31). This route, however, although better documented than those to the east which were less involved in the gold trade, was never the most important in the trans-Saharan slave

trade. Slave caravans leaving Timbuktu, which was for a long time the major slave market in the western Sudan,[4] and heading to the markets of the north, could choose one of several trajectories. For those caravans leaving for Morocco, one major route passed through the trade towns of the Mauritanian Adrar (cf. Schroeter 1992: 188). From there slaves could either be sold into the bīẓān slave markets, or be transported further north to the Oued Noun and the major Moroccan slave markets, like Marrakech. The network character of the trans-Saharan trade, in which commodities were traded along a multitude of trade routes intersected by entrepôts of varying importance, and operated by short as well as long-distance traders,[5] adds a further difficulty to the elaboration of estimates of the number of slaves traded in this context. Although still tentative, available data nevertheless is instructive as it shows that the trade in slaves from the western Sudan towards Morocco evolved dynamically. While during the 18th century about 2,000 slaves per year were brought to the latter destination on various trade routes, their number grew during most of the first half of the 19th century to 3,000 slaves and rose after a period of decline in trade to 5,000 slaves per year from 1876-1895 (cf. Austen 1992: 227).[6]

The western Saharans' direct involvement in the Atlantic slave trade was of minor importance. Annually about 1,000 slaves were transported from the western Sudan to the isle of Arguin, where the Portuguese (and their successors) ran a trade post from the middle of the 15th century on, which in many aspects still paralleled the trans-Saharan trade. Later Arguin fell into decline and frequently changed possessors. Its role was taken over by Saint-Louis, which was founded in 1659 and gained in importance from the early 18th century on (cf. Ca da Mosto 1967: 17f.; Lovejoy 1983: 35; Ruf 1995: 96ff., 107). In fact the post at Arguin had only tapped the western trans-Saharan trade route running from the western Sudan through the Mauritanian Adrar northwards to the Oued Noun (cf. McDougall 1992: 61), as well as the coastal route linking the Mauritanian Adrar (the departing point for the trade with Morocco), and Senegambia.[7] Although in no way opposed to selling Africans across the Atlantic, and actively engaged in selling slaves to the French colony (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 270), the bīẓān commitment to the Atlantic trade remained marginal compared to the volume of the western Saharan slave trade and the numbers of slaves traded in Saint-Louis. This pattern persisted until the end of the Atlantic slave trade. The few slaves bīẓān occasionally sold to Saint-Louis seem to have been largely the spin-off from their trade in slaves on the coastal route, and on the way to Morocco (cf. Webb 1995: 89; Curtin 1975a: 183). Throughout the era of the Atlantic slave trade in Saint-Louis, the Senegal River remained the major route linking the town with the slave-producing areas of the interior. Price differentials between Saint-Louis and the river were so high that the slave traders first established temporary, fortified posts along the river (e.g. at Podor and upriver in the region of Gajaaga), where in order to cut costs, the slaves were acquired and stocked until the ships were able to go upriver. Subsequent to

1730 this pattern of trade was replaced by direct trading with African middlemen (cf. Curtin 1975a: 174f., Searing 1993: 59f.).

The marginal role the bīẓān had in the slave trade to Saint-Louis is largely due to the specific economy and ecology of the Senegal valley, which in some areas resembles much a riverine oasis. Already a short time after the Atlantic slave trade had started in the area, only a minority of slaves traded to this destination came from the coastal area and the states of the middle and upper Senegal River (e.g. Fuuta Tooro and Gajaaga).[8] The major zones of enslavement had already moved east to the Bambara states of Segu and Kaarta during the 18th century, thus creating new east-west slave trade networks which were most prominently run by juula communities, and to some extent by bīẓān from the Hodh too (cf. McDougall 1995: 224). With the establishment of the Atlantic trade much of the lower Senegal River valley moved into new patterns of trade and production. The need to feed the slaves in the various entrepôts, together with demand from Saint-Louis, caused a market for local provisions like grain to develop. These exchanges, realised by means of imported commodities, added to already established relations of exchange between agriculturists of the valley and pastoral nomads of the north.[9] This development created in many of the riverine areas a demand for labour leading the region to import rather than export slaves (cf. Searing 1993: 29ff.; 60f.).[10] The tendency towards an increase in the region's production and exchange was reinforced with Saint-Louis not only having a demand for grain but also other local products, of which gum arabic was the most important. This commodity, obtained from the *Acacia senegal* tree, rapidly became a crucial resource in the developing European textile industry, and hence in the early 19th century grew to be the city's major trade item, thus overtaking even the slave trade.[11] Within this evolving trade, more valuable than the slave trade had ever been, the bīẓān were the most important suppliers (cf. Curtin 1975a: 216f.).[12]

Saharans in the Senegal River Valley

Throughout the centuries in focus here, the political topography of the lower and middle Senegal River valley remained fragmented into Wolof and Fulbe states on the left bank and the Trarza and Brakna emirates on the right bank. All of these profited from the increase in trade. Tolls were levied on the slave traders, especially by the left bank rulers, and local commodities exchanged against import products ranging from iron bars to guns and cloth (cf. Searing 1993: 72). The evolution of new patterns of trade and production, constantly rearranged by shifts in the major export commodities, laid the material basis for a continued struggle over the political structure of the region. James Webb, arguing from a long-time perspective of ecological degradation in the north, interprets the increasing bīẓān hegemony the valley experienced in the course of the 18th century as an outcome of a general southward movement of the Saharans (cf. Webb 1995).

Looked at more closely, the political history of the valley proves difficult to

Table 2: Slave Exports from Senegambia to the Atlantic, 1700-1800

	Estimates	
Period	Lovejoy	Richardson
1700-10	18,400	22,230[a]
1711-20	30,900	36,260
1721-30	22,500	52,530
1731-40	26,200	57,210
1741-50	25,000	35,000
1751-60	22,500	30,100
1761-70	14,400	27,590
1771-80	12,400	24,400
1781-90	22,100	15,240
1791-1800	7,000	18,320
Totals	201,400	336,880

Estimates are based on Lovejoy (1983: 50); Richardson (1989: 17).
a: Richardson makes use of a different chronology (1700-09, etc.). This was ignored, for the change does not significantly affect the comparison.

fit into a unidirectional scheme. A first attempt to expand Saharan hegemony to the south and well into the Senegal valley had already occurred in the second half of the 17th century. In the war of Bubba (Šurr Bubba, ca. 1645-75), as it later was called, Nāṣir al-Dīn tried to spread a revival of Islam, by uniting the community of Muslims and ending tribal and political fragmentation, both to the north and to the south of the river Senegal. At first the movement quickly gained adherents among Saharans, and popular support in the south where to missionaries were sent. These successes and the movement's aim of interfering with secular administration raised resistance among established chiefs and leaders. Nāṣir al-Dīn responded by shifting to military action. He declared a ǧihād in accordance with legal guidelines (cf. Gomez 1985: 548), and deposed several western Sudanese rulers, among them those of Fuuta, Kajoor and Waalo. They were replaced most often by people both loyal to the movement and affiliated to the former leading dynasties. The reformers' influence was secured by surrounding the new leaders with a staff of advisors from the zwāya elite. When after his successes in the south Nāṣir al-Dīn turned back to the north and tried to expand his power there, military resistance grew further. A number of ḥassān groupings, but zwāya too, opposed the reformer's claims. The balance of power shifted, and Nāṣir al-Dīn was killed in battle in 1674. Several successors to his office[13] tried to maintain the already vanishing movement, which was defeated definitively in 1677 (cf. Curtin 1971: 14ff.).

Little is known about the initial reasons leading to Šurr Bubba. One explanation might be an ecological crisis at the time, a supposition gaining some plausibility from southward migration processes of Saharan populations and millennial undertones within the reform movement (cf. Curtin 1971: 16; Ould Cheikh 1985a: 852ff., 1991a: 200ff.). Boubacar Barry (1972) was the first to embed the conflict in the wider context of Senegal valley economics and politics, and suggested that it was the result of the incipient competition between trans-Saharan and Atlantic trade. Subsequently several scholars have questioned this interpretation as presenting too neatly an opposition between French and African trade. What remains is the evidence of nascent French economic interests in the valley, developing precisely at that time. The report of the contemporary observer Chambonneau (cf. Ritchie 1968) gives a detailed account of how Nāṣir al-Dīn aimed to install himself as the major intermediary among all parties involved in trade in the valley, rather than using his power of control in order to interrupt exchanges, including the trade in slaves. The movement incited by Nāṣir al-Dīn thus can be seen as a first attempt to construct a unified political entity cross-cutting the diverse ethnic and political entities of the Senegal River valley, and take control of its emerging economic and trading potential (cf. Ruf 1995: 108-115).[14]

While the reformist movement failed to alter social structures on the left bank, the conflict contributed to the building of new patterns of zwāya and ḥassān identity, as well as to new patterns of relationships among these groups in the Gebla (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 535).[15] The century following the event witnessed an increase of bīẓān influence in the valley. Both the Trarza and the Brakna emirate managed to expand their area of hegemony further south: partly by the power to prey upon their southern neighbours, but more often by a variety of alliances,[16] they secured themselves a more direct control over several of the region's major grain producing areas. The aim was twofold. The agricultural resources provided a crucial complement to the pastoral nomads' animal-based diet, and geopolitical dominance secured to a large extent control of the trade running through the valley. However, as Raymond Taylor (1997) has convincingly argued, this socio-political evolution was paralleled by a rise of internal conflicts. The authority of the ʿamīr and ḥassān chiefs became undermined, as they were less and less able to develop their hegemony among the many local groups which once constituted their dependents. The latter gained in power once they were able to tighten their grip on local economic resources, and to exploit ḥassān dependency on allies in the many factional rivalries (cf. Taylor 1997: 149-194).[17] Bīẓān predominance in the valley and on the left bank, which had already become more fragile during the first half of the 19th century, virtually ended with the French expansion in Senegal, which started in 1855 when Waalo was conquered under the rule of Governor Faidherbe (in office from 1854-61, 1864-65; cf. Taylor 1997: 197).

Origins and Numbers of Western Saharan Slaves

Compared to the evidence of bīẓān contribution and involvement in the oriental and Atlantic slave trade, little is known about the origin of the western Saharan slaves. Speculations have often focused on the question whether the bīẓān appropriated the majority of their slaves via the slave market, by slave raiding, or by the submission of a preceding strata of black agriculturists. Given the large number of slaves traded through the western Sahara, and given the large number of slaves and ḥarāṭīn within bīẓān society, the following statement of Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh sums up the most probable point of view:

> C'est, me semble-t-il, au commerce et non, comme on l'entend parfois dire, à la razzia, qu'il faut imputer, pour l'essentiel, la présence au sein de la société maure d'une large communauté d'esclaves et d'anciens esclaves.
>
> Certes, il a dû y avoir de nombreux rapts isolés, et l'insécurité entretenue par la razzia maure chez les paysans noirs des régions limitrophes de leurs parcours a laissé à cet égard des souvenirs encore vivants. . . . Le substrat de peuplement noir des régions aujourd'hui désertifiées – et probablement parmi eux, surtout les îlots de sédentarité –, ainsi que le commerce transsaharien, ont été les pourvoyeurs les plus importants des nomades en esclaves. (Ould Cheikh 1993: 183)

This differentiated portrayal of bīẓān slave origins is valuable, because it hints at the fact that as the bīẓān means to acquire slaves probably were not uniform, the various slaves' conditions were not either. This view is confirmed by the analysis of the different slave occupations in bīẓān society (cf. chapter five). What nevertheless remains unresolved is the question how, and in what numbers, slaves were acquired and distributed in the western Sahara. As African slave populations, like most others, suffered from very low fertility rates, and were frequently diminished by other spin-off effects, e.g. by manumission, they were unable to reproduce themselves (cf. Klein 1983: 73ff.; and 1992: 69, Meillassoux 1983: 51f.).[18] To maintain a given slave population, most African slave holders thus had constantly to acquire new slaves. An evaluation based on rough population estimates for the late 18th century western Sahara provides the following numbers: of a total slave population of about 41,750-55,667 slaves living along, and to the south and south-east of the Adrar-Tagant axis, the numbers of new slaves needed to compensate for a net demographic loss of about two percent would have been between 825-1,113 slaves per year. A higher net loss of five percent, calculated on the same basis, would have needed an annual import of 2,087-2,783 slaves (cf. Webb 1995: 67).[19]

Carefully as these numbers have to be treated due to their highly speculative nature, they nevertheless stress that considerable slave imports were crucial, not only to constituting a slave population in the western Sahara, but also to maintaining it. Slaves imported into the western Sahara originated from a variety of sources. From at least the 14th century, desert and North

African horses were traded directly for slaves from the western Sudan. By this time horses, which could not be bred and were short-lived in the Sahelian climate,[20] had become a core element in Sudanese warfare. The horse and slave trade was distinct from other trading activities, as horses were essential to the raiding and capturing of slaves. Horses thus were both the means to assure military supremacy, and to produce new slaves to be exchanged for new horses. Producing and exporting horses, on the other hand, due to this rather rigid interlink, was driven by the interest in slaves, for the warriors largely lacked other commodities (cf. Webb 1995: 69f.). The number of slaves traded according to this pattern was substantial. Cavalries in the western Sudanese kingdoms numbered thousands, and pure Barbary horses often cost 15 slaves a piece. Late 17th century Waalo, with a cavalry of roughly 3,000 horses, thus exported an estimated 500 slaves per year to the north.[21]

A second major source of slaves were the western Sudanese and Saharan trade networks. To acquire slaves, the Saharans had to offer commodities needed, and largely lacking in the western Sudan. Desert salt was the most important single item of this specialised economy, which had developed already between the 9th and 12th centuries (cf. McDougall 1983). Unlike the horse and slave trade, salt in many areas of the western Sudan became a currency, and hence could easily be exchanged for all types of commodities: cloth, grain, slaves, gold, and many more.[22] Slaves, however, were of major interest to the desert merchants transporting salt from the desert mines and entrepôts to the trade towns of the western Sudan. High-value rock-salt was produced in a few desert mines, and amersal, an earth-salt of minor quality, was scraped from local salt ponds. Control over the resource was centralised, and production could be adapted more easily to market fluctuations than agricultural and pastoral production dependent of seasonal and climatic variation. The centre of exchanges focusing on salt and slaves in the era of the Segu Bambara State (1712-1861) lay in the trade towns of the Middle Niger area, located at the southern end of eastern bīẓān transhumance routes. The trade thus fitted into, and was backed by the seasonal encounters Saharan pastoralists had with local agriculturalists. Both groups exchanged complementary products like milk and dung on the one, and grain on the other hand (cf. McDougall 1992: 62ff.; Roberts 1987:46ff.).[23] The evolving trade networks were capable of persisting, and adapting to new circumstances because they resulted from the composite of many interests, actors, and a variety of commodities. Short distance local trade and trade from one caravan stop to another was performed alongside highly specialised long-distance trade.

Numbering the evolution of bīẓān slavery is possible only from the times of colonisation on, as precolonial accounts give only a glimpse of the phenomenon. According to one such account from a late 18th century observer, slaves were so common throughout the western Sahara, that he noted "An Arab must be poor indeed, not to have at least one negro slave" (Saugnier/ Brisson [1792] 1969: 99). Later visitors and explorers confirmed the statement. Slaves were numerous, and assigned a whole variety of occupations (cf.

chapter five). Despite this apparently high level of slave population, several factors indicate that the 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a considerable increase of bīẓān slavery, or to be more precise, the increase of relations of dependency, many of which fit into a straightforward concept of slave relations, while others tend to fit better into what could be called tributary relations. Southward expansion of bīẓān hegemony led to the integration of many right bank and some left bank cultivators of the Senegal River valley into relations of dependency with bīẓān overlords. These relations were not static, but were altered by the actors' agency. While many groups were still forced to pay considerable amounts of tribute, and to provide services to their masters (sometimes tribute was paid to both bīẓān and western Sudanese overlords), others managed to accumulate wealth, started to develop an agro-pastoralist lifestyle, and became powerful and feared allies of their former bīẓān masters, rather than continuing to be their dependents. These changes in status and lifestyle often took the shape of adopting a new ethnic identity; black Africans of the valley became successively bīẓān. Several bīẓān groups strongly involved in the western Sudanese trade became resident there, began to integrate themselves into their host community too, and hence managed to shift from "white" to "black" (cf. Taylor 1997: 68ff.; Webb 1995: 30, 35f.).[24] Within the Sahara, these changes were less marked. Some tributary groups managed to change their status as well, and a number of groups called ḥarāṭīn seem to have constituted themselves as sort of warrior tributaries, or as skilled workmen too. In the case of the ḥarāṭīn living in the oasis, the basis of the tributary relations some ḥarāṭīn groups lived in may have been remnants of an initial "better than slave" status that had resulted from the collective subjugation former indigenous cultivators had experienced from nomadic pastoralists. But in the context of centuries of domination, and with the inflow of manumitted slaves into these groups, the politics of identity and dependency are likely to have evolved significantly. The actual shape that the relations of dependency of either slaves and ḥarāṭīn took, resulted from an ongoing struggle, rather than being perpetuated past arrangements.[25]

In the 19th century major political events reframed the topography of political and military power in the Sahelian belt of West Africa. The ǧihād of Uthman dan Fodio in the first years of the century in the central Sudan, and of al-Hajj Umar, who seized Segu in 1861,[26] as well as the later wars of Samori Ture (in the 1880s), shaped new patterns of increased, and professionalised, enslavement. Had the spirit of Muslim reform initially been a guideline to at least the spiritual leaders of these movements, it soon deteriorated in the face of the need to maintain and equip the troops. Slave raiding, regardless of the Muslim or pagan origin of their prey, was the resource at hand to pay off the bill for horses, imported firearms and the like. While the West African market became flooded with slaves, the Atlantic slave trade went into decline. Since the late 18th century abolitionist movements had succeeded in having an increasing impact on their respective governments.

After a heavy decrease in the preceding decades, the slave trade on the Senegambian coast came to an end in the 1840s. This however neither stopped the use of slaves nor the trade in slaves on the continent. During their conquest of West Africa, started by mid-century, the French participated actively in enslavement and slave trade. Slaves constituted the majority of the French invasion army, and slave booty was used as a major reward for these forces. The internal slave trade was brought to an end only by the end of the century when the conquest was accomplished (cf. Klein 1990: 241ff.; Last 1974: 3ff.; Lovejoy 1983: 154f.; Mahadi 1992: 114; Meillassoux 1986: 257ff.).

Assessing the Trade in Slaves

What remains controversial in the debate involving the evolution of enslavement, slave trade, and slavery outlined here, is how to interpret the interrelations between the different branches of the evolution portrayed, and to some extent, the numbers of slaves involved. Patrick Manning (1990a: 140ff.) argues on the basis of price theory that the rapid decline in demand from the Atlantic made slave prices drop in the course of the 19th century. The profitability of slave use within Africa thus grew, and incited internal demand to compensate for the lost external demand. The second half of the 19th century, witnessing this evolution, became somewhat the heyday of African slave societies, with their brilliant courts, vibrant trade and impressive cities. Other scholars, however, deny that the end of the Atlantic trade had such an impact on the interior slave trade, and consequently on the evolution of prices there. The increase of slave use in the interior is interpreted as being a result of internal factors, not external ones (cf. Lovejoy 1983: 154).

Confirmation of either point of view proves difficult. To evaluate the link between Atlantic and internal trade, it should be pointed out that those slaves who could no longer be sold to the Atlantic coast effectively entered the interior market. This increase of supply, which according to the above-mentioned hypothesis of Patrick Manning should have incited a considerable drop in slave prices, is contradicted by data for the first half of the 19th century, which does not account for any such evolution, except for short periods in some coastal areas (cf. Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 279ff., 285). Any comparison of prices, however, only indirectly indicates the number of commodities traded. A whole set of reasons is possible for the prices in the interior maintaining their level, e.g. a rise in internal demand may have compensated for the decline in external demand. Far more illuminating therefore are direct indications of the numbers and characteristics of the slaves traded in the various directions. Most striking in this context is that the Atlantic trade had preferences in slave gender complementary to the Oriental, and most of the internal slave trade. About two thirds of the slaves shipped from the African continent to the Americas between 1811-1866 were male (cf. Eltis 1987: 256).[27] These preferences were well reflected by higher

prices for slave men paid at the Atlantic coast. In the interior market, as well as in the Oriental trade, prices for female slaves were most often higher than for male slaves. Most marked was the differential for young women and men, ranging between men costing 80 percent of the women's price and women being four times as expensive as men. Commonly slave women cost between a third and a half more than slave men, but differences became much less pronounced among older slaves (cf. Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 279).[28] These indicators of slave gender preferences are substantiated by accounts enunciating that female slaves were more important than men both in the internal and Oriental trade (where they made up two thirds of the slaves exported; cf. Klein 1983: 72f.; Klein 1990: 240).

It is by this complementary structure that the interior market and the trade on the Atlantic coast became connected. Paul Lovejoy has calculated that between 1805 and 1850 the number of slaves traded from the central Sudan to the Atlantic coast can been estimated at 75,000-124,000 slaves, of whom 95 percent were prime males (cf. Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 269).[29] However, what remains unexplored is what happened when this external demand for prime male slaves broke down. As prices in the interior for male slaves stayed low, profit from this trade, and hence interest in it, are likely to have been marginal. It might have been this tendency that became a reason why free men were slaughtered rather than enslaved during slave raids in the second half of the 19th century. Such reports have often been used as a proof of the slave markets' pronounced gender preferences, and consequently of female slaves dominating within the internal and Oriental trade (Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 281ff.). Opening up this narrow focus provides a more differentiated image. Preferences for female slaves, most clearly pronounced with regard to young women and girls, did not withhold male slaves from the market altogether. Those men massacred in the slave raids of the late 19th century were the free men, hence those most likely to resist enslavement. Slave men in the same event were simply captured and later resold along with slave women and children, as well as free women and children. Therefore the economy of slave raiding and trading depended not only on the logic of demand and supply, but on the patterns of production as well. From this point of view, free men, in the eyes of the slave raiders and traders, seem to have been more difficult to transform into slaves, i.e. to subjugate to the will of slave masters, than women, children and slaves.[30] The marketability of slaves depended largely on their presumed mood and capabilities.[31] Slaves threatening their future masters with their propensity for running away, such as "the male slave called *k'etara shimge* – 'the one who crosses the fence' – because of his great height and strength" (Dunbar 1977: 162, original emphasis) only attracted poor prices. They were a headache for the traders too, who often put them into chains to prevent flight.

Slave use was another determinant of slave prices. Several authors note that slave prices in the interior of West Africa rose in those regions where either agricultural or artisanal production became a major domain of slave use,

especially in the course of the increased commodity production during the 19th century. Demand for slave men, and consequently prices paid for them on the slave markets, are likely to have risen too, as slave men were needed for the emerging new sectors (cf. Klein 1983: 72).[32] The rather one-sided price differential between slave women and men reported from the interior of West Africa therefore might be a result of contemporary observers focusing largely on the export market, namely the prices paid in the Oriental trade.[33] In 19th century Damagaram, in the south of today's Republic of Niger, slave prices varied according to market location, and hence the assumed destination of the slaves. While in original Damagaram, where agricultural production relied heavily on slave labour, adult slave men attracted higher prices than women, the latter were much more expensive in Zinder, one of the major export markets frequented by Tuareg involved in the trans-Saharan slave trade, and renowned for its preference in slave women (cf. Dunbar 1977: 161f.).

Increased demand for slave men nevertheless did not necessarily alter a trade pattern favouring female slaves. The soldiers of the western Sudanese slave armies are reported to have been rewarded for their services with slave women, who were supposed not only to serve the soldiers, but to cultivate for them – and hence to feed them (cf. Klein 1983: 80ff.).[34] Many of the slave men living in slave settlements and paying their masters fixed agricultural tributes, lived together with slave women (cf. Meillassoux 1983: 59ff.).

Giving a slave man a woman was always a means for the master to secure the goodwill of the former. The aim of breeding slaves is likely to have been part of the masters' strategy too. An overall low fertility among slave women, and the negative growth which many slave populations experienced,[35] provide no rationale for the individual master to dismiss this option altogether. These numbers only underline that there were few slave children, or else that few slave children survived, and not that there were no slave children at all. Again market conditions are likely to have influenced the masters' interests. During the 19th century slave prices were low, so low that acquiring slaves on the market was less expensive than breeding them (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 285ff.). The end of the slave trade during the first years of the 20th century altered this situation. Now masters had to rely almost exclusively on biological reproduction to obtain new slaves. This rationale, manifest in present day strategies of manumission, is very well expressed by the statement that a slave master would be crazy to manumit his female slave, for this act would entail giving up not only the rights in her person, but in all her children (Khalifa Ould Kebab).

In conclusion on the historical evolution of bīẓān slave demography two major hypotheses remain, although the scarcity of data leaves much room for contestation (cf. McDougall 1995). Gender preferences of pastoral bīẓān slave masters involved in domestic slavery are likely to have matched those of their western Sudanese fellows, which means they opted for the acquisition of slave women rather than slave men.[36] Contradicting patterns nevertheless are

likely to have occurred. Wherever the production of marketable goods, such as gum arabic, dates, and grain, as well as the organisation of caravan trade became a major concern, male slave labour was to be employed on a larger scale. The rise of these different economic sectors within the Sahara and at the desert's edge throughout the 19th century, together with the low prices for male slaves on the slave markets, therefore are likely to have fuelled the diversification of bīẓān pastoral economy into different, complementary branches linked by master-slave relations. Slavery became the most prominent means to organise both social hierarchy and economic specialisation. In this respect, slavery easily fitted into a social landscape marked by a multitude of relations of dependency, such as patron-client ties, spiritual leadership, and military supremacy. These patterns of social hierarchy provided a framework which enabled slave masters to draw analogies between the various relations of dependency, including slavery. Nevertheless slaves, and to a large extent slave descendants, remained apart from the social body. Analogical reasoning saved the masters from confusing dependents of free and slave status.

Numbering Sūdān

While the foregoing paragraph tried to elucidate the demographic importance of bīẓān slavery in historic times, the present one focuses on the recent past, and contemporary data. The last official Mauritanian population inquiry to publish numbers distinguishing bīẓān and sūdān goes back to 1965. Then the bīẓān were estimated to make up 70-60 percent, and the sūdān at 30-40 percent of only the bīẓān society, i.e. the Mauritanian population without the black African ethnic groups. More detailed numbers can be deducted from a survey of the literate (either Arabic or French) population older than twelve years. According to these estimations ḥassān make up 15 percent of bīẓān society, zwāya 36 percent, znāga 5 percent, and artisans (iggāwen and maʿalimīn) 2 percent. The sūdān together constitute 42 percent, with ḥarāṭīn representing about 29, and slaves 13 percent of the total bīẓān population (cf. De Chassey 1984: 452f.; Davis 1997: 96).

The Colonial Records

Further demographic information comes from the colonial period, when the administration registered all inhabitants by both tribal and social affiliation. For the "cercle du Hodh" in 1957 the sūdān were estimated to make up 49 percent of the total population. The further south bīẓān tribes lived, the more sūdān were attached to them. While the almost completely sedentarised Awlād Mbarek consisted to about 80 percent of sūdān, a northern, small camel-rearing fraction of the Idebussāṭ had only a share of 11 percent sūdān.[37] Data on the population of the whole Assaba region from 1950 presents a

more balanced relation. Here 45,265 (68 percent) bīẓān live together with 21,252 (32 percent) sūdān (cf. Munier 1952: 40).[38]

For the region under study here a fairly complete inventory of population in the district of Moudjéria in 1950, which covers a large part of the area of Achram-Diouk, offers very detailed insights (cf. Table 3). Among the local tribes, the sūdān make up an average of 33 percent. Inner-regional variation, however, is strong, ranging from 14 percent sūdān among the Kunta Awlād Sīdi Haiballa I to 62 percent in the adabay of Moudjéria. Another significant characteristic is the rather low percentage of 26 and 27 percent sūdān in the tribal groups of the Abakak and Kunta, compared to 39 and 47 percent sūdān among the Tarkoz and Messūma. One explanation might be that the latter two are zwāya tribes, a number of which are known to have relied more heavily on slave labour in the past than their ḥassān fellows (e.g. the IdawʿĪš Abakak). The limited range of this explanatory scheme, however, becomes apparent, once the exceptions to it are taken into account. The Kunta, although having only a very low percentage of sūdān in their midst, do not fit into the status category of either ḥassān or zwāya properly, but have gained a reputation for both groups' virtues alike. On the one hand there are tribal traditions drawing heavily on the religious prestige of their eponymous ancestors which allow the group to be commonly classified as zwāya (cf. Withcomb 1975, Batran 1979). On the other hand, besides these roots of piety and learning, the Kunta were a major actor in the military confrontations of the last few centuries. In this, much like the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd of the Assaba and Hodh (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1997: 592ff.), they gained a reputation for zwāya and ḥassān virtues alike.[39]

Even more pronounced is the demographic imbalance occurring between sūdān men and women, with the latter making up as much as 58 percent of the total sūdān population. Variation among the individual tribal fractions is strong again, and ranges from a sex ratio of 71 to 49 percent women, again a constellation that cannot be explained consistently in terms of the assumed patterns of ḥassān or zwāya master-slave relations. The great number of sūdān women is the more surprising, as the data concerns population patterns almost five decades after the slave trade came to an end, which also meant the end of the option to buy slaves according to gender preferences, and hence to be able to create a bias in the sex ratio of the slave population. The most feasible explanation for the greater numbers of sūdān women is an already manifest outmigration of sūdān men while sūdān women continue to remain behind with the bīẓān. This evolution was noted already by colonial administrator Gabriel Féral (1983: 138), who ruled the Assaba district successively during the 1940s and 1950s. In several cases bīẓān even continued to enlist slaves in the colonial registers who had left them long before, for admitting this fact would have meant dishonour to them.

Table 3: Population in the Moudjéria District, 1950[40]

tribe fraction	bīẓān Men	Women	Children	Total	sūdān Men	Women	Children	Total	Total population	share sūdān/ total pop.	share sūdān women/ sūdān
Abakak											
Ahel Soueid Ahmed	459	439	387	1,285	94	145	103	342	1,627	21%	61%
Ahel Soueid Baba	91	103	111	305	42	49	58	149	454	33%	54%
Aoueissiat Mama	60	61	58	179	25	32	22	79	258	31%	56%
Aoueissiat Hamoud	88	51	98	277	19	43	44	111	388	29%	69%
Legouanit	163	142	191	496	40	63	68	171	667	26%	61%
Oulad Ely N'Tounfas	278	244	179	701	114	142	58	314	1,015	31%	55%
Total Abakak	1,139	1,040	1,024	3,243	334	474	353	1,166	4,409	26%	59%
Kounta											
Haiballa I	466	446	450	1,362	74	84	59	217	1,579	14%	53%
Haiballa II	52	63	55	170	17	26	17	60	230	26%	60%
Oulad El Bah	108	106	105	319	12	29	18	59	378	16%	71%
Oulad Tenakayas	190	214	198	602	52	65	73	190	792	24%	56%
Askéras	69	56	67	192	47	46	61	154	346	45%	49%
Ahel Elewa	79	74	97	250	21	25	36	82	332	25%	54%
Legraiers	55	59	69	183	62	84	95	241	424	57%	58%
A. Mhmd. Ould Sidi Elemine	83	71	125	279	10	20	18	48	327	15%	67%
Zenaktas	208	214	152	574	76	99	96	271	845	32%	57%
Oulad Sidi Ahmed Bouhjar	64	78	32	174	57	56	71	184	358	51%	50%
Total Kounta	1,374	1,381	1,350	4,105	428	534	544	1,506	5,611	27%	56%
Torkoz											
Oulad Sidi Ahmed	340	338	361	1039	140	197	262	599	1,638	37%	58%
Leghouareb	204	149	124	477	95	151	114	360	837	43%	61%
Sidi Reyoug	147	120	128	395	54	115	97	266	661	40%	68%
Total Torkoz	691	607	613	1,911	289	463	473	1,225	3,136	39%	62%
Messouma											
Moctar	101	78	57	236	63	94	102	259	495	52%	60%
Hamady	88	75	77	240	52	64	53	169	409	41%	55%
Total Mess.	189	153	134	476	115	158	155	428	904	47%	58%
Isolated											
Adabaye Moudjéria	63	82	84	229	105	140	134	379	608	62%	57%
Ahel Cheikh Ould Meni	216	193	140	549	147	160	142	449	998	45%	52%
Ahel Obat	122	105	70	297	78	112	72	262	559	47%	59%
TOTAL	3,794	3,561	3,415	10,810	1,496	2,041	1,873	5,415	16,225	33%	58%
Total 1947	3,589	3,598	2,968	10,155	1,420	2,040	1,778	5,283	15,393	34%	59%

It could be asked whether the figures provided by colonial documents might be put in question for being biased. Indeed the administrative population registers were developed for the purpose of colonial rule and did often not rely on inquiries on the ground, but depended on information from local chiefs. Nevertheless the data from 1950 seems to be quite accurate, as it reflects knowledge generated and confirmed over several decades of colonial administration. Questions remain with regard to the correct appreciation of sex-ratios among sūdān. It might be supposed that administrators interested above all in the tax on livestock[41] failed to assess scrupulously the population in some independent adwaba, i.e. sūdān agricultural settlements. There sūdān men might have had less reason for migration than while living among bīẓān. The data available on the adabay of Moudjéria (subsumed under the ambiguous category of "isolated" tribal groups), however do not confirm such a hypothesis. While this settlement, developing around the local French administrative residence, offered the largest employment opportunities to male workers, i.e. sūdān men throughout the region, the sex ratio among the numerous sūdān living there was most close to the average sex ratio of all other tribal groups (57 versus 58 percent). Sex ratios in rural adwaba experiencing even more control by the bīẓān therefore are unlikely to have contradicted the patterns found in Moudjéria.[42] Within this context it seems noteworthy to hint at the opposite imbalance among the bīẓān, where the men, in contrast to what might be expected, slightly outnumber the women. Although the administrative register cannot be regarded as a source attentive to migrational movements and therefore might underestimate their number, it has to be reminded that the data from 1950 presents a situation hardly to compare with the present one.[43] Today the Mauritanian rural hinterland has become characterised by men of all social strata emigrating to the urban centres and above all women, elders and children staying back home.

The data of 1950 is most accurate in the sense of being an exhaustive census of the district's population by means of registering every inhabitant as a member of one tribe or fraction. It is therefore able to limit the distortions arising from a territorially-based assessment of population data, which would cross-cut these territorially mobile social entities of nomadic society. This advantage is opposed by the difficulty of constructing and maintaining a "tribe" as a fixed unit of observation. The bīẓān qabīla not only used to change its territory of nomadisation, but size and memberships too, thus challenging the records.[44] Finally the heavy migrational movements triggered off by the droughts of the recent decades, concentrating about one third of the national population in the capital Nouakchott, brought an end to both the further viability and practicability of this method of gathering population data.[45]

Contemporary Rural Population

In the quest for an estimate of the importance the various status groups have in contemporary rural areas eleven villages and neighbourhoods of one

big village were studied to gather data for something akin to a census of these socially heterogeneous settlements. The results presented in Table 4 are unconventional in so far as they do not rely on interviews with all the people concerned. Given the sensitivity of the information required most crucially – namely servile and dependent status – a large-scale, open inquiry focusing on this topic would have firstly been a vain effort due to false information by the respondents. Second, and much more seriously, any such procedure would have raised resistance and opposition to further cooperation with my work. Third, as much of the population is still highly mobile, wandering around various fields and village-based houses, moving to pastures, and migrating seasonally to the cities, inquiry on the ground, seeking a nominal population, incurs further serious problems. Information therefore was gathered from several paid informants, who in many cases in turn sought assistance among further informants. The result was census data based on the number of households considered to be permanently settled by the informants. The depth of information yielded by the informants varied strongly from one case to the other. Several informants withdrew their initial consent to the project, others limited their information so as to avoid touching on any sensitive matter. This happened in one third of the total projected case studies. Data in the remaining eleven cases varies too, due to the informants' differing ability and willingness to provide information. Figures are most accurate for male household chiefs, while women's status failed to be indicated in several cases, or available data remained superficial. In these cases the more ambitious goals of research were abandoned rather then forcing the male informants to release information they were apparently less ready to provide, and in some cases obviously less familiar with. Nevertheless in a number of cases supplementary data concerning various aspects like property in land and animals, migration and children could be gathered and provided valuable background information.

Depicting status categories in a matrix as in Table 4 seems to contradict a perception of these as dynamic social constructs, emerging in social and economic interaction, and thus to give a static description of bīẓān social hierarchy – an image which was hardly ever appropriate, and completely disregards the actual diffusion into new meanings of many social labels. Indeed one might argue that distinguishing between ʿabīd and ḥarāṭīn, and additionally "slaves liberated during their lifetime" as is done here, is futile, for these people all share by and large the same situation. Most probably all of them would describe themselves as ḥarāṭīn to any outsider. Insiders on the other hand continue to know personal histories, and thus origin and status in many cases. While this knowledge is withheld in much of today's everyday interaction, it is maintained for occasions where it might become important, such as marriages. Another reason to maintain distinct categories is that many ḥarāṭīn insist on being a ḥarṭāni by birth, and having no servile predecessor, or as in some more dubious cases, to descend from a ḥarāṭīn grandfather. To many of these, it is of crucial importance to distinguish

Table 4: Frequency of Status Group Members in Different Villages

village	sex	absent	ʿabīd	liberated	ḥarāṭīn	znāga	šurva	zwāya	ḥassān	others[a]	missing	Tot.
Achoueibir	M	8	5	3	4	7	0	3	9	0	0	39
	W	0	4	0	14	6	0	4	9	0	2	39
Hella	M	39	14	3	37	16	7	14	33	10	5	178
	W	2	29	6	39	26	3	15	33	16	9	178
Idabouzeid	M	7	3	4	0	0	0	32	0	0	0	46
	W	3	6	1	0	0	1	35	0	0	0	46
Achram I	M	14	0	2	11	2	0	11	4	3	0	47
	W	3	4	0	15	3	0	11	6	2	3	47
Achram II	M	5	6	48	12	0	0	8	6	0	0	85
	W	1	5	9	54	1	0	7	8	0	0	85
Achram III	M	8	1	5	3	0	0	25	0	3	0	45
	W	4	2	7	1	0	0	26	1	3	1	45
Leklewa	M	12	8	16	26	0	1	16	0	0	0	79
	W	5	19	20	14	0	0	14	0	1	6	79
Labde	M	3	8	7	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
	W	0	14	5	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
Téjal	M	13	12	15	15	0	0	0	0	0	1	56
	W	0	40	9	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	56
Legned	M	13	0	0	28	2	0	4	1	0	0	48
	W	2	0	0	40	2	0	1	3	0	0	48
Leqraye	M	2	0	27	1	0	0	46	46	7	2	131
	W	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	129	131
Subtotal	M	124	57	130	150	27	8	159	99	23	8	785
	W	20	123	57	196	38	4	115	60	22	150	785
Total		144	180	187	346	65	12	274	159	45	158	1,570

a: iggāwen, maʿalimīn and kwār

themselves from those ḥarāṭīn who acquired this status only recently, and in correspondence to its folk etymology, meaning "freed slave", especially if doubts persist whether this was achieved via a formal act of manumission. Trying to represent this distinction put forward by many interviewees, I will introduce here the category of "liberated", meaning people actually claiming to be ḥarāṭīn, but having achieved this status during their lifetime, i.e. not by inheritance. This of course is an arbitrary distinction, as any manumitted slave becomes ḥarāṭīn. The aim is rather to give a hint at the pace of what could be called "ḥarṭānisation", the disappearance of people of formal slave estate in recent times. Here again the data is to be treated cautiously. While

the informants frequently distinguished clearly between liberated and ḥarāṭīn as far as men were concerned, they did so much less often with regard to women. These, if not classified as slaves, are often directly subsumed under the label ḥarāṭīn, clearly representing the euphemistic use of this term referring to all sūdān, i.e. slaves, liberated and ḥarāṭīn. In this respect the numbers presented reveal the limitations of the data in some case studies (especially Achoueibir, Achram II), rather than slave women's achievements in their struggle for social ascension. Another category quite uncommon in a description of bīẓān social hierarchy are the šurva. While a tribal confederation of this name does exist, in this case the term is employed only for people of proclaimed šarīfian descent, disregarding affiliation to either ḥassān or zwāya tribes.[46]

The study focuses on households, and hence ideally couples rather than individuals. However, it should be noted that there are cases in which these are led by only one person. This configuration is revealed by the category "absent", representing the men or women missing from the households. This distinction shows that throughout all villages, many more women lead a household on their own, and without support of a husband, than men do. The overall number of 124 households lacking a man (vs. 20 lacking a woman) constitutes about 16 percent of the total number of households. This number is effectively still a low estimate of male absenteeism in the rural area. It only recognises cases in which either member of the couple is deceased or divorced.[47] Many men, however, are absent from home for long periods, mainly in the dry hot season, or even permanently due to migration. The last official national population census in 1988 thus witnessed a continuous rise of female heads of households, with the average frequency being 25.3 percent in rural households (maximum 39.1 percent in the rural sedentary settings) and 36.8 percent in urban households (maximum of 45 percent in the squatter areas of Nouakchott; cf. Davis 1997: 115; Simard 1996: 83, 103).

The different villages and neighbourhoods have quite distinct characteristics. Achoueibir is a small village inhabited by ḥassān of one tribe and a few zwāya families. Hella is the settlement of the former emiral camp of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. The name of this village, which corresponds to the word for an emiral camp in ḥassāniyya (ḥella), is reminiscent of this more glorious past. Although by definition a ḥassān settlement, quite a number of zwāya from a wide variety of tribes have moved to Hella. All cases from Idabouzeid to Achram III represent neighbourhoods of one big zwāya village neighbouring Hella. While Idabouzeid and Achram I are inhabited by sūdān and zwāya, and also a number of ḥassān in the case of Achram I, the majority in Achram II is constituted by sūdān. In Achram III the zwāya have only one ḥassān woman living among them and only a few sūdān live in this quarter. Leklewa again is a smaller zwāya village, with one fifth of the population being bīẓān. Labde is a small and recent settlement of sūdān from Achram, i.e. of zwāya affiliation. Téjal is a similar case, but of sūdān from a ḥassān tribe. Legned finally represents a settlement of ḥarāṭīn from the Ahel Swayd

Aḥmed, who claim to descend not from slaves, but to have always been an autonomous body of ḥarāṭīn within the tribe. Leqraye finally is a medium-sized village inhabited by many, diverse tribal groups, constituting small neighbourhoods, and comprising sūdān and zwāya as well as ḥassān.

This short overview illuminates how diverse the social landscapes in the settlements under study are. While the cases clearly differentiate along such classical categories as zwāya/ḥassān, or bīẓān/ḥarāṭīn dominated villages, this typology proves unable to apprehend the full scope of social formations. Clues to an understanding of the villages' social topography are given rather by the exploration of a varying set of factors. One such strain is the evolution of relations of dependency distinct from one tribe to the other. A glance at the highly diverse tribal histories including the still recent sedentarisation shows how bīẓān and sūdān individuals and groups reconfigured their relations differently. While tribal cohesion was in most cases strong enough to make at least a considerable number of sūdān settle with their former masters, it was the later management of sūdān aspirations by the bīẓān that was decisive to whether sūdān left to build their own villages or remained with their former masters. Besides different types of master-slave relations prevailing in bīẓān camps with distinct professional and economic specialisation (cf. chapter five), it is first of all tribal access to land that today shapes both old and new relations of dependency (cf. chapter seven). As the demography of bīẓān slavery proved to be characterised by a marked preference for slave women and thus underpinned the perception that slave men and women were incorporated differently into society, it remains a major question whether the data on status affiliation in the area of Achram-Diouk gives evidence of these patterns living on until the present.

The Demography of Rural Sūdān Women

A major differentiation with regard to the shape of gender relations in the eleven villages of the region of Achram-Diouk under study here occurs between sūdān of either ḥassān or zwāya affiliation. While the ratio of women and men across all categories from slave to ḥarāṭīn is balanced in the villages and quarters where the majority of sūdān are affiliated to zwāya (e.g. Achram II, Leklewa, etc.), this is not the case where sūdān are of ḥassān affiliation. In these villages and quarters sūdān women clearly outnumber sūdān men, but this imbalance does not represent the number of women actually living without a husband. Some sūdāniyyāt (sūdān women) are in fact married to bīẓān men, but their number is far from balancing the effects of the portrayed female overhang. The reasons why so many households (the number of which is probably largely underestimated in the present study) simply lack a man vary. Many women stay alone after the death of their husband, while others decide to continue to lead their own household after divorce (cf. note 48, this chapter). The marked differential in the sex composition of the many sūdān households is remarkable for another reason. It applies to the second major subordinate group, the znāga too,[48] and proves

to be a phenomenon more pronounced with respect to subordinate groups, and less prevalent among bīẓān of either zwāya or ḥassān status. The number of the sūdān women actually leading a household alone in the permanent absence of a man ranges in the ḥassān dominated villages from 20 percent in Hella, to 42 percent in Achram I.[49] Ratios in the zwāya dominated villages generally are lower, Idabouzeid and Achram II have null or almost null percent of the sūdān women leading a household alone, Labde has about 10 percent, Leklewa 13 percent, and Achram III stands out with about 30 percent. In most villages the respective ratios among the bīẓān (znāga excluded) are lower: about 10 percent in Achoueibir and Hella, 16 percent in Achram II, about 20 percent in Idabouzeid and Achram II. Exceptions are revealed by the cases of Achram I and Leklewa, both with 26 percent of bīẓān women single head of household. While in Achram I even more of the few sūdān women (42 percent) as compared to the bīẓān women live alone, the situation is the complete opposite in Leklewa. Here 13 percent of the women of the large sūdān community live without a male counterpart. Achram I therefore presents a case where both bīẓān and sūdān women face problems with marital insecurity, while in Leklewa this is a more serious problem for the bīẓān than the sūdān women.

Reasons for this situation are specific to each case in question. While in Achram I those factors leading to a surplus in women, and consequently of unmarried or widowed women, apply to both sūdān and bīẓān, with an even stronger emphasis on the former, they apply in Leklewa foremost to the bīẓān, and thus contradict the general trend. The two villages differ not only in being either ḥassān or zwāya. While in Achram I there live a conglomerate of bīẓān from diverse strata, and sūdān of ḥarāṭīn status from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, in Leklewa the bīẓān are of a small, formerly predominantly pastoral nomadic faction, who in order to obtain some control over cultivable land had to quarrel with, and dissociate themselves from the elite of their Legwāṭiṭ tribal body. The sūdān in this case found both a sort of ally in the bīẓān, and access to new plots for cultivation. Achram I therefore represents a case of a quarter with low social cohesion, and no direct link to natural resources, whereas Leklewa marks the case of sūdān gaining in many respects, and bīẓān experiencing an ambiguous situation both with reference to natural resources (the gains in land cannot compensate for the losses in the pastoral sector), and probably more importantly in symbolic terms, by the experience of marginality.

Why ḥarāṭīn of ḥassān affiliation more often have their households led by women without a male partner, while those of zwāya affiliation do not, remains open to speculation, unless further evidence confirms the findings developed from the survey, and increases the insights into reasons. The motives for women leading a household on their own are manifold. While in the different quarters of Achram a considerable number of zwāya women simply are not married, but nevertheless live on their own, the majority of the ḥarāṭīn women in the same situation in Legned are old and widowed. As

marriage patterns with regard to marital age and other demographic factors do not differ significantly among the status groups, habits of integration of old people may vary from one village community to another.

In view of the scarce resources of the region of Achram-Diouk being the major reason for rural emigration and the male seasonal migration to the cities, different constraints on the access of the two different ḥarāṭīn groups, those with a zwāya and those with a ḥassān tribal affiliation, to local resources can be discerned as another factor responsible for sex imbalance and households led by women alone. Indeed, as will be analysed below (cf. chapter seven), zwāya and ḥassān in the region practise different modes of land tenure, and attribution of land to dependent people. In addition, some tribes are better off with regard to control over land than others.

A more pronounced, and often permanent male migration out of the rural area necessarily influences marriage patterns. Older, divorced or widowed women who already have several children may face more problems than young ones in contracting a new marriage with one of the few men in the area willing and able to pay for a marriage. This is the predominant constellation in Téjal, where many women living alone have children still going to school, and very few are old and widowed. Many young women nonetheless leave for the cities in order to get the right husband there, and only later come back. An overaged population, resulting from the migration of many men and some women at their most active age, leads to disproportion in the number of men and women, and many women being unmarried. As men normally are much older than women in bīẓān marriages, the number of widowed women in a community is likely to increase in correlation to its mean age. All these points emerge as being dependent on the evolution of the rural area's attractiveness to young residents. Obviously sūdān perceive fewer opportunities in the rural area than bīẓān do, or else the cities are more attractive to sūdān than to bīẓān. This is revealed by the male absenteeism among the former being generally stronger than among the latter. The reason for this unbalanced and uneven evolution of rural demography has to be seen in the various settings of social and economic deprivation experienced by either sūdān and bīẓān in the rural villages. Relations of dependency between sūdān and bīẓān, and the gender aspects of this relation, vary from one community to the other. Hence the greatest number of sūdān women actually without a husband is found among the ḥedmān (sing. ḥādem), the slave women of Hella and Téjal. Here low women's status appears as inhibiting to marriage. Second, in a few cases the absence of marriages still results from the bīẓān social practices of domination that denied slaves the right to marry.[50] A lack of economic opportunities leading to the young men's rural exodus thus is at the basis of further social deprivation experienced by women, and here especially the women of low status remaining in the rural hinterland.

Sex, Gender and Servile Demography

One major thread links the demography of servile groups in and beyond Africa throughout the centuries, and until the present. The relations of dependency manifested in slavery, and more recently in patron-client ties, have always been, and continue to exploit gender as a means of domination (cf. Glassman 1995). Women and men living in conditions of servility experienced different modes of domination. This only partially resulted from slave women and men being acquired for different purposes and uses, and thus being more or less valued throughout West Africa. The deprivation of kinship which slaves had to experience meant different things to women and men respectively. Consequently, masters adopted different practices to exploit this important means of domination with regard to slave women and men. The greater hardship slave women experienced compared to slave men when they struggled for increased autonomy from their masters, as inferred above from the life histories of women and men who experienced slave relations (cf. chapter two), can be traced in the demographic material presented in this chapter. Both the colonial census (cf. Table 3), and the contemporary study of villages in the region of Achram-Diouk reveal that women are more often bound to the slave estate than men. Manumission in recent times, i.e. the opportunities of enhancing one's status (though the data here is less precise for the women's cases), has also been achieved by many more men than women (cf. Table 4). The figures for the ḥarāṭīn seem to alter this image, for they show a greater number of women than men belonging to this category. The number of ḥarṭāniyyāt, i.e. ḥarāṭīn women, is likely to be overestimated in Table 4 and Table 5, because data provided for women was less precise than for men. The delicate question of whether a woman classified as "ḥarāṭīn" had achieved this status through her parents, or had achieved it by manumission, was less often possible to confirm. Any person whose status was in doubt in the present survey was classified as belonging to the highest possible status group. However, the total number of 56.8 percent ḥarṭāniyyāt is less dramatically biased in favour of the women than one would expect. It is indeed quite close to the sex ratio of either the artisans or the ḥassān. Such relations can already be expected to result from the high ratio of male migration among the ḥarāṭīn.

A major objection to this conclusion can be derived from the nature of this very data. It provides only a glimpse of sex ratios in recent times, and it displays a great variation among the villages and neighbourhoods. As the relations of dependency were subject to massive changes throughout this century, and probably throughout the preceding ones too, conclusions on the basis of this data on the nature of gender relations and sex ratios in earlier times run the risk of portraying the past in terms of the present. There are factors in the evolution of slave relations in bīẓān society which probably favoured an increase of the masters' pressures to preserve their rights in the women slaves. After the end of the African slave trade during the first years

Table 5: Status Affiliation of Women and Men (Data from Ten Villages in the Region of Achram-Diouk)[51]

	Men (row percent)		Women (row percent)		Total (column percent)	
ʿabīd	57	(31.7%)	123	(68.3%)	180	(15.8%)
liberated	103	(64.4%)	57	(35.6%)	160	(14.0%)
ḥarāṭīn	149	(43.2%)	196	(56.8%)	345	(30.3%)
znāga	27	(41.5%)	38	(58.5%)	65	(5.7%)
šurva	8	(64.3%)	4	(35.7%)	12	(1.0%)
zwāya	114	(50.2%)	113	(49.8%)	227	(19.9%)
ḥassān	52	(46.4%)	60	(53.6%)	112	(9.8%)
others[a]	16	(42.1%)	2	(57.9%)	38	(3.3%)
Subtotal sūdān	309	(45.1%)	376	(54.9%)	685	(60.1%)
Subtotal bīẓān	217	(47.8%)	237	(52.2%)	454	(39.9%)
Total	526	(46.2%)	613	(53.8%)	1,139	(100%)

a: iggāwen, maʿalimīn, kwār

of the 20th century, these women had become the sole source of new slaves. Manumitting slave women, unlike manumitting slave men, had the consequence of giving up rights in their progeny. While the exact impact this change in the outer dialectics of bīẓān slavery had is difficult to discern, its relevance as a factor contributing to a change in bīẓān master-slave relations has to be affirmed. Nevertheless, its occurrence, which by now is almost one hundred years past, did not alter the gendered structure of bīẓān slavery altogether. It rather solidified structures already present. Slave women became an important source of slave reproduction not only with the end of the slave trade in the region. Although the demography of the bīẓān slaves is likely to have been negative, like those of the other African slave populations, slave women had children, and these continued to be slaves. Other factors, such as e.g. the gendered structure of slave labour, and the ambiguities in slave women's and men's divergent options for status enhancement, as will be shown in the next chapter, also shaped relations between slaves and masters. They were the reason why the control of slave women by the masters was stricter and tighter than that of slave men.

It is not intended here to assume that the gendered experience of the slave condition in recent times is identical to that of the past. Rather the conclusion to be drawn from the present data is that gender, i.e. the changing configurations of gender relations in bīẓān society, has been essential to the definition of master-slave relations. The rise of slave emancipation and manumission did not alter this configuration. As it was possible to show in this chapter, those relations of power and dependency embedded in gender relations were not directly challenged by the emancipation project. Also today, men have

better chances than women to formally surmount servile estate. Maintaining women's servile estate is a strategy for many bīẓān who wish to preserve their mastership. The denial of manumission remains a powerful means in the hand of the bīẓān masters, because it enables them to maintain relations of domination and symbolic supremacy over these women, but in some respects over their men and their progeny too. This is true although the emancipation of the servile and dependent strata has achieved many successes to date, and continues to move on as the growing number of ḥarāṭīn and liberated slaves shows. With regard to this process, the analysis of gender relations proves to be crucial in discerning where the new emerges, and where the past continues to shape the present.