

## Introduction Child Slavery, Redemption, and "Adoption" in Senegal

This study is a social history of minors in Senegal who were once enslaved and who, upon the abolition of slavery in the French colonial empire in 1848, became wards of the colonial state. In essence, it is a study about children - eighteen years of age and younger - and institutional care, specifically guardianship. From 1848 to the first decade of the twentieth century when guardianship declined (it was never abolished), minors experienced a transition from slavery to freedom. At emancipation, French authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, backed by merchants, proprietors, and commercial enterprises in Senegal, among whom were those who vehemently opposed abolition, expressed the need to maintain the Senegalese economy, avoid chaos, and ensure a future source of labor. In the aftermath of emancipation, these were among the considerations that led the French colonial administration to create an institution called tutelle - a form of guardianship or wardship. With tutelle in place, the administration gave minors to Black and mixed-race Africans, Europeans, and institutions, including Catholic orders, and, later, to the military for "adoption." As I have argued elsewhere, tutelle as a legal instrument existed in metropolitan France before French emancipation in 1848, but its purpose to protect the patrimony of mostly middle and upper-class orphan minors - and the manner in which it was administered, were vastly different than the tutelle which emerged in colonial Senegal during the second half of the nineteenth century, as we shall see in Chapter 3.<sup>1</sup>

Paradoxically, many of the individuals who adopted liberated minors were people who once owned them, and who had no vested interest in abolition, which they believed would lead to the end of servile labor. For the most part, these individuals continued to profit

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See Bernard Moitt, "Slavery and Guardianship in Postemancipation Senegal – Colonial Legislation and Minors in Tutelle, 1848–1905," in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), Child Slaves in the Modern World (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), p. 141.



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from the labor of minors in the post-emancipation period. In addition to adoption, the administration viewed *tutelle* as a form of apprenticeship that would allow minors, mostly males, to acquire skilled trades taught by their guardians or others designated by them. Most of the trades were artisanal. Females had fewer opportunities to learn trades and were usually relegated to acquiring and performing domestic labor like cooking, washing, and grain pounding. As we shall see throughout this book, the colonial administration's focus on apprenticeship was a self-serving device aimed at maintaining critical labor needs in post-emancipation Senegal. As a result, the poor treatment of liberated minors in *tutelle* – a central theme of this study – was not the primary focus of administrative attention for most of the period covered by this study. In other words, child welfare was not the principal objective of *tutelle*.

Since the abolition law of 1848 applied only to areas where the French had sovereignty, this study focuses primarily on minors in urban areas of Senegal, the most important of which were Saint-Louis, located at the mouth of the Senegal River, and Gorée, an island adjacent to the Cape Verde peninsula. But minors in Dakar, located at the tip of the Cape Verde peninsula, and Rufisque, south of Cape Verde, also merit attention because, along with Saint-Louis and Gorée, they became the most important commercial and political centers in Senegal. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, as G. Wesley Johnson indicates, they were known as the Four Communes or "municipalities whose citizens lived under the same privileges as communal residents in France itself." Child slavery was

<sup>3</sup> See G. Wesley Johnson, Jr., *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes*, 1900–1920 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Article 7 of the Emancipation Act of April 27, 1848, decreed that slavery was illegal on French soil. In the case of Senegal, French soil referred to Saint-Louis, Gorée, and a number of trading posts along the Senegal River within the range of cannon. The law was promulgated in Senegal on June 23, 1848. See Victor Schœlcher, *L'esclavage au Sénégal en 1880* (Paris: librairie centrale des publications populaires, 1880), pp. 8–9; Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 19–21. Archives Nationales du Sénégal (hereafter ANS) K 24, Captivité et esclavage: répression de la traite, 1904–1906, Gorée, June 2, 1905; François Renault, *L'abolition de l'esclavage au Sénégal: l'attitude de l'administration française*, 1848–1905 (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer), 1972, pp. 5–16.



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> important in these centers, albeit to different degrees. Minors also became wards in the town of Thiès, thirty-five miles inland from Dakar, which must also be considered urban. Overall, the data show that tutelle was more geographically widespread than colonial authorities acknowledged. There were minors in tutelle in areas further afield, including Podor and Kaolack, where the French had no sovereignty. Guardianship in these areas has not been the object of scholarly inquiry, but it is likely that it operated differently than it did in the urban centers where the French had control.

> In Senegal, there was a close association between tutelle, slavery, and other forms of servitude and coercive labor, especially engagement à temps - a form of apprenticeship. Indeed, slaveowners in post emancipation Senegal received compensation for loss of coercive labor in the form of indemnity for engagés (indentured servants), and the enslaved alike in the 1850s.4 But clientage, which Paul Lovejoy describes as "voluntary subordination without fixed remuneration for services rendered," and pawnship, "in which labor was perceived as interest on a debt and the pawn as collateral for the debt," are also relevant to tutelle, though beyond the boundaries of this study.<sup>5</sup> It is worth emphasizing that the association between tutelle and other forms of coercive labor shaped social relations in the post emancipation era. Thus, although Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers contend that there is disagreement among scholars "as to whether the transition from slavery to freedom caused widespread disruption or whether it had little impact on major African social and economic institutions," the phenomenon of tutelle shows that this transition was marked by a lack of demonstrable antagonism between former slaveholders and the formerly enslaved after 1848.6 One might well ask whether these children had options and, if so, whether they could exercise them. As it was, former slaveholders (in the urban centers in particular)

> <sup>4</sup> M'Baye Guèye, "La fin de l'esclavage à Saint-Louis et à Gorée en 1848," Bulletin de L'I.F.A.N., tome XXVIII, Série B, nos. 3-4, 1965), p. 645.

Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, "The End of Slavery in Africa," in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), The End of Slavery in Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Paul Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5. See also Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological* Perspectives (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 10.



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continued to coerce and profit from the labor of formerly enslaved minors under the guise of adoption, as later chapters demonstrate.

These slaveholders were mainly *habitants* – Europeans and Africans of various racial backgrounds, many of whom were mixed-race merchants and traders. Due to fears of a labor shortage at emancipation, the French colonial administration in Senegal yielded to the wishes of the habitants who wanted to maintain the status quo. Of the habitants, the signares – women of African and European ancestry, a significant number of whom engaged in commerce and owned many enslaved people, primarily minors - exerted considerable influence, which this study will highlight. The administration sought their support in making the transition from slavery to freedom for minors attainable, but the signares, who viewed abolition as an attack on their wellbeing, devised ways to maintain coercive labor instead. In spite of the fact that anti-slavery laws existed, the colonial administration was determined to limit their application as much as possible to guarantee labor. After 1848, other minors were bought out of slavery (in areas of Senegal where the institution was still legal) through a process called rachat (ransom or redemption) by institutions and individuals who "freed" them first, "adopted" them, and then exploited their labor under tutelle. Some of these individuals were bureaucrats in the colonial administration, including members of the judiciary. Roman Catholic orders, such as Les Pères du Saint-Esprit (the Holy Ghost Fathers) and the Soeurs de Saint-Joseph de Cluny (the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Cluny), were among the institutions that had minors in their care. The colonial state also placed minors in institutions, most notably the *École pénitentiaire de Thiès* (the Thiès Penitentiary School) – a correctional facility run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, the *Ecole des Frères* (the School of the Fathers) – a school run by Catholic Fathers – and two orphanages, the Orphelinat de Ndar Toute (the Orphanage at Ndar Toute) and the Orphelinat de Sor (the Orphanage at Sor), near Saint-Louis. In some cases, minors were entrusted to parents (when they could be found), other relatives, or to themselves if they were considered of age, in which case they were left to their own devices.

For a comprehensive treatment of ransom and redemption in Africa, Europe, and Asia, see Jennifer Lofkrantz and Olatungi Ojo (eds.) Ransoming, Captivity & Piracy in Africa and the Mediterranean (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2016).



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In most instances, however, the *habitants* constituted the majority of the guardians.

Guardianship in colonial Senegal was servitude, though it has not been presented as such. Indeed, the roots of *tutelle* date back to slavery. It most clearly resembled engagement à temps or indentureship - a form of coercive labor that the French introduced after the abolition of the maritime slave trade in 1818 to fulfill labor needs in the French garrisons, commercial enterprises, and domestic households in urban areas.8 Under this system, enslaved Africans were redeemed from slavery on the condition that they work as engagés. Paradoxically, "the French often seized slaves destined for export or purchased them through rachat (ransom) in violation of their own law against slave trading," in order to increase the number of African army recruits – an endeavor which proved difficult and yielded meagre results.9 To be sure, "The Emancipation Act of 1848 expressly prohibited the recruitment of slaves and the military tried to rely on volunteer forces, but in the three years after emancipation, only three volunteers came forward." So purchasing and freeing enslaved males "in exchange for an indenture contract of twelve to fourteen years" became the primary means of recruitment for the military. 10 According to Myron Echenberg, the price paid to slaveowners (rachat) usually did not exceed 300 French Francs. 11 The Tirailleurs Séenégalais (Senegalese Rifles) aside, enslaved Africans ransomed by the colonial state had to serve for seven years, while those ransomed by the habitants of Saint-Louis and Gorée were obliged to serve fourteen years, providing labor in return for food and accommodation.

Thus, the *habitants* had become accustomed to one form of servile labor or another. The *engagés* in these cases were adults for the most part, but their offspring were subject to servitude of a sort as well. Indeed, "Children born of former enslaved females who became

Martin Klein believes that the terms which the French employed were designed to hide the fact that *tutelle* was a form of servitude. Another factor may have been a nineteenth-century notion of childhood that children were expected to serve, except those who came from privileged families (Martin Klein, personal communication, May 2017).

Bernard Moitt, "Slavery, Flight and Redemption in Senegal, 1819–1905,"
 Slavery and Abolition, vol. 14, no. 2 (August 1993), p. 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 74.

Myron Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), p. 8.



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indentured servants also had obligations. Though free, they had to work for their mother's employers until the age of 21. In return, they were fed." While there has been some inquiry into *engagement à temps* among these adults, this has not been the case with children. <sup>13</sup>

We must study the experience of children if we are to better understand the transition from slavery to freedom. This phenomenon has been neglected not only in the historical literature of Senegal but that of Africa as a whole. While scholars have emphasized the slavery of adults and, to a lesser degree, the transition from slavery to freedom among them, child slavery and forms of child servitude have been largely ignored. Fortunately, there has been growing interest in the broader trends of child welfare, including child fosterage, the commodification and use of children as capital, pawnship, migration, child sex trafficking, and the relation between child slavery in precolonial Africa and modern slavery. There is a need for good, comparative studies that incorporate these aspects of child bondage. In concentrating principally on the experience of liberated children in colonial Senegal during the second half of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, this study contributes to the literature on the exploitation and degradation that children endured across geographic

Marie Rodet has produced solid work on children in foster care in Kayes, Mali, where fosterage expanded in the twentieth century and permitted women to draw upon additional labor. These women profited from their own family networks and from previous forms of bondage that persisted after abolition to control juvenile and female labor. Added also draws linkages between fosterage and child sex trafficking after fosterage came to an end in the early twentieth century. In southern Nigeria, where the palm oil industry created a

<sup>12</sup> Moitt, "Slavery, Flight and Redemption," p. 72.

See, for example, François Zuccarelli, "Le régime des engagés à temps au Sénégal (1817–1848)," *Cahiers d'études africaines*, vol. 7 (1962).

Marie Rodet, "Notes sur la captation de la main d'œuvre enfantine dans la région de Kayes, Mali (1904–1955), Journal des africanistes, vol. 81–82 (2011), p. 49.

Marie Rodet, "Under the Guise of Guardianship and Marriage: Mobilizing Juvenile and Female Labor in the Aftermath of Slavery in Kayes, French Soudan, 1900–1939," in Benjamin N. Lawrence and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), Trafficking in Slavery: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), pp. 86–100.



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need for credit in the twentieth century leading to the development of a vast pawning network, Robin Chapdelaine has indicated that hundreds, if not thousands of children were thrust into domestic slavery as pawns. Along with pawning came child rape, child slavery, and the intensification of trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of prostitution. <sup>16</sup> Child migration has also been linked to child trafficking and contemporary forms of labor. <sup>17</sup>

Martin Klein and Audra Diptee have highlighted the need to understand child slavery as a means of grasping fully the human experience and the slavery of adults. They state that "an historical analysis of children has the potential to shed light on the common priorities and values of any particular society. Furthermore, understanding child-hood experiences provides greater context and a more holistic portrait of the human experience." Diptee amplifies this position further. Indeed, she argues that

... the story of children and the story of adults are, in fact, part of the same story. The story of the enslaved child is the first part of the story of the enslaved adult. In other words, without proper consideration of childhood under slavery the adult's story is incomplete, and the narrative lacks depth.<sup>19</sup>

There is no single study of enslaved children in Africa, but some authors have dealt with aspects of child slavery and guardianship in their work with regard to female slavery and the process of abolition. In their pioneering study, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, for example, Claire Robertson and Martin Klein emphasized the importance of female slavery in their opening sentence by stating that "most slaves

Robin Phylisia Chapdelaine, The Persistence of Slavery: An Economic History of Child Trafficking in Nigeria (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), pp. 15–99.

Audra Diptee and Martin A. Klein, "African Childhoods and the Colonial Project," *Journal of Family History*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2010), p. 3.

Marie Rodet and Elodie Razy, "Child Migration in Africa: Key Issues & New Perspectives," in Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet (eds.), Children on the Move in Africa: Past and Present Experiences of Migration (Woodbridge: James Curry, 2016), p. 3.

Audra Diptee, "Notions of African Childhood in Abolitionist Discourses:
Colonial and Post-Colonial Humanitarianism in the Fight against Child
Slavery," in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), Child Slavery before & after Emancipation
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 209.



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in sub-Saharan Africa were women."<sup>20</sup> But aside from noting that "slaves were often taken as children and removed far from their homes," they ignored the link between female slavery and child slavery.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Klein has indicated that "in many areas, slave children were given as part of bridewealth. Thus, young slaves often moved to the master's compound or were permanently separated from their parents."<sup>22</sup>

A similar approach to the study of slavery in the Americas has resulted in few published works on child slavery. Since the late 1980s, the historiography of this region has benefited from serious and ongoing work on female slavery – a worthy scholarly pursuit given the neglect of women's contribution in history. Thus, child slavery is seen through the prism of enslaved women.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the Caribbean, the works of Hilary Beckles, Barbara Bush, Marisa Fuentes, Arlette Gautier, Bernard Moitt, Jennifer Morgan, and Marietta Morrissey fall into the same category.<sup>24</sup> Consequently,

Robertson and Klein, "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems," p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule, p. 10.

See for example, Richard H. Steckel, "Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States," in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 43–60; Cheryll Ann Cody, "Cycles of Work and of Childbearing," in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 61–78; Wilma King, "Suffer with Them Till Death': Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America," in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 147–168.

See Hilary Beckles, Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Barbara Bush, Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Arlette Gautier, Les Sœurs de Solitude: La condition féminine dans l'esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe siècle (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985); Bernard Moitt, Women and Slavery in the French Antilles (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Jennifer Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marietta Morrissey, Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); and Marisa J. Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems," in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.) Women and Slavery in Africa (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1983), p. 3.



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although the literature on slavery in the Americas is very extensive, only a few works – primarily those of Wilma King and Marie Jenkins Schwartz – focus specifically on child slavery.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to guardianship in Senegal, the picture is not much better. Indeed, aside work done by François Renault, Mohamed Mbodi, Martin Klein, Trevor Getz, and Bernard Moitt, there has not been has not been much else until recently.<sup>26</sup> A welcome addition to the literature on tutelle is an excellent article that Kelly M. Duke Bryant has published. Drawing upon some of the same data used in this study, Bryant "investigates both trends and individual experiences of work, mistreatment, conflict, and sometimes - defiance" of liberated minors in Senegal's colonial towns (primarily Saint-Louis) from 1895 to 1911 – a period of sixteen years.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, she has joined Audra Diptee and others who have drawn attention to the lack of studies about children in Africa. However, the chronological boundaries of Bryant's study - a period when the data on tutelle are richest for the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a whole - point to the challenges that confront the researcher intent on writing a full-length study of guardianship in colonial Senegal, as we shall see.

Press, 2016). See also Barry W. Higman, Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

Wilma King, Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Marie June Schwartz, Press in Press of Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press in Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Authorite Schwartz, Press of the Comming Lie Findens die the Comming Lie Findens die

Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 2000).

Renault, L'abolition de l'esclavage; Mohamed Mbodj, "The Abolition of Slavery in Senegal, 1820–1890: Crisis or the Rise of a New Entrepreneurial Class?," in Martin A. Klein (ed.), Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 198–199; Martin A. Klein, "Slavery and Emancipation in French West Africa," in Martin A. Klein (ed.), Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 174; Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule, pp. 72–73; Trevor Getz, Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast (Athens, OH: University Press, 2004), pp. 69–84; Bernard Moitt, "Slavery and Guardianship in Postemancipation Senegal: Colonial Legislation and Minors in Tutelle, 1848–1905, in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), Child Slaves in the Modern World (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 140–156.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly M. Duke Bryant, "Changing Childhood: 'Liberated Minors', Guardianship, and the Colonial State in Senegal, 1895–1911," *Journal of* 

African History, vol. 60, no. 2 (2019), p. 209.



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There is no doubt that scholars have focused mainly on the nature and dimensions of slavery in Africa, with particular emphasis on the Western Sudan which encompasses much of West Africa. While this emphasis can be justified given the dimensions of slavery in this region where the enslaved constituted 30 to 50 percent and, in some areas, up to 80 percent of the total population by the end of the nineteenth century, the neglect of child slavery and guardianship is still baffling. Since children made up a significant part of the slave populations of the western Sudan, it seems reasonable to assume that they would feature prominently in studies dealing with the end of slavery and its aftermath. Guardianship deserves sustained historical inquiry because it will illuminate the process of liberation, thereby enabling us to get a better understanding of what this phenomenon entailed. 29

Such inquiry will also provide new insights into how the labor of children was used and exploited for more than a half century after the end of slavery in Senegal. As the labor of children was also exploited under apprenticeship schemes in other parts of the world, including the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America following the end of slavery in those regions, this study opens up greater possibilities for comparative approaches. Indeed, when slavery ended in the British Caribbean in 1834, the authorities classified formerly enslaved people above the age of six years as either agricultural or domestic servants, depending upon their previous occupation. Under the Abolition Act, such servants were forced to undergo an apprenticeship – six years in the case of the former, four in the case of the latter. Douglas Hall has

See ANS K 14-K 27; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 191–194; Martin A. Klein, "Women and Slavery in the Western Sudan," in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 67–78.

On the transition from slavery to freedom, see Renault, L'abolition de l'esclavage; Roberts and Miers, "The End of Slavery in Africa"; Klein, Slavery and Colonial Rule. See also, Frederick Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); David Northrup, Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865–1940 (Athens: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1988); Fred Morton, "Slaves, Fugitives, and Freemen on the Kenyan Coast, 1873–1907," PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1976; Toyin Falolo, "The End of Slavery among the Yoruba," in Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein (eds.), Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 232–249; Paul Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, Slow Death for Slavery: The Cause of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).