Résumé

C. VerEecke — Une approche historique de l'esclavage dans l'Adamawa du XIXe siècle à nos jours.
Depuis la fondation de l'émirat de l'Adamawa au XIXe siècle par des conquérants fulée, les esclaves constituent une fraction importante de cette société. De même que dans le califat de Sokoto, dont l'Adamawa faisait partie, les esclaves fournissaient aux Fulé une main-d'œuvre agricole et purent occuper des positions stratégiques et militaires dans le gouvernement qui venait d'être formé. Enfin, nombre de ces esclaves étaient envoyés comme tribut aux dignitaires de Sokoto ou constituaient, dans le cadre d'une économie régionale naissante, une marchandise pouvant être échangée.

En dépit du déclin de l'esclavage dans le califat de Sokoto sous la colonisation, au moins pour ce qui concerne la région de Yola (Nigeria), la possibilité pour les esclaves d'accéder à l'identité ou au statut de leurs maîtres est un problème qui n'a pas disparu, et ce nonobstant leur participation de longue date à la culture fulée. Cela est dû au fait que l'esclavage existe depuis fort longtemps dans la région, qu'il a grandement profité aux Fulbe. En outre, dans le contexte historique et culturel de la région de Yola, les Fulbe ont dressé des barrières sociales relativement rigides, qui ont, jusqu'à une époque récente, exclu de leurs rangs les étrangers, en particulier les esclaves. Néanmoins, nombre d'anciens esclaves continuent d'affirmer une identité servile afin de bénéficier des largesses de leurs maîtres.

Citer ce document / Cite this document :

http://www.persee.fr/doc/cea_0008-0055_1994_num_34_133_2039

Document généré le 02/06/2016
Catherine VerEecke

The Slave Experience in Adamawa: Past and Present Perspectives from Yola (Nigeria)

According to some estimates, by the late nineteenth century, slaves constituted about 50% of the population of the Islamic (Fulbe) emirate of Adamawa. Though seemingly extraordinary, these figures are representative of many emirates of the Sokoto caliphate, of which Adamawa formed a part. Established in 1804 in conjunction with an Islamic holy war of purification, the caliphate rapidly developed as a regional economic system, connected by elaborate trading networks, with slaves constituting the primary commodity, to be bartered, sold, or given as tribute. Consequently, the region experienced a dramatic shift in its demographic composition and political orientation, and agricultural efforts were consolidated into plantations, manned by the captive slaves. Other slaves became the loyalists of the conquering Fulbe, as assistants on the battlefield, emissaries, title-holders or laborers. Those who escaped enslavement were often forced to engage in raiding, so as to provide slaves as tribute. Thus, the nineteenth-century jihad and its associated activities left an indelible mark on the societies that formed the Sokoto caliphate as well as those on its peripheries, such as Adamawa.

A large body of literature has therefore emerged which analyzes the various dimensions of slavery and slave trading in the Sokoto caliphate, particularly in its core emirates, commonly known as Hausaland. But, with a few exceptions, there is comparatively less ethno-historical material for the phenomena in Adamawa. Moreover, because the caliphate's institution of slavery purportedly was gradually dismembered during the early colonial period, the experience of its slaves and slave descendants in the latter part of the 20th century—in the various milieus in which they are found—has received much less attention.

Seeking to situate the activities and patterns of the Yola area within those of the Sokoto caliphate as a whole, this paper gives an overview of slavery in Adamawa emirate, focusing on the city of Yola, the emirate's capital, and its immediate rural hinterlands. We first begin by summarizing the historical factors, both regional and local, which stimulated the emergence of the

Islamic system of slavery in Adamawa. Second, based on accounts of slaves and local historians, and available historical analyses, we attempt to reconstruct the social organization of slavery as it existed in the late nineteenth century and to portray the slave’s experience both in the past and in the modern day, in such domains as their family and economic life, their treatment, and their perceptions of their identity in relation to the dominant Fulbe. Third, we show the transformation of the slavery system from one based on forced labor in the nineteenth century to one centered around relations of dependency in the twentieth century. In the final analysis we explain the differences between the twentieth-century system of slavery in the Yola area and that of other northern Nigerian societies (i.e., the Hausa), and discuss how the legacy of slavery is particularly evident in political and economic relations in the Yola area today.

This paper is based on ethnographic research in the Yola area, conducted particularly between 1983 and 1986. The primary research locales were: 1) Yola, now the capital of Adamawa State, Nigeria (see Map) and the headquarters of Adamawa emirate since 1840; 2) Fufure, a town 40 km southeast of Yola which is now the headquarters of Fufure Local Government Area and of the traditional sub-emirate, Balala; and 3) Njoboli, a small Fulbe town, about 20 km east of Yola, which served briefly as the capital of the Fulbe before Yola was founded. The comparison of these three locales will give some indication of variations in the region as affected by such factors as urbanization and ethnic heterogeneity. Though many of the practices described here are found throughout Adamawa, some are notably specific to the Yola area. First, Yola has served as the emirate’s traditional headquarters and many of its towns were established for Fulbe settlers to provide fortification for Yola, so that the area has for some time had a greater number of Fulbe than the emirate’s more peripheral zones. Second, during the colonial period, the Yola area fell under the jurisdiction of Britain, whereas much of the emirate became part of Cameroon, subject to German and later French policy towards slavery and the slave trade, each of which differed (Azarya 1978: 74-75). And third, in Yola, which served as provincial and later state capital, Fulbe identity has been highly politicized, perhaps more so than in other places.

Slavery, I discovered, is clearly a sensitive issue in the Yola area today, in part due to the earlier persecution and enslavement of many of the area’s peoples, and because slave descendants are still numerous and view the discussions as derogatory, and also because many prominent Fulbe still support slaves in their house. Initial discussions readily gathered general information about slavery, especially in the nineteenth century, but it was only much later in the research that “informants” would reveal the history and prevalence of slavery in their households, or their section of town, both past and present. Though the number of slaves and slave descendants encountered during this research constitutes only a small fraction of the perhaps one thousand self-ascribed slaves in the area today, not including the thousands who
deny their slave heritage, their personal histories, as included here, give life to the general descriptions that are abundant. This qualitative data is supplemented by the detailed historical work of Abubakar (1977) on Adamawa as a whole, Burnham (1980) and Froelich (1954) on Ngaoundere, and more recent archival research by Hogendorn and Lovejoy (1988) and Ubah (1991).

**Adamawa in the Regional Perspective**

The construction of the system of slavery in Adamawa emirate can be understood at least partially within the context of the history of Sokoto caliphate. As is well documented, much of the region to the north of the Niger and Benue rivers was consolidated in the early nineteenth century, during the jihad of the Fulbe *mallam*, Usman dan Fodio. Motivated initially by goals of purification in the Muslim areas and of proselytization in the non-Muslim ones, the new or reconstituted emirates recognized both the religious and political sovereignty of dan Fodio, and later that of his successors based in Sokoto. From the Fulbe conquerors emerged leaders who restructured the emirates' local political and economic systems, and religious clerics and scholars who revitalized and propagated the Islamic faith among their own peoples and those they had subdued. Relying heavily upon military excursions to achieve their objectives and upon Islam to guide the missions, the Jihadists captured and enslaved innumerable peoples who refused to succumb to Islam, and accepted as tributaries those who converted or reformed. Even after the warfare subsided and the caliphat's structure was in place, slave raiding as an end in itself proliferated throughout the caliphate, especially in its peripheries. Slaves were then transferred within an emerging regional network beginning in the peripheral areas or sub-emirates, to emirate headquarters and finally to Sokoto, as a kind of tribute.

Owing to the economic needs of the emerging Fulbe aristocracy, many of whom had been pastoralists, as well as the case with which numerous individuals were captured, captive slaves became a vital if not the primary source of agricultural manpower throughout the caliphate. Slave farms, or "plantations" as Lovejoy (1978) called them, thus replaced the previously existing family-oriented agricultural units. With the ever-increasing demand for slaves, raiding continued in rural Hausaland, trade networks expanded, and Hausa merchants disseminated throughout the caliphate, irreversibly altering the structure of many local, subsistence-oriented economies. Such was the case until the early colonial period.

During the twentieth century, this regional political economy has in some respects perpetuated, with different meaning attached to its core elements. As the British recognized (though reduced) the authority and functions of the caliphate, its administrative structure remained relatively intact, and connections based on trade or religion have not been eliminated, but rather
transformed and internationalized (Watts 1985: 172-182; Paden 1970; Whitaker 1970). The abolition of the slave trade, however, dramatically altered the region’s economic system, in the sense that slaves were no longer readily available either as commodities to be sold or as agricultural laborers. Although slavery itself was never officially abolished, measures adopted by the British, such as taxation on slave owners and enticements to slaves to seek their freedom, encouraged many slaves to establish their own households, apart from their masters, especially in Hausaland. Many former owners opted instead for small labour-intensive farms which were increasingly oriented towards cash-crop production. Thus, by the late 1920s, the formal (economic) institution of slavery in Hausaland is reported to have been practically non-existent (Hogendorn & Lovejoy 1988: 411), and remaining slaves’ descendants were being incorporated into their host (Hausa) populations’ identity (cf. Smith 1954: 211).

Let us now situate Adamawa within this brief regional history. From the nineteenth century onwards, the people often referred to as the Adamawa Fulɓe have been a major factor in shaping society and history in the Benue area, under the authority of the Sokoto caliphate. Now comprised of eleven districts, under the leadership of an emir (laamiido) based in Yola, Adamawa once covered a territory of about 20,000 square miles (Migeod 1927: 18).

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may be characterized as the time the Fulɓe asserted their identity and hegemony in the Benue area, and helped establish Islam\(^1\) among the Fulɓe and their subjects. Prior to this time, the Benue-area Fulɓe were few, inhabiting isolated seasonal camps whose members paid rent to settled agriculturalists for grazing land. But with an increase in the Fulɓe population resulting from migrations from the north, relations with the settled peoples became more and more antagonistic, culminating in several violent confrontations. The few Islamically-educated among them subsequently drew inspiration from the Sokoto jihad in the west, with the Fulɓe mallam, moodibbo Adama, receiving the flag of Islam to legitimize yet another segment of the jihad this time against non-Fulɓe in their land. They devoted the years between 1810 and 1870 mainly to eliminating pagan elements in the area, especially through demanding conversion to Islam under the threat of enslavement and destruction. Their ability to organize for battle, coupled with their ethnic enthusiasm, catapulted them to victory and to a dominant position in much of the Benue area. To administer their land and matters of war, they quickly adopted state political structures and institutions, including a territorial organization of districts under flag bearers, which were to pay annual tribute. As in Sokoto, they

---

1. The debate over the Islamization of this region’s Fulɓe is beyond the scope of this paper (see Abubakar 1977; Lacroix 1966; Stenning 1966). By mid-century the evidence suggests that the majority of the Fulɓe population had become relatively devout.
established numerous towns as outposts, and in 1841 Adama founded Yola as the emirate headquarters to administer matters of war and its vast territory (cf. Mohammadu 1981). Whereas the movement initially sought Fulbe autonomy and the spread of Islam, once momentum and support were gained, conquest, expansion and subjugation and the capture of slaves became primary motives for the continuation of the jihad throughout much of the nineteenth century, especially since many of the region's pagan peoples had escaped or resisted Fulbe attacks (Abubakar 1977). Indeed, in contrast to the jihad in Hausaland, that in Adamawa was a protracted struggle (cf. Lovejoy 1983: 200).

As in Hausaland, the Adamawa Fulbe, having been predominantly pastoral, readily adopted the labor of slaves for agricultural production, establishing numerous slave farms (dumde, sing. rumnde) that provided food. The need for slaves increased when several new waves of Fulbe clans migrated to the area from the north and northwest, having learned of the military success of their kinsmen. Slaves, acquired through raiding, trading, reproduction, and payment of tribute became so numerous that most Fulbe families never had to farm. Barth's estimate that the laamiido received about 5000 slaves in tribute annually, in addition to those captured during his or his brothers' expeditions, gives some idea of the magnitude of the operations (Barth 1965, II: 191). Accordingly, some Adamawa towns were composed of between one-half and two-thirds slaves (Burnham 1980: 48), and even the army of Yola reportedly was staffed mainly with slaves (Abubakar 1977: 96).
By the 1850s, following Fulɓe success at clearing potential trade routes of troublesome inhabitants through warfare, traders, particularly Hausa from the northwest and Kanuri from the north, developed trading enterprises extending from their homelands to Adamawa and its peripheries, at times aided by indigenous pagan populations (Passarge 1895; Abubakar 1977; Burnham 1980). Yola then became the main junction between the northern and southern areas of Adamawa, and it was appropriately positioned along the Benue River to provide access to its east and west areas. Thus, by the second-half of the nineteenth century, slaves were not only in extreme abundance in Adamawa, the emirate and its environs had become the main source of slaves and ivory for the Sokoto caliphate in exchange for arms, cloth, salt, and other luxury goods (Lacroix 1952: 34; Abubakar 1977: 101; Adamu 1978: 74). Although the Fulɓe required many slaves for their economic and military activities, particularly in the Yola area, in the more peripheral zones, especially to the southwest, the capture of slaves for tribute and trade along caravan routes leading to Sokoto was for some a highly profitable enterprise (Passarge 1895; Burnham 1980).

As part of the colonial conquest, Yola was captured in 1901 by the British. Though the laamiido, his cabinet, and regional representatives retained their positions and some of their powers, part of the emirate fell within the jurisdiction of German Cameroon (later a United Nations mandated territory), thereby eliminating the authority of the laamiido over his eastern and southern provinces (Kirk-Greene 1969). In Nigeria, Yola became the headquarters of Adamawa province, itself under the jurisdiction of the Northern Region. As proved to be the case elsewhere in the region, the British outlawed the capture and sale of slaves and left it to those already owning slaves either to grant them freedom or maintain them under equitable conditions, lest they be arrested and punished by the Native Authority. Children of slaves were also declared free. Consequently, many Fulɓe “lost” their slaves and were forced to begin working on their own farms, at times just at the subsistence level. At most, slaves could assist them with remuneration, like hired workers. Fulɓe hardships multiplied when the British introduced cattle and poll taxes to serve as the primary source of revenue of the Native Authority (Migeod 1927: 33). According to colonial reports, however, some traffic in slaves did continue, particularly of children who would not report the actions and could easily be passed off as the traders’ children. The Yola area was among the last in northern Nigeria to abandon such activities (during the 1930s), only after local leaders, police (dogari’ien) and Islamic courts were persuaded to join in the effort (Ubah 1991: 451-452). However, as we will see, slavery itself has persisted in various forms since that time.

Slavery and Freedom among the Fulɓe

Slavery (njeyangu) has been institutionalized among many West-African Fulɓe for several centuries, but its practice became particularly widespread
during the nineteenth-century jihads. Since this time the identity of slave in Adamawa has been shaped by Islam and Islamic views of slavery, and at the same time been elaborated into a distinct, inferior, and salient one. Even now individuals still identify themselves or are identified as slaves.

The significance of slavery among the Fulbe and the position of their slaves is suggested by Adamawa Fulfulde concepts, particularly the verbs jeyugo and marugo, and the noun jawmu. Jeyugo means “to own”, or “to have”, and from it derives one of several terms for “slave”, jeyado (pl. jeyafe). The act of ownership is, however, most often conveyed through the verb, marugo, which means “to possess”, or “to have”. Maral is its noun form, referring to “possessions, riches”, and slaves (jeyafe) are discussed by Fulbe as maral. Marugo or jeyugo (“to own”) may also connote the notion of “rights over persons”, as for instance a husband under Islamic religion and Fulbe custom has rights over his wives. Yet another term for slave is marado (“someone owned”), and the terms maccudo (pl. maccube) and kordo (pl. horfe) distinguish, respectively, male and female slaves. O mari maccube is thus the most appropriate way of saying, “He owned slaves”, with slaves being among the possessions of their master (jawmiiko). Deriving from the same root as jawmiiko is the term jawmu, which refers to an owner or a head, and also one presiding over Fulbe social units, such as the household (saare), in which case it is used as jawmu saare (“household head”).

During the nineteenth century, slaves constituted perhaps the most important possessions of many Fulbe, as an aid in their economic ventures and as a source of prestige. But as we will see, slaves became increasingly enmeshed in Fulbe society, without fully escaping their marginal slave status and identity.

The many slaves who became free after the colonial conquest usually assumed the identity of riminafe (freed slaves). This concept derives from the verb rimâñugo ("to set free") and it has, over the years, been extended to refer to “descendants of slaves”. This contrasts to a dimo (pl. rimbe) (a free person), a term that might be employed at the time of one’s emancipation, though it is a category normally reserved for true Fulbe. Nowadays, a former slave owner is referred to by his dependents as baba suudu or jawmu saare, which suggests the gradual redefinition of the relationship of former slaves and masters. As we shall see, when slaves were freed, they could pursue their own interests in the community of their former masters or elsewhere. But if they remained, their marginal status was usu-

2. Thus for instance it is not uncommon to find a Fulbe woman who says she cannot leave her husband without his consent because “He owns me” (*O mari am*).

3. In other some other areas of Adamawa (and the Fulbe world) the concept, rimaaybe (sing. dimajo) is employed, evidently as it was in Yola earlier this century. At present, if such a term is used at all, the term rimadado (pl. rimâñado) is most commonly used in Yola to refer to a freed slave or slave descendant. Hill (1985: 48) suggests that the word *dimajo* has had different meanings at different times and in different places (see also Stenning 1959: 17, 66).
ally perpetuated, despite the assimilating mechanisms of Islam. They were
denied access to the true Fulɓe identity, they were barred from marrying
Fulɓe (except in certain prescribed instances), and at times they were prohibit-
ed from obtaining land and houses. And though they were considered
members of their former masters’ house, they could not legitimately claim
his identity or ancestry (i.e. through adoption) from it, nor could they inherit
from his household. Indeed, many Fulɓe continued to refer to these indi-
viduals as maccuɓe (male slaves) or horɓe (female slaves), particularly in
their absence, and though their rights and entitlements have increased, this
kind of labeling persists to this day. “Once a slave or slave descendant,
always a slave”, say many. Nevertheless, as with the maccuɓe of the Borgou
Fulani in Benin (Baldus 1977), many Adamawa Fulɓe “slaves” cannot and
will not leave their masters’ protection, or the esteem they acquire from
close association with the Fulɓe.

When discussing Fulɓe notions of slaves and slavery, it is also essential to
consider the concept of “freedom”, which historically has been central in
Fulɓe society. During my research on Fulɓe identity (see VerEEcke 1988),
many individuals, both pastoral and settled, listed “freedom” (ndimaaku) as
among the core components of their identity or “Fulɓe-ness”, commonly
known as pulaaku. Some regard it as asli Fulɓe (the origins of the Fulɓe),
which as a value gave rise to and aided the retention of the Fulɓe identity and
those people’s distinctiveness. In their pastoral form, the Fulɓe, usually as
alien minorities, have valued their uniqueness and independence, not merely
as values in themselves, but also to preserve their livelihood, centering
around cattle. Ideally a Pullo should be maraka (“not owned”, “a man on
his own”), able to withstand the hardships of the bush so as to maintain his
herd and his family. Among all Fulɓe, physical and social distancing from
non-Fulɓe in the form of endogamy has also facilitated this objective, and
culturally they have achieved this through an elaborate sense of shame (sem-
teende) which they believe is lacking among non-Fulɓe. Semteende is mani-
fest most clearly in their struggle to be free from needs, emotions and various
natural bodily functions, such as eating and urinating, so that one may partic-
ipate more freely in social relations (cf. Riesman 1977: 138-141; Dognin 1975:
318). The implication, of course, is that those who lack these virtues (i.e.
ndimaaku, semteende)—ostensibly all non-Fulɓe—might be regarded as
slaves.

In the area that is now Nigeria, the Fulɓe value of freedom was sharpened
during warfare among the Islamic states and even during the jihad when the
threat of enslavement prevailed, especially among the unincorporated soci-
eties, including many pastoral Fulɓe who had yet to settle. Seeking to evade
enslavement or political domination, many either emigrated or took to arms
(Abubakar 1977: 32). As the Fulɓe themselves acquired slaves and utilized
their services, freedom (or lack thereof) in its various manifestations served
as a scale upon which these individuals could be situated. Despite the offi-
cial end of slavery in northern Nigeria, many Fulɓe individuals have contin-
ued to define *pulaaku* (Fulbe-ness) as *lenyol ngol maraka*, "a people not owned", and for some Fulbe, as noted, freedom constitutes the most important defining element of the Fulbe identity. Any suggestion of slavery or slave-like attributes in one's ancestry or behavior may result in the negation of his *pulaaku* and of his membership in the Fulbe *lenyol* (descent group). Slavery is thus not merely an identity but rather a condition based on one's inherent ability to follow the Fulbe behavioral standards. We return to this issue below. Let us now discuss the system, based primarily on my own research, employing case-history illustrations.

**Forms of Slavery in Adamawa**

**Slave Acquisition**

Slavery existed in the West-African Sudan as early as the tenth century since the establishment of the region's first Islamic states (Levtzion 1985). Nomadic and sedentarizing Fulbe pastoralists did on occasion acquire slaves, through trade and small-scale warfare, especially during the jihad. Those who came to Adamawa from the eighteenth century onward thus arrived with a pre-formed image of slavery and with few slaves of their own (Burnham 1980). As they adhered more closely to the tenets of Islam their system of slavery approximated that of Islam which, during occasions of jihad, allows the capture and enslavement of all those who resist conversion, with the objective of incorporating them into the Islamic community. When the Benue Fulbe initiated their segment of the jihad, several autochthonous pagan peoples immediately fled or accepted the Fulbe invitation to convert (*e.g.* the Verre and the Chamba) and became tributaries. As Lovejoy (1983: 200) put it, they literally swept the area of pagan peoples and began to re-populate it with captive slaves and with Fulbe immigrants from such areas as Borno and Hausaland. Since the Fulbe had subsisted primarily through pastoralism and many during the jihad became warriors, administrators or Islamic scholars and teachers, "slaves" began to provide them with agricultural labor (Azarya 1978: 36). Based on these economic choices, themselves influenced by trends in the caliphate and their profound success at enslaving the...
peoples of the area, many Fulbe established slave farms, known as dumde (sing. rumnde), inhabited exclusively by slaves. When a Pullo acquired a large number of slaves through capture or purchase, he merely went to his town chief, or laamiido, to obtain land for a rumnde, and as he acquired more or when the slaves reproduced he would establish another rumnde.

Slaves captured in battle ideally were divided in a prescribed manner. A warrior would retain one-half of his booty for himself and then would “fix the remainder chains and lead them to Yola”, to the treasury of the laamiido. Annually, the laamiido would also summon his Fulbe allies and non-Fulbe tributaries in nearby villages and sub-emirate headquarters, and receive zak-kat (alms) in the form of grain, cattle and slaves. Those not retained by himself or his cabinet were sent to Sokoto as tribute, normally 1000 per annum (Abubakar 1977: 103). Some Fulbe, of course, ignored this system and kept the slaves for their own purposes, and eventually, for at least some Fulbe, the capture, sale, and trade of slaves—often outside the jurisdiction of the jihad—became a legitimate economic venture. Slaves were displayed and sold in people's houses or in the market “like cattle”, as several informants put it. In the Yola area, slaves were inexpensive (purchased for a gown, cowries, a cow, animal hides, or even a cap), they were readily available, and they were practically everywhere. One former slave thus commented: “Whenever one looked outside, one would usually see slaves being led around on chains”.

Once captured, slaves were subjected to circumstances that affected theirs and their children's lives. Here we turn to the recollections of Leiman, a female slave (kordo) whose history goes back to well before the impact of slave emancipation was felt.

“I was born about ninety years ago during the reign of Zubairu. I was living with my family at Lamorde Bachama; we are Batta by tribe. Then they took me to live among the Fulbe. I was only about seven years old at the time. A man came and took me away from my parents. He captured only me. He took me to his place at Girei and left me with his wife while he proceeded to Maroua. He was a butcher and used to take loans in cowries from Maroua to buy cattle. When he ran out of money, he decided to sell me. I don't know how much he sold me for, but I was sold to a warrior at Girei, Mohammed Bello. I worked on his farm for one year when he died, and the moodibbo (“learned man”) inherited me. At first I worked near Girei, but then I began going with the rest of the slaves to Ruwo where the moodibbo had a farm. The farm was divided into two: one for another kordo and myself, and one for the other slaves. Together the two of us produced nearly a granary of groundnuts and guinea corn each year. I met seven slaves owned by the moodibbo; all were grown up when I was brought to Girei. Some had been captured in war by Mohammed Bello and the others were their children. All of them died at Girei. When we were at Girei, during the dry season, I would collect leaves and would bring them to the moodibbo's wives for soup. They would divide the grains and we would grind them. I was married three times at Girei, but I stayed in the moodibbo's

---

6. BARTH (1965, II: 190) estimated that a slave costed 2000 cheede (cowries) or four tukurdi (striped Manchester cloth), which were obtained from Hausa merchants.
house, except when I visited my husbands. Moodibbo moved to Yola but left me with his children in Girei so that I could be near my husbands and continue working on the family farm. Each time a husband divorced me, they brought me to Yola to the moodibbo’s house. I continued to work around the house—sweeping, washing, sifting, running errands, to name a few. Upon the moodibbo’s death, his son, Chubado, inherited me and took me to Mubi and I worked in his house. Then we came back to Yola where I was married twice but divorced, so that I returned to Chubado’s house. He died six years ago, and I came to this house—of moodibbo’s sister. At present, moodibbo’s sister’s son owns the house. I became blind about three years ago and can’t walk, so the people of this house care for me.”

This synopsis of Leimani’s life history illustrates several significant features of Fulbe slavery in general. First, on the acquisition of slaves and the use of their labor. Leimani herself became a slave by one of four means prevalent at the time—through kidnapping by an entrepreneur, which was evidently widespread up to the early twentieth century, especially among children (cf. Ubah 1991: 461). As a female, her value lay in her reproductive and labor potential, and as a child she was unlikely to flee. Female slaves, accordingly, were the most expensive in the Yola area. The case also illustrates another form of acquisition—through purchase. Slaves could be sold if they proved troublesome, if the master had too many of them, or if, as in Leimani’s case, a master needed “cash”. The pawning of slaves or slave descendants, and at times by many individuals in the region not merely former slave owners, also prevailed for long after the abolition of the slave trade (ibid.: 453). The third means of acquisition, as noted above, most prevalent during the nineteenth century, was capture in war. Finally, before slavery was fully de-legalized, new slaves were often acquired through reproduction among themselves. In Leimani’s compound, for instance, there were several female slaves with their children. And many other contemporary Fulbe report that their ancestor’s female slaves and their children lived together, usually on dumde, as their husbands might belong to different masters, though there were also many who reportedly simply “never gave birth”.

This residential set-up derives from Islam under which the slave status is inherited from one’s mother and not the father, and children born to a female slave belong to their mother’s master (see for instance Fisher & Fisher 1970; Hill 1985). Among the Fulbe, if a female slave was freed for reasons such as marriage to a free male, her children with him were free, though her free husband had to buy the freedom of her children from her previous slave marriages. If, as in very rare instances, a free female married a male slave, their children were free. But in many cases, slaves of the same

8. This is supported by the genealogies of slaves collected in the Yola area. Arguably, living and work conditions did not favor it and, as one elder put it, “they simply did not want to give birth to slaves”.

master simply intermarried and their children were born and raised as slaves in the master's compound or rumnde. When asked why slaves' children stayed with their mother and not their father, one Fulbe elder explained: "Slaves are like cattle. Whenever one is born and grows up it stays with its mother; the father is irrelevant".

Slaves' Work

Leimani's story also illustrates some of the kinds of work in which slaves were engaged. During the rainy season, many worked on their masters' personal farms, or dumde, normally, for six days a week—from mid-morning until the 2 pm prayer—and they were given Fridays off. Some masters, however, especially those owning only one or two slaves demanded longer work days from their slaves. The slaves spent the remainder of their time on their own farms and gave a share of their produce to their master as a kind of tribute. Each rumnde had a chief slave, and each village or town also had a chief slave who would, for instance, hear grievances from the slaves, or aid in disciplining them when necessary. During the dry season, slaves usually worked in their owners' households: the males made repairs on the houses and tended to domestic animals, and the females aided in cooking and cleaning. Some, particularly women, remained in their masters' households all year round, providing domestic labor. But not all slaves engaged in this kind of domestic and agricultural work. Some male slaves (as we will see below) belonged to title-holders. They cared for horses or the leader's palace grounds, or assisted at the battlefield, and some were awarded slave titles. The strongest and most trustworthy slaves fought in battle, participated in strategic missions (e.g. to capture troublesome Haaɓe), and accompanied their masters on journeys.

From among the slave or tributary populations of Adamawa, young female slaves or daughters of slaves often became concubines (culabe, sing. culado), over whom the owner, usually a title-holder, held exclusive sexual rights. Occasionally, girls of free status also became concubines and, like the slave concubines, they were not married to their jawmiiko ("master"), but participated in many household activities, as his wives did. Until recently, leaders could demand beautiful girls (both slave and free) from their fathers; others gave away or sold their daughters so that they bear princes or chiefs; and leaders could, in turn, pass these concubines to friends or other leaders. Yola's laaamiiɓe have each owned around forty culabe, and all title-holders owned at least one, especially during the nineteenth century when their labour was greatly needed to assist in the large houses of the nobility. Many still own them today. The Fulɓe nobility maintained concubines of several kinds: elderly ones who cooked for the chief's council, friends or visitors; young ones who tended horses in the palace; and beautiful ones who provided sexual favors to the master. Some also accompanied
title-holders on journeys or to the battlefield. Concubinage was thus attractive to many slaves, not only as enhancing their own and their children’s status, but also as a way to obtain freedom for their children; children of Fulɓe concubines are free.

Slaves were essential to the functioning of many Fulɓe households and farms into the early twentieth century. But how widespread was slavery among the Fulɓe? What percentage of the Fulɓe population owned slaves? This is difficult to assess since there is nowadays little available first-hand or documentary evidence—especially for slave-holding beyond the nobility. In our preliminary surveys, most denied that their ancestors had anything to do with slaves and answers to the question “Did all Fulɓe own slaves in the past?” were contradictory. Some claimed that “everyone” owned slaves, yet others insisted that only a few did but certainly not their own ancestors. However, genealogical discussions with elders, particularly those whose ancestors arrived during the jihad and reportedly were labbo’en (“warriors”), suggest that slavery was indeed rampant among the Yola-area Fulɓe. In Njoboli and Fufore, commoners often owned about five slaves and as many as twenty, and a number of women are reported to have owned slaves, well into the colonial period. Rural title-holders had around thirty slaves, though some wealthy individuals had one hundred or more. The towns’ surrounding areas, having been swept clear of Haɓe, were populated mainly by slaves, mostly in dumde. In Yola, during the nineteenth century, the major title-holders (e.g. Galadima, Waziri, Kaigama) reportedly owned each between fifty and two-hundred slaves and between two and four dumde, which were mostly located far from Yola for strategic reasons and due to the presence of Fulɓe farms on the town’s fringes. And many other Yola Fulɓe (and their non-Fulɓe affiliates) had slaves, especially on their personal farms. As noted earlier, the laamiɓe appear to have owned each as many as 1000 slaves, 5 dumde and up to 100 concubines. One title-holder in Yola reported that his grandfather, aided by his slaves, produced about 1000 baskets of grain per annum; that is, over ten times the normal production of an individual family with hired workers today!

Slaves’ Experience

We now turn to Fulɓe perceptions and recollections of slaves, and slaves’ perceptions of their own experience. There is indeed a diversity of views about the experience of Fulɓe slaves corresponding to some extent to changes occurring over time. Many, especially slave descendants, stress that unscrupulous and inhumane treatment prevailed, that slaves were overworked, chained, or beaten to the point that they sometimes plotted to run away or even kill their masters. Islam, as noted, does legitimize the taking of slaves, that is, with the objective of conversion. But some Fulɓe argue
that their ancestors distorted the tenets of Islam to suit their own ends—to acquire humans principally for sale and labor. One moodibbo explained this deviation as follows:

"According to Islam, when slaves are captured, one-fifth goes to the 'chief' and four-fifths to the soldiers. Slaves may be taken, but they should not be made to suffer. Their master should feed and clothe them, teach them the five pillars of Islam, and should not overwork them. Slaves are considered brothers and should be given the master's own food and clothes. Freed slaves should have the daraja ('prestige') of their masters.

In Adamawa the Fulɓe did not follow the Qur'an as regards slavery. They did not divide them accordingly, but rather arbitrarily. They subjected the slaves to harsh conditions, such as punishing them, not feeding or clothing them, and by overworking them."

Leimani, in her account, which we discussed above, also hints at such harsh treatment:

"I was not aware of how the Europeans came here. But then some slaves began returning home. Some ran away and some would go and come back. Their masters reduced their work; they stopped beating them and tying them with chains. They only gave them light work, if any at all. But before the Whites came, slaves only had Fridays off. Thereafter, they could go to their farms as they wished, as was the case with my husbands.

In the past, they [the Fulɓe] didn't look at the Hausa as human beings. They wouldn't even teach them the Qur'an. It was only when the Europeans came that this changed. Then the children of the moodibbo taught me the Qur'an. Before then I couldn't do that; I didn't even know how to pray."

This account also conforms to the view of slaves' inhumane, un-Islamic treatment, especially during the nineteenth century. Evidence collected by Hogendorn and Lovejoy (1988) on the flight of slaves also suggests that at least some slaves in the Yola area were harshly treated at this time.

Another perspective argues on the contrary, for the benign nature of Fulɓe slavery. Some Fulɓe may have dehumanized and mistreated their slaves for various reasons, but there is little concrete evidence about how widespread this was, and there is evidence to the contrary as well. For some, slaves were more like hired workers who received compensation in basic amenities. Fulɓe depended on them to maintain their farms and households while they themselves engaged in battle, scholarship or leadership. All this would not have been possible without slaves. In many accounts, from the late nineteenth century to now, slaves are also reported to have been treated fairly by their masters, who acknowledged their needs while relegating them essentially to the status of "legal minor", as Kopytoff and Miers (1977: 25) state to be true of much of African slavery. They were

---

not deprived of a social life entirely, though they were often constrained by their master’s wishes, as were children by a father. Islam similarly advocates equitable treatment once a slave converts. The master in many reported instances was thus addressed by the slave as “father” (baba) and he accordingly saw to the welfare of his slaves, from childhood till death. He arranged their marriages and, when necessary, paid or received their bride-wealth. He also gave them land to farm for themselves or allowed them to engage in petty trade. He also attended to their spiritual well-being, providing basic instruction in Islam, sponsoring naming ceremonies when they accepted Islam, and giving them gowns and food, especially at Sallah time. Many modern-day elders also stress that slaves were normally not beaten arbitrarily; rather a master would do so only after repeated offenses, not unlike the way a child receives a beating. To illustrate this perspective, let us return to Leimani who now talks about her membership in the moodibbo’s family:

“When I wanted to marry, I would simply ask my master’s permission. Then he would go to the mosque to represent me to my potential-spouse’s family at the Fatiha prayer, during which marriages are contracted. My husbands never came to meet my master. They would send sadaka (bridewealth) to the moodibbo and after he died, to his sons. All my five husbands were slaves and not from our compound. I was allowed to spend evenings with my first three husbands, and I moved to the place of the last two. Each time I was divorced I went back to my master’s house. Children were never an issue since I was not blessed to give birth.

My master never asked me if I wanted to leave. He even allowed my relatives to visit me, though they died long ago. But I grew up in the moodibbo’s house and I felt that his family were my people. I never thought of going elsewhere. I called the moodibbo baba and the rest of his children by their names.

The moodibbo was very kind and generous. He gave me clothes, money and other things, as he did for the other women of the house. He was never cruel to me. One time I complained to him that his step mother was not feeding me well. He was so harsh with her on my account that she ran away in embarrassment.”

Leimani, like many other Fulbe slaves, saw herself as a member of her master’s family, to the extent that she simply did not want to leave following the emancipation of slaves, even though some of her relatives had moved to Girei. At most she moved during marriage to her husband’s house, but with full knowledge that she would return if divorced. This practice is known as hootugo saare (“going home”). In Leimani’s case, departure from her master’s house during marriage was always compensated for by a small bridewealth, even though she still performed many of her household duties. Had she withdrawn her services entirely, the bridewealth might have been doubled.

11. Interview with Leimani Moodibbo Girei, ibid.
12. The case of Leimani is not unique. During my research I encountered several other women labeled as horbe residing in the household of their master or his descendants. They had “returned home” after divorce or their spouse’s death. Moreover, one also finds male “slaves” and even entire families of “slaves” residing in the home of their jawmu.
have been higher and had she married a slave in the house (a union preferred by masters because it kept slave families together), no bridewealth would have been paid.13

In summary, slaves provided essential services to the Fulbe, assuming a special role in their adopted society. They had been disengaged from their homeland and given marginal membership in their masters' households. The conditions of this membership varied according to the wishes of each master who held rights over his slaves, over their sale, and also over their sexuality and procreation. The treatment of slaves appears to have varied considerably among masters, and most certainly improved during the colonial period, and there were many who enjoyed a significant degree of liberty, responsibility, and even power.

Noble Slaves

Obedience was a highly valued and often rewarded duty of Fulbe slaves. As in other Sudanic States, slaves loyal to their chiefs, or laamiido, could achieve positions of importance and even titles. As noted, wealthy title-holders or absentee masters usually chose their most loyal slave, known either as jauro or gaga, to preside over the dumde. Until the present, slaves have figured prominently in the administration of Adamawa emirate,14 and have often proved more loyal than their free counterparts. Unlike free Fulbe titles, slave titles, with a few exceptions, are not hereditary. This has insured hard work and loyalty among slaves. At present, some children of the slave title-holders see the incumbency of such a position as demeaning, but at the same time, free individuals have been known to relinquish their freedom to become slaves of the laamiido (maccube laamiido) in order to occupy these titled positions. This is shown in the experience of the present kofa of Adamawa.15

"I am the present kofa of Adamawa, age 45. I am the bodyguard of the laamiido, but in the past the kofa' en guarded the town gate and acted as scouts in war. My mother was free-born but my father was a slave from the Laka people, and he worked as a dogari ["guard"]). When I was growing up I wanted to get a title, unlike most boys. I thus decided to follow my father's lenyol so that I could become a dogari like my father. I quickly advanced to second in rank among the dogari' en.

13. Owners attempted to follow Islamic practice, including representing the slaves in the Fatiha prayer at the mosque and payment of sadaka. Some former owners also report that some slave marriages were not performed according to Islam. Owners might casually meet to contract the marriage without paying sadaka or bridewealth.
14. There are presently about twenty-five major slave titles in Yola, some of whose holders preside over large groups of slaves, e.g Lamdo Cudde (chief of front-line warriors); Sarkin Baambadawa (chief of praise singers and dancers); Dan Rimi (chief of messengers); and Sarkin Dogari (chief of police, guards).
15. Interview with Muhammed Jinau (Kofar Adamawa), 7 March 1986, Yola.
This is how I got the title of kofa. One night, in the middle of the night, laamiido beat the drums to test his slaves' loyalty. These are beaten only in times of trouble. I heard the drums, mounted my horse, rushed to the palace and asked what was wrong. The laamiido then asked: 'Why are you asking such questions? Only the chief of the dogari'en should do this.' Then I went home. One other time the laamiido, some slaves and the dogari'en were hunting and I was among them. We saw a lion and the laamiido fired at it, but we did not know if he had killed it. I was the only one brave enough to go looking for it. When I came back with it with a shot in its head, the laamiido marveled at my courage. Then the kofa died. The council met and decided among six candidates for the title, from which someone else besides me was chosen. They brought the choice to the laamiido and he asked why they had not chosen me, narrating the stories of my bravery. Then they all agreed that I was most suited for the title and I was turbaned. The laamiido gave me this house (alongside the palace) as well as a farm near Mayo Inne. A few slaves remain on that farm and I am their owner. At present I am the laamiido's closest bodyguard and accompany him everywhere."

This story could just as easily be that of a gallant nineteenth-century Fulbe labbojo ("warrior") as of a modern-day slave title-holder, most of whom are exceedingly loyal and proud of their position. Each laamiido, apparently, has had his favorite slave, and the most devoted received responsibilities in his close company and rewards of gowns, land, culabe, houses, and many other valuables. In the past, some fought in the ranks with the most courageous warriors and were rewarded with slaves and dumde. Others, namely the Ajiya and Shamaki, were entrusted with all the emirate's newly-captured or tributary slaves, escorting some of them to Sokoto each year as tribute. And stories abound of the loyalty and diligence of these royal slaves, some of whom were so esteemed that free Fulbe approached them for assistance. On the other hand, some royal slaves lacked such responsibility and esteem: some simply cut grass for the laamiido's horses or escorted him in procession; some had no formal duties; and several of them were poor.

None of the slave titles has been abandoned in recent years; some have even been created. Some may have lost their functions but all are held by individuals who, simply to hold a title, are willing to be labelled "slave" by their peers. Kofa was born of a free mother, yet he assumed his father's identity in order to become the laamiido's slave with the aim of holding a title. Many others do not hold titles but they still regard themselves as slaves of the laamiido, and there are numerous descendants of former slave title-holders who are still considered slaves. One slave title-holder described this as follows:

"There are many slaves in Yola today. If there weren't there wouldn't be any truly loyal supporters of the laamiido. Only the laamiido owns slaves today. In the past others owned them but the Europeans came and said that no one but the laamiido could own them. Even now, his slaves are proud to be slaves, and some even fight to be his slaves. But today, slaves do little. They simply come to fada on Friday and greet the laamiido."

Today *maccudo* is just a name. But each is entitled to get pay from the *laamiido*. Even now they are sitting at home while the *laamiido* is at the farm. He even has to buy grasses to feed his horses. This is because the Europeans came and said slaves can't be forced to work. Now they just dress up for ceremonies.

Unlike in the past, slaves can now move around as they wish, though they do inform the *laamiido* if they travel. Many now own farms which they received from the *laamiido*. They are free to marry anybody—even true Fulbe. In my own case I've already married two Fulbe and am about to marry a third.”

Many royal *maccube* do in fact remain as “slaves”, for the proximity it gives them to their emir, the *laamiido*. They choose to remain in a perpetual state of dependency upon their chief, the *laamiido* who, like a father, is obliged to meet their basic needs. This is not too dissimilar from the care given to commoner slaves.

**Freed Slaves and Slave Descendants**

*Rimdinabe*, as noted, is a term that has until recently been employed by Fulbe to refer to people they categorize as slave descendants and freed slaves—more appropriately, “free slaves”, a term that best approximates what appears to be the opinion of many Fulbe, especially those of the older generation. They are free, yet they are categorically still slaves, and they may be treated as such, especially when they no longer can enjoy their master's protection.

Even before the colonial period, slaves could purchase their freedom, through paying their *jawmiiko* ("master") with cattle or horses; others were freed under their *jawmiiko*'s good will. When the British began to dismember slavery in northern Nigeria, many Fulbe owners immediately complied with their intentions and freed their slaves. Some reportedly did so because, under the tenets of Islam as well as colonial proclamation, they were obliged to treat their slaves equitably, not unlike family members. For them, the costs had come to exceed the benefits. Many others, under suspicion of abusing their slaves, were arrested, fined and forced to free their slaves. Others thus released their slaves, in fear of being reported. Nevertheless, according to elders' estimates, full fledged slavery continued until at least 1940, long after the British had abolished the slave trade. In particular, children of slaves were illegally made slaves, and some were kidnapped and held under conditions of slavery. Moreover, because the practice of concubinage was not legally abolished, concubines were still taken from among slave descendants, often performing functions similar to those of slaves, and this practice continues to this day. Some individuals paid compensation fees to the British for female slaves' freedom, in which case they remained the women's legal guardians, but officially as husbands rather than masters. In many of cases, Fulbe masters not only persuaded their “freed” slaves to stay on as workers, they also convinced the British that the “slaves”
in their houses were their relatives—which, metaphorically, they were. According to some Fulbe, a few slaves were formally owned up to twenty years ago and even today, given kofa’s words, some, including himself, still own slaves in the villages. He says: 17

“When I was turbaned the laamido gave me Rumnde Turbiru which had been owned earlier this century by the kofa’en. I give many of the 300 people living there clothes, food and even arms, and they give me tribute. They are my slaves. They can’t even speak to me because of this. If I go to the rumnde they beat their drums, they cook for me and guard my house at night.”

Many other contemporary Fulbe have slaves residing in their households, though they do not “own” them, or demand their labor as in the past. Here, the present Kaigama of Adamawa (formerly a senior military official) reports on slavery in his household: 18

“Because many of my ancestors were warriors, each owned at least fifty slaves and two dunde, up to the 1920s. When their owners died, some departed, and some, particularly the women and children, chose to remain, and they were divided among living family members.

As a youth I inherited from my father one kordo and her children, as slaves. Some of their descendants are alive at present and are now considered free. But I have remained like a father to them; they call me ‘Baba’ and they regard my children as their siblings. When the women married, I gave them a dowry and received a brideprice when appropriate, and when they were divorced, they ‘came home’ to my house. Among the males, two still live in my house and I provide for them, for instance covering the cost of sending them to school. I sometimes help my deceased brother’s slaves. My other relations in Yola also provide for the slave descendants in their households.”

This example, similar to many others collected in the Yola area, shows that many former slaves and slave-descendants still retain very close and important connections with their jawmu, who has assumed the role of their guardian.

When slaves became “free”, they were faced with a dilemma. Should they depart from their masters’ house in order to escape their slave identity? If so, how would they fare on their own, with no family or master? What if new associates learned of their true roots? According to accounts from the Yola area, some males “fled” and returned to their purported village of origin and sought to establish new ties, while females and their children more often remained with their master. Many of those who fled, however, reportedly returned, and these and many others appear to have relocated in the general vicinity, in order to escape their slave heritage and find avenues into the Fulbe identity or that of another established group, particularly the Hausa. For instance, many from the rural areas moved to urban locales,

17. Interview with Muhammed Jinau (Kofar Adamawa), 7 March 1986, Yola.
18. Interview with Usmanu Pate (Kaigama Adamawa), 19 June 1986.
such as Yola or Girei, where they could maintain a measure of anonymity, and a number of them joined the colonial army. It is said that some declared: “Now we are free. We are going to town to become Fulbe.” However, many of them still retained contacts with their former master’s household, paying tribute or greeting the family at Sallah time or, in some instances, visiting the household in times of need. Some continue to do so at present.

Because they had no recollection of their ancestral home and regarded their master’s family as their own, many other freed slaves chose or were persuaded to remain in or nearby their master’s house. In such instances, they and their children would retain their slave identity, being referred to as kordo (female slave) or maccudo (male slave). For instance, Leimani is known by her personal name or as kordo moodibbo (“the slave of moodibbo”). Under this arrangement, they retained the full support of their guardian and the prospect of gradual improvement of their status, namely through marriage. They continued to provide services (domestic, agricultural) for their guardian’s household, but they notably did not become sukaabe (“clients”), a term reserved for individuals who voluntarily became workers, in exchange for food, clothing and nowadays money, based largely on their proven loyalty (cf. Smith 1954; Hill 1985). Their position was more like adopted family members than clients.

Though they enjoyed protection and material benefits, slave descendants who remained in their master’s compound normally did not have the same rights as true family members. Fulbe elders cite a proverb about the motives of freed slaves: Heba ndimu, daba ndongu (“When he gets his freedom, he looks for inheritance”). Indeed, rimāínabe often sought relative equality in their master’s household: by adopting the master’s lenyol (“ancestry”) without his consent, by attempting to marry among his children, and by making a claim on his inheritance. However, many Fulbe argue, citing the Qur’an, that such a goal ideally cannot be achieved by former slaves. A master’s lenyol might be legitimately obtained only after several generations of intermarriage (though such marriages were rare), and his land might be inherited by his former slaves, but only if he had no living free relatives. Such principles reportedly were fully in operation until about twenty years ago, and even now, many Fulbe insist that regardless of the strategies employed, slave descendants can never become true Fulbe. As one elder explained:19 “They are slaves because of their history, not because of their work.”

In large towns such as Yola, by virtue of the passage of time and the scale of the community, the dilemmas of many slave descendants have been minimized, or disappeared with the recollections of their identity. Generally speaking, by the third generation, one’s slave identity might become some-

19. The current Kaigama of Adamawa.
thing of a family secret, in the sense that most community members except knowledgeable elders or guardians are now unaware of their background. The elders in particular still refer to these individuals as "slaves", and it is only the youths of this generation that are more accommodating in their behavior towards slave descendants. Some individuals who are aware of their own slave heritage, such as Leimani or the royal slaves, still see no harm in such labeling, and even refer to themselves as slaves, but most others now view being called slaves as pejorative.

The difficulties associated with being a rimïnado in town for some was avoided simply by staying on the master's rumnde, in relative isolation. Over the years, the nearby Fulɓe community might lose track of the true origins of the individual members of these villages, believing that all the slaves moved away or died out and were replaced by Fulɓe. This is true in some cases. But for other rumnde, knowledgeable Fulɓe elders or descendants of their owners reveal that their inhabitants "really" are slaves—the descendants of the original slave inhabitants of the rumnde, who may try to conceal their ancestry. On the other hand, some former slaves now owning their rumnde take pride in the fact that, though formerly owned, they can perform economically in a way not incompatible with the status of their former masters and their Fulɓe counterparts. They do not deny their heritage and believe that in some respects they have escaped it through their achievements.

In rural towns like Fufore and Njobjoli, incorporation into the Fulɓe community has been less easily achieved than in Yola, especially among those whose heritage is common knowledge and who lack a guardian. Here is the case of Mawnde.

Mawnde is a seventy year old retired farmer from Fufore. His father was Shuwa Arab and had migrated to the Fufore area around the turn of the century. He was free and owned two farms, a herd of cows and five horbe ("female slaves"). He married one of the slaves (O suli mo: literally "He freed her", but also, "He made her his concubine"), and she gave birth to Mawnde. She was from the Laka people and had been captured as a girl and sold to Mawnde's father, who later married her. The father died around 1930 when Mawnde was thirteen years old. His mother remarried at Karewa (near Gurin) to a slave who was still working for his master. Mawnde had a very small farm of his own. He married his first wife there—a slave—who stayed with him until the death of his mother. Then he divorced her and moved to Mbewere. After consulting a mallam ("teacher"), Mawnde decided to "try his luck" at Fufore where he received from the ardo ("chief") a small plot of land about fifteen kilometers outside Fufore. He managed to hire a few workers so that the farm could produce enough to support his household. Since his mother's death, he has married three free Fulɓe wives and three slaves. One Fulɓe wife died and he divorced all the others. He claims that he never experienced any difficulty in marrying the Fulɓe women, though the fact that they all were divorcees undoubtedly facilitated the marriages. Mawnde laments that he is now too old to farm. Owing to his poverty, his wives in reality deserted him. All his brothers and sisters have died, and his daughters have married out of town. His twenty year-old son does not work and is said to have drug problems. His daughters help when they can and he is usually fed by a neighbor. He claims he now has only four friends.
Mawnde also laments that he really has no identity: “I speak only Fulfulde, yet I cannot claim to be a Pullo.” And the people of Fufure know of his background: he bears the name of a slave and not of a Pullo or even a Muslim, and indeed, they refer to him as maccudo.20

Mawnde’s story illustrates the predicament faced by some rimïnaôe, particularly those with no family or guardian to protect their interests. In Fufure, Mawnde’s slave heritage is not easily forgotten and the principles defining a slave are still applied to him. Mawnde may argue that his father was Shuwa Arab and freed his mother so that he is also free, but the local Fulbe insist that he is still a slave, not only because of his heritage but also because his father divorced his mother who then remarried a slave, thereby forfeiting her and her son’s status. Given that these principles exist today and that Fulbe attitudes towards such individuals have prevailed, especially in rural areas, Mawnde still is a “slave”. Even worse, Mawnde’s father was also his master, and since he had died, Mawnde had no baba or jawmu (“guardian”) or family to “go home to”. Much of his life has been spent shifting from town to town, in search of equitable treatment and an identity.

For the past twenty years, Mawnde has lived in Fufure but has not escaped his heritage. The town’s free people (rimbe) may acquire land on the town’s periphery; they can readily marry according to their choice, and normally only about half their marriages end in divorce; they can enjoy the assistance of friends and patrons often throughout the town and, given all this, few are impoverished. But Mawnde could not enjoy any of these privileges: he is poor and, even worse, he is subject to ridicule by the townspeople. In fact, some asked me why I bothered to interview “a slave like that who doesn’t know anything and just speaks rubbish”.

Having spent many years among the Fulbe, Mawnde has unavoidably adopted Fulbe language and culture. He claims he has pulaaku, which to him means “being a devout Muslim”. As to becoming Fulbe, he explains: “That is something that happens after a long time, perhaps among one’s children. But even after one becomes Fulbe, a ‘true’ Pullo will not tell him his secrets.” Mawnde’s story also illustrates some strategies used by former slaves to improve their status through marriage. Over the years, he managed to obtain three Fulbe wives, even if all were divorcees. His daughters have married out of the town, thereby escaping their slave heritage, but his son, still in Fufure, has not managed to do so, nor has he married. In Yola, slaves and rimïnaôe can and do marry Fulbe, but often following extreme scrutiny of the bride’s family, through paying high bridewealth, and most commonly by marrying widows or divorcees. One palace slave reported that he paid 2000 Naira (then about $2000) just for a Pullo divorcee; normally, little is paid for a previously-married woman. Like Mawnde, this

slave has identified himself with the Fulbe and he says he has *pulaaku*. He does not—in fact, cannot—try to hide his ancestry. However, his children are ashamed of their ancestry and their father’s occupation, they often lie about both, and have adopted their mother’s identity.

In short, until recently residential strategies of *rimdinahe* for improving their status in this Fulbe dominated region included the following: 1) segregation from those who could identify them as slave descendants, and adoption of the identity of another established Muslim group; 2) residence near the former master who could provide full or partial support; 3) residence in a Fulbe community as a known slave descendant and, situationally, treatment as one of inferior status.

**System of Slavery in Yola in the Wider Perspective**

This paper has sought to examine the system of slavery in Adamawa emirate, and more specifically Yola, as it was constructed by Fulbe leaders and maintained by the Fulbe people throughout the nineteenth century and much of the colonial period. In this section we attempt to explain why such a system assumed its particular form and why it has ostensibly persisted into the modern day.

This system was in many ways structured after that of the Sokoto caliphate, itself conditioned by the Islamic beliefs regarding slavery. As a satellite emirate, Adamawa became increasingly immersed in a complex regional system, linked by shared Islamic ideals and an administration centered at Sokoto, and by an elaborate network of trade routes and enterprises in which slaves constituted a primary commodity. With these connections it is not surprising that the form Adamawa Fulbe slavery assumed mirrored that of Sokoto, particularly in the following areas: 1) the means of slave acquisition and delivery; 2) the kinds of work and work conditions of slaves; 3) the significance of slave-farms as agricultural, productive units; 4) the prevalence of concubinage as a means of recruitment of personnel to provide labour and reproductive services; and 5) the status of slaves, whose initial position and role as chattels improved somewhat with theirs and their children’s Islamization.

Moreover, under the directives of colonial policy in northern Nigeria, the slave trade of the caliphate was, ideally, uniformly abolished and slavery was de-legalized, employing specific measures, so that slavery itself gradually and similarly declined throughout the region. At the onset, many slaves fled, and others, being granted their freedom, established independent households and farms apart from their masters. Many of these, however, remained in their host community, seeking and eventually securing their master’s identity, Hausa or Fulbe, respectively. In both regions, the continuation of concubinage, which was not prohibited by the British, perpetuated the status of slave but also facilitated the eventual incorporation of slave descendants.
Despite these overarching similarities precipitated by personnel, ideological, and economic exchanges throughout the caliphate, Adamawa's system had some peculiarities of its own. First, because of the initially low percentage of Fulɓe, most of whom as pastoralists opted to devote their livelihood to works other than farming, and because a sizeable proportion of the large autochthonous population of the area were pagans, vulnerable to enslavement, slavery in Adamawa and especially the Yola vicinity was perhaps more widespread and essential than it was in Hausaland. Related to these economic and demographic trends, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery occurred more gradually in the Yola area, as many Fulɓe struggled to make the transition to agricultural work within the framework of the colonial economy. Thus many masters encouraged their slaves to remain in or nearby their house, as free dependents or workers, a practice which was evidently less common in Hausaland proper, where many severed ties with their master altogether. But despite this, slave descendants in the Yola area have not achieved full incorporation into the Fulɓe identity as easily as those in Hausaland.21 Until very recently the slaves of the Yola area occupied the intermediate identity of rimdaïnabe, which did not allow them to enjoy the same rights and privileges as true Fulɓe. Some were—and are at present—labeled as slaves and either try to conceal their identity or remain the dependents of their jawmu.

The differences in the relative incorporation of slaves may also be attributed to several other complex, locally-specific factors, such as ethnic composition and "culture". In Hausaland, where the Hausa have for centuries constituted the numerically- and culturally-dominant ethnic group, slaves—even in the rural areas—appear to have been readily absorbed into the Hausa population, as part of a general tendency towards assimilation of non-Hausa Muslims, including the local Fulɓe peoples.22 In contrast, Fulɓe conquerors initially constituted a minority of the Adamawa population, and the majority itself, both slaves and former tributaries, was highly diverse. In the Yola area, to retain power they appear to have increased their numbers by inviting their kinsmen to settle in and around Yola. As this occurred, they strove to exclude from their ranks all those they regarded as Haɓe, both slaves and non-Fulɓe Muslims (excluding the Hausa and Kanuri), all of whose ancestors are generally assumed to have been slaves. Surely, some of these did, over the years, become Fulɓe, but not without much resistance and ridicule by those who regard themselves as true Fulɓe.

21. Cf. Hill 1985: 39. Though slave descendants were more likely to seek incorporation into the Hausa identity, rather than into that of the ruling Fulɓe aristocracy. In Zaria, an emirate with many Fulɓe elements, incorporation, as of the 1950s, was proceeding more slowly than in Hausaland proper (Smith 1960; cf. Hill 1985: 41).
22. See for instance Hill (1985) on the Kano area; Dunbar (1977) on Hausa in Niger; and Smith (1954) on Hausa-Fulani in the Zaria area.
VerEecke 1993a) This contrasts to some other parts of the emirate where the relatively rapid incorporation of non-Fulɓe appears to have become a deliberate strategy for maintaining Fulɓe domination (Schultz 1979, 1984) or at least has had the effect of rapidly swelling the Fulɓe population (Burnham 1980). In the Yola area, Haɓɓe normally were restricted to such occupations as trader, artisan, or farmer, they were required to live separately from the Fulɓe, and though they had become Muslims and behaved like the Fulɓe, they were regarded as lacking the key element to be true Fulɓe, *pulaaku*. For their part, Fulɓe strove to secure work in administration, in religious matters, or in cattle rearing, though some, of whose many non-Fulɓe, did become farmers. They inhabited Fulɓe-only town wards, they were highly endogamous, and they continued to reinforce their exclusivity through elaborate views of their inherent distinctiveness and superiority. Indeed, they came to regard themselves as the *aslī’en* ("indigens", "owners") of the area, and all other people as foreigners or Haɓɓe. Under this system, the Fulɓe could more readily maintain their monopoly over political and economic resources (see VerEecke 1993b).

Such differences may also be attributed to certain cultural tendencies of the dominant host society of the Yola area, the Fulɓe. Based on traditional Fulɓe culture, rooted in their pastoral heritage, a premium upon lineage purity and moral probity has persisted. Intermarriage or even overt interaction with non-Fulɓe, particularly slaves, has been regarded as polluting the Fulɓe *lenyol* ("descent group") and its physical and cultural type, and as reducing Fulɓe virtue and honour. As noted earlier, Haɓɓe are "free" yet possess many attributes of slaves (cf. Riesman 1977: 117-120; Stenning 1959: 57), and such cultural, moral and even symbolic distinctions constitute for many Fulɓe the primary rationale for denying them access to the Fulɓe identity. Thus, despite the penetration of Islam in the Yola area as a supra-ethnic integrating force, many aspects of Fulɓe culture have remained, and continue to codify relations with other peoples. At least for the Yola area, there has existed a contradiction between Fulɓe ideals of exclusiveness and Islamic assimilationism, in which Fulɓe and non-Fulɓe participate in a culture based largely on Islam, and non-Fulɓe are encouraged to emulate certain aspects of Fulɓe behavior, yet non-Fulɓe can never achieve full incorporation into the Fulɓe identity, though as noted, this contradiction has, for at least some slaves, been mitigated by the perpetuation of dependency relations between slave and slave master, freed slave and guardian.

This system of the Yola area can also be understood as part of a broader social and cultural pattern that exists in the African societies, as regards the position of slaves as outsiders, even after the formal abolition of slavery. This particular facet of African slavery is explained by Kopytoff and Miers (1977) who argue that because of the strong corporateness of African kin groups, the need for individuals "to belong" in order to secure rights in African societies, and the value of expanding the group through acquiring new individuals and dependents, slaves could join their host community, but only
as marginal outsiders. Over time, and especially after their emancipation, some not only adopted their master’s culture, they also acquired rights and privileges in the host society, namely through becoming quasi-members of their master’s kin group or of the society as a whole. But despite this, “slaves” in many African societies have been unable to achieve full membership, for such reasons as their background and culture, their legal inability to become true members of the host community’s kin groups, and related, the community’s elaboration of a special category of people—those of slave origin—who are treated as legal minors or dependents (Kopytoff 1988; Roberts & Miers 1988).

The persistence of the identity of slave among the Yola-area Fulɓe may be attributed in part to such structural principles. Much significance is attached to one’s belonging to a lenyol (pl. le’i), which broadly is an agnatic descent group but is also a concept employed for such notions as patrilineage, ancestry, as well as people, purity of ancestry, and even political supporters. In the past le’i were economic and at times residential groups, and, though they have proliferated, they continue at present to hold rights over their members and their resources, and hereditary titles. In Fulɓe towns, le’i are ranked on their wealth, the size of their membership, their prestige and honor (daraja), and their achievements in Islam and administration, and some in essence are “truer Fulɓe” than others. It is thus not surprising that most residents, including youths, can specify their ancestry at least through their grandparents and very commonly to the founders of Adamawa, though the metaphor of kinship, bandirabe (“blood relatives”, “extended family”), extends to the Fulɓe of the whole region. Slave descendants, for their part, are situated marginally on this continuum of Fulɓe-ness, nowadays not very distant from “non-Fulɓe Muslims”, who may also situationally claim to be Fulɓe. In the view of “true Fulɓe”, because these people lack lenyol in its various ramifications, as well as the key ingredient of Fulɓe-ness, pulaaku, which itself is obtained through lenyol (in the blood), they cannot be fully incorporated, and their rights in the community (i.e. marriage, work, titles) may be affected. Nevertheless, the metaphor of kinship may be extended to them, whereby they can remain the dependents of the Fulɓe.

In summary, slaves initially provided important agricultural work to the Fulɓe and served as a means of personnel recruitment, namely through concubinage. But in accordance with political and economic conditions in the Yola area, influenced by Fulɓe social and cultural principles, a specific policy has been elaborated for continuing until recently to situate known slave descendants on the fringes of the Fulɓe social system, in which all individuals are scaled according to specific membership criteria. In other northern Nigerian societies, such as the Hausa, where such principles are not so clearly defined, the incorporation of slaves appears to have occurred more easily.
Despite its preponderance until the early colonial period, slavery in the Yola area has become something of a historical matter. With the passage of time, aided by their increased success at claiming the Fulɓe identity, many individuals are escaping their slave heritage. Moreover, with the elders of this generation vanishing, precise recollections of the experiences and genealogies of slaves are now being lost irretrievably. Other identities, such as ethnic group, socio-economic status, religion, or family, have also become more salient in the modern-day, as certain groups align to face surmounting competition for increasingly scarce resources, especially in the state capital, Yola. However, it is under such conditions that one’s slave heritage may indeed become an issue, with the principles discussed above at times being invoked to justify discriminatory behavior. On the other hand, since colonial times, many, including those of free status, have benefitted substantially from seeking or remaining under the changing conditions of servitude, as slaves or concubines of the laamiido, his chiefs or title-holders. Still others are proud of such an association simply for the status it brings. All this suggests that the institution of slavery is very much in operation in the Yola area, yet its meaning has been transformed and its outward functions reduced, to what has in most cases become a voluntary form of servitude. It now comprises one significant facet of Yola’s dynamic system of clientelism which has greatly proliferated to help all involved parties confront such intense competition and the void created by the Nigerian government’s inability to service the needs of all its citizens. Nevertheless, as these self-ascribed slaves continue to reproduce, their dependents may still face the dilemma of being free yet categorically slaves.

It is also under the current hardships that other elements of the legacy of slavery have become obvious. Even now, many Fulɓe acknowledge that they lag behind other peoples occupationally, having avoided certain work they delegated to their slaves. Dependency benefits, once reserved largely for family, slaves or clients, are now very often manipulated by Fulɓe bandirabe as a whole, to the dissatisfaction of elders who recall the traditional meaning of the kinship ties. Moreover, many elders can specifically trace corrupt and illegal dealings among today’s Yola elite to former slave owners who never fully adjusted to the new political and economic order introduced during colonialism. Though these phenomena were undoubtedly induced as well by wider societal changes, the ideological transformation, especially that in which the Fulɓe have come to regard themselves as the “owners of the land” and as conceptually distinct from all other peoples, reflects the mentality of slave-owning times which appears to have been ingrained in many Fulɓe, rich and poor alike.

Because in many respects a majority of Fulɓe and slave descendants deny certain features of the phenomena and its legacy, research has not been an easy matter and there are inevitably many gaps in this reconstruction.
Nevertheless, it has striven, at least, to capture the memory of several individuals whose experience as "slaves" might otherwise have been dismissed by their peers as trivial.

_CENTER for African Studies_  
_The Ohio State University, 1993._

---

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**ABUBAKAR, S.**  

**ADAMU, M.**  

**AZARYA, V.**  

**BALDUS, B.**  

**BARTH, H.**  

**BURNHAM, P.**  

**DOGNIN, R.**  

**DUNBAR, R. A.**  

**FISHER, A. G. B. & FISHER, H. J.**  

**FROELICH, J.-C.**  
SLAVERY IN ADAMAWA

HILL, P.

HISKETT, M.

HOGENDORN, J.

HOGENDORN, J. & LOVEJOY, P. E.

KIRK-GREENE, A. H. M.

KOPYTOFF, I.

KOPYTOFF, I. & MIERS, S.

LACROIX, P.-F.
1952 “Matériaux pour servir à l’histoire des Peul de l’Adamawa” (à suivre), Études camerounaises 37-38: 3-63.
1953 “Matériaux pour servir à l’histoire des Peul de l’Adamawa” (fin), Études camerounaises 39-40: 3-40.

LEVTZION, N.

LOVEJOY, P. E.
Migeod, C. O.  

Mohammadu, E.  

Paden, J.  

Passarge, S.  

Riesman, P.  

Roberts, R. & Miers, S.  

Schultz, E.  


Smith, M. G.  


Stenning, D.  
1959 Savannah Nomads (Oxford: Oxford University Press).


Uba, C. N.  

VerEecke, C.  


WATTS, M.

WHITAKER, C. S.