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Ruf, Urs Peter

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Urs Peter Ruf

Ending Slavery

Hierarchy, Dependency and Gender in Central Mauritania

[transcript]
Culture and Social Practice

Ending Slavery

Urs Peter Ruf

Ending Slavery.
Hierarchy, Dependency and Gender in Central Mauritania

[transcript]

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To Boissil

Preface

In 1980, slavery was abolished in Mauritania for the third time in the 20th century.[1] The issue is, however, of such longevity that it continues to attract the attention of abolitionists and human rights groups, but also of international donors and journalists up to the present day.[2] Like the vast majority of these popular perceptions the present analysis focuses exclusively on Moorish, or, in the terminology that will be adopted here, on bīẓān society. However, to equate slavery within this largest ethnic group in Mauritania with slavery in this country, as is frequently done in the media, is misleading. Similar institutions existed, and still can be traced too, among the black African ethnic groups in Mauritania as well as among most other Sahelian and West African ethnic groups. This is acknowledged and highlighted by a number of human rights groups, such as "Human Rights Watch", "Anti-Slavery International" and the Mauritanian "SOS esclaves", to name only a few.[3]

Closer to the heart of the matter are statements from pressure groups which criticise the government of Mauritania for doing at best little or else nothing at all to promote the slaves' and former slaves' emancipation and economic development, and hence for allowing slavery to continue. While these accusations cannot be compared with those against the government of Sudan, which has been accused at least for tolerating if not promoting the enslavement of women and children in the country's south by northerners, the whole issue seems outdated: after all it is more than 150 years since the abolition of slavery by France under the initiative of Viktor Schoelcher. This declaration, however, only followed similar earlier declarations concluded in 1792 in Denmark, in 1807 in Great Britain, and in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna. Today the framework of international consensus on the abolition of slavery, human rights and the rights of the individual is provided by the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights of 1948, the "Slavery Convention" of 1926, the "Forced Labour Convention" of 1930, the "Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery" of 1956, and the ILO convention nº 105 of 1957 concerning the "Abolition of Forced Labour". The various conventions not only condemn slavery and forced labour, but also call for measures to prevent these. In view of this long history of abolition, and the consensus on

this issue within the international community, the accusation of continuing to tolerate slavery hits hard. It brings into the present an institution of domination and oppression commonly thought to have long been consigned to history, and thus puts back on the agenda the question of what "slavery" means.[4]

I became involved with Mauritania, and with the problem of slavery in this country, in 1992. Besides the many fascinating aspects of bīẓān society I got to know during this first stay, I was struck by people speaking publicly and without any uneasiness of their slaves and former slaves. A little later I became acquainted with settlements inhabited exclusively by slaves and former slaves, and I realised that these people live in the worst conditions I had ever seen thus far – though I had to admit that the situation many of their masters lived in was hardly more enviable. This experience, which is first of all one of social inequality, and thus in no way particular to Mauritania, would not have raised my concern so strongly, had there not been what may be called a mental state of slavery: arrogance on the part of the former masters, the bīẓān, and subservience on the part of the sūdān, the slaves and manumitted slaves (ḥarāṭīn).

Having worked on local institutions of participation in a development project and beyond, and the sedentarisation of the bīẓān pastoral nomads while finishing my studies (cf. Ruf 1993, 1995), the wish to go to Mauritania for a further period and explore what remained of slavery persisted. A generous research grant for a Ph.D. thesis from the graduate school "Market, State, Ethnicity" at the Social Development Research Centre, which is part of the Department of Sociology at the University of Bielefeld, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia, finally provided the material means to turn this project into reality.

Almost one year of fieldwork primarily among slaves and manumitted slaves (ḥarāṭīn), but former masters, the bīẓān, too, was a rich experience providing many insights into the complex universe of hierarchy and dependency in bīẓān society. I was able to witness slaves still experiencing maltreatment by their masters, a great number of slaves and former slaves living in highly ambivalent relations with masters and former masters, and finally slaves and former slaves defying not only their former master, but the bīẓān as such. However, beyond all these differentiations, which highlight that things are indeed changing in Mauritania, I still feel anger whenever my thoughts go back to some of the experiences I had and which have to be named. There is the bitterness underlying many slave narratives telling how things used to be, and there is the memory of one particular old slave man, who, being no longer of any use, had to sit all day long outside in the courtyard, barely protected by a hut of branches from the beating desert sun, while his master, a likeable and learned man, resided in the modest house build of clay-bricks a few steps away.

This, and various other experiences which taught me what an end to slavery

can mean to those who still suffer from it made me decide that this analysis should contribute to changing this situation. Indeed, the vast majority of Mauritanians, living in one of the least developed countries of this world, need better living conditions. However, among these Mauritanians, the slaves and manumitted slaves, together with a number of other despised social groups, deserve special attention. Their deprivation resides not only in such domains as economy and welfare, but also in ongoing social discrimination, which is a result of their slave past. Change in this domain needs understanding and an open, unprejudiced debate about the nature of the past. This is, as recent cases show, a sensitive and most difficult task. Nevertheless, it is to such a future project that the present discussion would like to propose some arguments.

As far as this aim is concerned, the present study is far from all encompassing. Its intention is to unravel perspectives on bīẓān slavery that until today have remained largely ignored. Its leitmotif is that it is the points of view of the oppressed which need to be made explicit, and which have to be contrasted with those representations of the social provided by the discourses of the dominant strata.[5] Such a perspective allows one to discern what makes up lines of conflict in society and how these are maintained, shifted or overcome. Social hierarchy in the light of such an analysis is free from that certain taste of social consent that common-sense definitions of difference in society tend to suggest and which the powerful like to maintain.[6]

As a critical approach to the analysis of bīẓān society, the present work takes up a concern expressed by a long and illustrious list of social scientists. It was Karl Marx ([1846] 1983b) who stated that philosophical reasoning, which was judged to have only interpreted the world in different ways until then, should turn towards changing the world. Later this tradition lived on, among others in the works of Antonio Gramsci ([1929-35] 1971) and Frantz Fanon (1952). While the voices of these scholars continue to influence present discourses, engaging in public debate on political issues, however, still remains open to the reproach of leaving scientific territory. A most recent example for this divide is the recent debate in France concerning what has come to be the "case" of Pierre Bourdieu – as opposed to the social scientist (cf. Priester 1998).

Although I am aware that the present analysis could be vulnerable because of this impetus and its explicit premises, I prefer this more precarious status to hiding behind ritual and meaningless evocations of the ideals of scientific impartiality. The descriptions of social relations in Mauritanian society which will be developed in the subsequent chapters are laden with theory, and hence "thick descriptions" (cf. Geertz 1973). They are aimed at providing a narrative capable of changing the perceptions of the social topography of Mauritania. However, this means not engaging in unfounded polemics, but on the contrary unfolding a sound analysis enabling the reader to discern how relations of dependency, which have come to be known as slavery, evolve, how they are maintained, and what, today, brings them to an end.

This work is offered to all Mauritanians wishing to tackle the issue of slavery in their society further, as well as to scholars concerned with Mauritania, development sociologists and of course everybody interested in the study of slavery and relations of dependency. As a view from the outside, this study will, it is hoped, provide new insights, while it will undoubtedly also receive criticism for misunderstanding bīẓān society. Indeed much of Mauritania and bīẓān society still remains alien to me, but seeing this country and its people through the eyes of a stranger is not necessarily a disadvantage, nor does it systematically inhibit the acquisition of knowledge. On the contrary, strangeness to the object of study is a prerequisite to the production of knowledge. In the social sciences it is certainly one of the greatest strengths of social anthropology and ethnography to have developed systematically the productive tension resulting from strangeness to cultures observed and immersion in these cultures, regardless whether this is a subculture around the corner, or the culture of an ethnic group on the opposite side of the globe (cf. Knorr-Cetina 1991; Hirschauer/Amann 1997).

For those to whom Mauritania is alien, it has to be explained that the debate whether there is slavery, and what slavery has meant and continues to mean to members of bīẓān society, continues to go on both in the country and abroad. Periodically the issue surfaces in the independent Mauritanian press as well as among the Mauritanian emigrants, who today are linked by the newsgroup Mauritanie-Net.[7] Until today debates remain heated and highly controversial. Points of view vary from denying both the significance of slavery in the past and especially its persistence until the present to denouncing continued slavery. This controversy is reflected also by the public debate between the government and various Mauritanian NGOs, aiming to defend the rights of slaves and former slaves.[8] In January 1997, president Maouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya dealt for the first time in a public speech with the issue of slavery. Acknowledging this institution to be part of the nation's past, he altogether denied its persistence until the present. Consequently there are not remnants but only "sequels" of slavery to be witnessed in Mauritania (cf. Mauritanie Nouvelles, nº 234, 12.1.1997: 10).

The practical consequences of this kind of definition became obvious about one year later. On the 12 February 1998 five prominent Mauritanian anti-slavery activists were sentenced by a Mauritanian court to thirteen months of jail, and a 30,000 UM fine after having participated in a French television programme focusing, among other topics, on the issue of slavery in Mauritania.[9] On the 24 March the appeal of the human rights activists was refused and the sentence confirmed. However, numerous international protests and – probably more important – a meeting with a group of international donors scheduled for the next day, made the president of Mauritania, Maouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, lift the sentence (cf. L'Autre Afrique, 1.4.1998).

Witnessing these recent trends towards a more rigid handling of the issue of slavery in Mauritania by local authorities, the present study, which will be

the second one focusing on Mauritania's slaves and former slaves in only a short period (cf. Brhane 1997a,b), will provide some further substance to the debate, and thus contribute to a more thorough treatment of this serious issue. This indeed is needed, as the recent evolution has polarised opinions rather than encouraged to dialogue.

This book aims at describing the slave experience from a grassroots perspective; it wants to give the oppressed a voice, and to provide a forum where both their dignity and humiliation can be expressed. Indeed slaves resisted their masters, developed strategies to enlarge their autonomy, and much more, while still living under the threats resulting from their slave estate.

Tracking these slaves' and former slaves' experiences in quest of their point of view was done by conducting numerous individual interviews with people still bound to the slave estate and ḥarāṭīn (manumitted slaves). The locus of research was the region of Achram-Diouk, a small rural area in central Mauritania. Fieldwork consisted in many respects of learning by doing, as I failed to anticipate a number of issues sensitive to the interviewees and also because the latter had never been confronted with questions of the kind I confronted them with. Nevertheless, as will be outlined in detail later on (cf. p. 44-47, 50-57), the people of Achram-Diouk came to teach me a lot about their lives, and consequently about what it meant to have been a slave in bīẓān society, or to be still bound to this estate. While some refused to take part in my investigations, most were ready to answer my questions. Ultimately they introduced me in a subtle and tactful way, to this particular social milieu, and I have to thank them for their readiness to endure and forgive my unawareness of many of the finer and more major points of good conduct.

Acknowledgements

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Besides these sūdān, numerous other Mauritanians have contributed to this dissertation, and I am grateful for their support. Professor Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh readily listened several times and at length to my very first reasoning, and did much to encourage me to carry it on. Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara too was a thorough discussion partner and gave me advice for my research in Mauritania. The University of Nouakchott kindly lent its official support to my fieldwork, and Amadou Sall, head of the Department of Philosophy in 1995, was not only a lively discussion partner but also enabled me to get a glimpse of university life there and have an animated and fruitful discussion on fieldwork with Mauritanian students of the social sciences. Finally the head of the SO.NA.DE.R (Société Nationale pour le Développement Rural) of Tagant, Amadou Ba, together with Guy Rousseau and Hubert Jörg from the GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) at Achram and the GTZ office in Nouakchott, greatly contributed to the success of my fieldwork by generously lending me a car, and providing me with comfortable housing at Debissa.

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slave populations in West Africa. Thanks go also to Professor Hans-Dieter Evers, Professor Gudrun Lachenmann, Professor Anna Spittler and Karin Werner as well as all fellows of the graduate school "Market, State, Ethnicity" who contributed to this study by giving me feed-back on various aspects of this study.

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Thanks too to Patricia Skorge, who tried her best to make improvements to my English, by carefully pointing out mistakes to me.

The staff of the University Library of Bielefeld deserves my gratitude for making available to me numerous documents on Mauritania difficult to obtain access to. This task indeed needed a good deal of work and ingenuity.

Finally, there is Jutta Bischoff, who went with me through all the ups and downs of these last years. Together both of us managed to succeed in finishing studies and doing our jobs. While this may not sound like much, we know well it is not. I also have to thank my son, Yassin Bischoff, for his presence continues to bear that immediacy which adults like me sometimes need in order to remember that there is a thriving world going on beyond one's desktop.

Note on Transliteration

Two distinct types of Arabic transliteration are used throughout this book. Personal names of Mauritanians, such as interviewees, are transcribed in the Latin alphabet according to the practice common in Mauritania and used in newspapers for example. Names of locations and towns are transcribed in the same way, taking whenever possible as a reference the transcriptions provided by the Michelin Map nº 953 "Africa North and West". Expressions in ḥassāniyya Arabic dialect, as well as names of bīẓān tribes and of a few historical figures are – with a few changes revealing consonants specific to ḥassāniyya dialect – transcribed according to the system of transliteration of Arabic as suggested by the 19th conference of Orientalists in Rome in 1935 (cf. Krahl/Reuschel 1980: 31). Transliteration is documented on p. 395. By this choice I hope the interested reader might be able to further investigate the etymology and meaning of ḥassāniyya Arabic dialect terms (comprising also a number of terms which are derived from the Berber language), while good readability is maintained by avoiding the overloading of the text with diacritics.

Map 1: Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Based on "Mauritania 1995"; Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

Studying the end of slavery means studying social change. In the case of the bīẓān society of Mauritania, i.e. the Moors, who are the focus here, this process of transformation constitutes a challenge in many domains. It affects social structures as well as patterns of identification in the former slave society and underlies changes in the economy. While some societies managed to leave relations of slavery behind quickly, this process is one of long duration in the case of the bīẓān society. Struggles between new and old, between relations of dependency embedded in the slave system and social relations no longer moulded in this framework have now been going on for decades. However, while this process only began to take shape slowly after the French colonisation of Mauritania at the start of the 20th century, the transformation of bīẓān society evolved at a faster pace since the 1970s. During this decade the country was first hit by the beginning of the Sahelian drought cycle. Later Mauritania occupied a part of the former Spanish Western Sahara; the subsequent war with the POLISARIO liberation movement, which was soon lost, led into a long period of political and economic instability.[1]

In the course of this fundamental restructuring of bīẓān society all major sectors of social and economic life were affected. Undoubtedly the most striking and visible change has been the sedentarisation of the vast majority of the former pastoral nomadic population and the rapid emergence of the capital Nouakchott as the biggest city in the country, today home to about one third of the national population. This rapid and profound transition also challenged relations of hierarchy and dependency. Where masters lost the means to sustain even themselves, they also lost all means to maintain others in a state of dependence. Where new economic opportunities which no longer unequivocally favoured the former masters evolved, subordination to them lost much of its meaning.[2] This recent turmoil in bīẓān society, however, helps the observer and researcher to investigate the change of social relations, for periods of accelerated transition make social relations transparent: they are discussed and contested publicly, taboos are broken, social norms and values questioned. In this respect, periods of crisis also provide information about the past when the present lines of conflict were already in place, but had not yet surfaced as a result of relations of domination still

remaining largely unquestioned.[3] Moments of crisis thus are moments in which the past becomes rationalised, and is remembered and expressed in new terms, for what is no longer self-evident needs explanation. These newly emerging discourses, far from simply representing the past, instead interpret it in order to speak about the present and the future. As such they are a crucial source in unravelling the past of subservient strata such as slaves and manumitted slaves. By discerning why and at which point relations of domination stop working, the researcher is able to see more clearly how they functioned in the past. This means dealing much more profoundly with one of the most crucial questions emerging in the context of a sociological approach to slavery, the question of *how is slavery possible*.

The present study aims to specify these questions and to suggest answers by analysing slavery in bīẓān society from different perspectives. Besides a discussion of theories of slavery and hence a definition of the problem in question, this means engaging in exploring the meaning of slavery in different contexts. Naturally descriptions of slavery differ depending on whether they are provided by masters or slaves, but they also differ among slaves because experiences are varied. The significance of slavery in bīẓān society, which gradually changed into a social institution legitimated and regulated by precepts of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as slavery in other societies, cannot be understood properly without an understanding of its history. It is this perspective that makes it possible to discern how and in which domains of society slavery was practised and what kind of ambiguous interrelation evolved between the shape of society and the practice of slavery. Finally, as this study aims to reflect on the end of slavery in contemporary bīẓān society, those processes and articulations marking and fuelling change have to be highlighted. These can be found both in past and present trends of social and economic change as well as in discourses which reinterpret the past in order to give the present a new shape.

Throughout the following chapters arguments will be developed throwing light not only on what slavery in bīẓān society meant in different phases of history, but also on how it was perceived by the different social strata, and among these above all by the slaves and manumitted slaves themselves. Besides a factual reconstruction of the slave past in bīẓān society and of its – quite vigorous – remnants in the present, these arguments are able to give insights on how the divide between masters and slaves was upheld and reproduced. Stating that for some decades now there has been a great change going on in master-slave relations, changes that even go so far as to result in their dissolution, does not imply that in former times these relations were static. Individual slaves' conditions always resulted in struggles over where to set the limits of a slave's freedom of action. Although the relation of power between masters and slaves tended to be biased drastically in favour of the former, coercion as a means of rule was complemented by negotiation, and slaves had means to resist and to oppose their masters' will.[4]

A Note on Terminology

Before presenting an overview of this book, an initial outline of the terminology of social hierarchy in bīẓān society has to be given. Moorish society is divided essentially into two major groups – *bīẓān* and *sūdān* – but these notions may refer to different people in different contexts. Bīẓān refers either to all freemen, i.e. only freeborn people, or to all speakers of the ḥassāniyya language, and thus includes all constituents of bīẓān society besides the freeborn, namely the slaves and manumitted slaves. To make transparent this distinction, the idea of a bīẓān ethnic community constituted by a shared language and culture will be expressed by the term *bīẓān society* in the following, while the designation *bīẓān* will only refer to the status group of freeborn people. Slaves and freed slaves as a group also sharing some features will appear under the emic designation of *sūdān*. However, the sūdān are far from constituting a uniform group. They are essentially divided into ʿabīd (Arabic: slaves; sing. ʿabd) and ḥarāṭīn (Arabic, sing. ḥarṭāni). The latter term is commonly described as meaning freed slave or freemen of secondary rank. As many members of this social group lay great emphasis on their claim not to have a slave ancestry, the notion of ḥarāṭīn will be used to comprise all these meanings, which in fact all describe the idea of a group of freemen which is distinct from the bīẓān, and discriminated against in some respects. A detailed exploration of bīẓān social hierarchy, taking up these definitions, will be given in chapter one, p. 38-44.

This Study

Theoretical reflections on the ambiguities inherent in the master-slave relation and on the implications the practice of slavery has on the shape of society will introduce central arguments of the present study in chapter one. In a discussion of major theoretical contributions to the study of slavery in Africa, the case of bīẓān slavery in Mauritania will serve as a foil against which theoretical approaches to slavery may be critically evaluated. By synthesising the arguments thus developed, the theoretical devices underlying the present study will be outlined. These insights will be used to discuss social hierarchy and conflicting interpretations of bīẓān social order. The chapter's final section will reflect on the methods of field research that were used to gather data among residents of the region of Achram-Diouk in central Mauritania. As living in slavery is an experience of personal alienation and in many respects of the annihilation of individual personhood, inquiring into this aspect of people's life means embarking on the most sensitive topics of individual life histories. Enhancing one's individual status in these circumstances has much to do with deleting and reconstructing the past. Because slavery is nothing glorious to remember, neither for the former slaves nor

their masters today, it does not become part of great public traditions and narratives. Instead it remains incorporated into tales of the past. There it figures as a subtext which can be deciphered and which is needed to apprehend fully how society worked. Despite all these problems individual accounts of life histories developed by biographic interviewing turned out to deal both directly and indirectly with the issue of slavery. The personalised character of this information was of great value. Individual data could be contextualised and related to information derived from other sources, but also be checked for internal consistency. Besides these analytical characteristics the narratives are a rich source of information because they gave those who had experienced slavery the option of describing their life in words of their own.[5]

Chapter two is devoted to the development of this narrative strain of argumentation. Based on a number of life histories, arguments will be raised which open the way for the evaluation of what slavery meant in rural Mauritania and what it continues to mean in the present. A discussion of how to bridge the gap lying between individual experiences and individual case-studies on the one hand and an analysis of slavery on the other introduces this approach, which has a prominent place in the context of this study. While most chapters are arranged in a systematic order, putting the emphasis on different topics and subjecting all kinds of empirical evidence to systematic questioning, this chapter has its own perspective. Rather than isolating out interview fragments, major parts of interviews are arranged into narratives, each of which deals with different perceptions of slavery and social hierarchy in bīẓān society, thus laying the basis for further discussion. Two narratives by slaves who managed to gain autonomy, though by very different means and starting from very different conditions, introduce this section. The second narrative is complemented by and contrasted with passages from two further life histories, that of the interviewee's mother and of the former master's son. The story of an old slave woman who continues to have strong affective ties to her masters but nevertheless manages to give expression to her experiences of humiliation deepens the insights on the different meanings of having been and being a slave. Shifting sides from the sūdān to the bīẓān, in order to get the outside view of slavery, a woman of tributary (znāga) status reveals some aspects of how female identity and a subordinate position in society shape individual aspirations. The circle is closed by two narratives from bīẓān men, who because of their mother having been of slave or manumitted slave status have come to live across the lines of status segregation. Major aspects of the relations of dependency and hierarchy surfacing in the narratives are worked into an initial synthesis of the different meanings slavery and ending slavery has for different members of bīẓān society. This outline of arguments will carve out from the narratives major insights into the working and ending of slavery in bīẓān society.

Certainly one of the greatest strengths of the life history narratives is that they highlight the relationship between gender and distinct practices of

slavery. Chapter three takes up this issue and further investigates the distinct position of slave women in bīẓān society. Indeed the experiences of slave women are marked by a strong ambivalence. They often lived closest to the masters, and were able to escape the slave estate and become incorporated into the freemen by marrying a freeborn man (an act that needed their formal manumission). This intimate relationship with the masters offered slave women a number of advantages with regard to status enhancement compared to slave men. However, being so closely intertwined with the masters also had distinct disadvantages. In addition to the integration of slave women into the society of the masters, manifested in distinct institutions such as milk-kinship, concubinage, secret marriage and marriage, slave women remained in a dependent position unlike that of free bīẓān women. Their avenue into the society of the freemen was paved by men. This made them experience resistance from free women who saw their power and bargaining abilities in marital relations threatened by the competition of slave women who would depend absolutely on the men.

A crucial aspect of the gender differential in bīẓān slavery is whether this phenomenon is of demographic significance. In order to explore this dimension, chapter four undertakes an evaluation of the African slave trades. Recent studies have underscored earlier evidence that the inner-African trade in slaves, as well as the slave trade to the Islamic world of North Africa and the Near East, transported markedly more women than men, while the opposite was the case in the trade of slaves across the Atlantic. Although sources that make it possible to assess directly the gender specifics or detailed figures of bīẓān slave imports are lacking, a number of sources indicate a bīẓān preference for slave women. When the trade in slaves came to an end at the beginning of this century, this interest in slave women persisted and might even have increased, as slave women then had become the only source of new slaves. While empirical evidence for the precolonial era is lacking, data from colonial records shows slave and manumitted slave women clearly outnumbering slave and manumitted slave men, and hence make a strong argument for the hypothesis. Further evidence is raised by survey studies conducted in eleven villages and neighbourhoods. These highlight that today the majority of those who remain bound to formal slave status in the area of Achram-Diouk are women, whereas formal manumission according to the precepts of Islamic jurisprudence remains to a large extent the privilege of former slave men.

Chapter five is concerned with another aspect of the gender differential in bīẓān slavery: the issue of a gender division of slave labour. As the life histories, and here again above all those of the slave women show, slaves could expect little respect for their gender identity in matters of the tasks they were assigned to. De-socialising and de-gendering slaves was a means to increase the difference between slaves and masters, and thus to maintain the latter's domination. Nevertheless slaves in bīẓān society were not subjected without differentiation to all kinds of labour. When the assignment of labour to slaves

revealed some of the patterns it had among the freemen, this was only partially a result of successful slave struggles. These differentials reflected to a large extent attitudes of the mistresses and masters, who did not want to have men of any status disrupt the privacy of the women's spheres, namely the tent and the camp. While occasionally slave men had to do housework or other tasks with a feminine connotation they were mostly supposed to remain at the periphery of the camp or beyond this boundary, in the bush. Slave women, on the contrary, were made more versatile workers. They could be assigned both work within the sphere of female privacy and beyond it. Nevertheless portraying slaves as having done all work misses the point. As the analyses of work in different sectors show, free members of bīẓān society participated in many productive activities, though with different emphasis. This partly resulted from numbers of bīẓān being too poor to own slaves themselves or owning too few to give up all work, but also from a social ranking of tasks that allowed bīẓān (men more than women) to do certain kinds of work without experiencing social discrimination while other kinds were perceived as dishonourable. Work thus was a social field in which status could be both expressed and achieved. While freemen could be forced from material need to perform tasks conflicting with their ideals of good conduct, slaves, and among these above all men, by being assigned jobs associated with the qualities of freemen, could manage to enhance their condition.

Currently persisting patterns of slavery in Mauritania are hard to understand and explain without considering the history of slavery and slave emancipation in this country. While the analysis of slave work in bīẓān society in chapter five has to strike a balance between the description of basic and hence persisting characteristics of slave work on the one hand and changes in the character and domains of slave work in the course of history on the other, chapter six is engaged explicitly with the history of bīẓān economy. The evaluation of the impact of trade on the economy of precolonial bīẓān society shows the desert pastoralists to have been involved in commercial transactions of a significant volume for centuries and to have adapted rapidly to changing market conditions. Certainly the most decisive change in the environment of the bīẓān economy was marked by the start of French colonisation, which coincided with the rapid decline of the trade in bīẓān gum arabic at the beginning of the 20th century. The subsequent shift to meat production for the rapidly emerging markets in the French colony of Senegal had a strong impact on bīẓān society and by restructuring the pastoral economy also affected the relations between masters and slaves. By creating new economic opportunities, above all for manual labourers, colonial rule opened up new opportunities which profited primarily slave men wishing to increase their economic autonomy. While the basic elements of this new configuration of master-slave relations were already laid out during the first decades of colonisation, economic diversification by wage labour and migration of slaves expanded rapidly after the Second World War.

The start of the still ongoing drought cycle in the Sahel in the early 1970s was the most decisive blow to bīẓān society, which until then had been portrayed as unchanged and somewhat archaic by many observers. Migration for work – until then almost exclusively a slaves' and former slaves' affair – suddenly became a necessity common for most freemen too. While the pastoral sector went into a deep crisis, efforts for the cultivation of subsistence crops, namely millet, were strongly increased. The result of this economic restructuring and drawback severely affected the configuration of master-slave relations, and transformed lifestyles. The bīẓān of Mauritania in only a few decades changed from a predominantly pastoral nomadic people into a sedentary people.

Chapter seven is dedicated to one of the most pertinent issues of continuing relations of dependency in Mauritania, the question of land tenure. Up to the present people with a slave past continue to suffer from their foremothers' and forefathers' exclusion from the ownership of land. Although the Mauritanian government issued new legislation on land ownership, designed to enhance the situation of the many landless making their living by something akin to sharecropping in 1983, the effects of this law, as well as later supplements, remain limited until today. Land tenure in most parts of Mauritania continues to be structured by customary arrangements strongly influenced by Islamic jurisprudence of the Māliki school. Starting from an overview of the legal framework of land tenure in the western Sahara and later Mauritania, the focus of this chapter turns to a number of case studies revealing how land tenure effectively changed in the course of this century as a response to colonial rule, changing relations of power within bīẓān society, and finally changing patterns of land-use. Hence it is shown how the ḥassān, the warriors of bīẓān society, who had previously held only political power, managed to achieve the proprietorship of land in the region of Achram-Diouk. Of vital importance to these acts of appropriation was the construction of small and large dams, an activity that was favoured by the colonial administration, which also developed a land register. From the 1970s on land tenure became an even more crucial question as a result of the drought cycle and the conversion of many former pastoralists to agriculture. Being the owners of the land, impoverished bīẓān masters started to claim increased duties from their cultivating dependents. In some cases land used by former slaves and slaves was even claimed back by its bīẓān owners. In this context distinct arrangements regulating access to land and between landless cultivators and land owners developed and will be analysed. While some of these new relations expressed the maintenance of old relations of dependency others mark an increased autonomy of slaves and former slaves. Finally the control of land is not only an issue of dyadic master-slave relations but also a highly political one, involving collective tribally organised use-rights, discussed both with regard to their significance for the relations of dependency and for the articulation of local politics.

Leaving the complex of historical, material and legal factors contributing to

the ongoing discrimination against people of slave past in bīẓān society, chapter eight embarks on an evaluation of the consequences of this power differential for the shape of Mauritanian society and politics. In an introductory section the politics of a distinct ḥarāṭīn, i.e. slave and former slave identity as opposed to that of the bīẓān masters and former masters is discussed. Here again the focus is on the situation in the rural hinterland, where lines of conflict and discourses are revealed to be strongly influenced by those developed in the cities. The presentation and analysis of distinct discourses and practices related to the production of identity and difference between bīẓān and sūdān, i.e. former masters and slaves and former slaves, makes it possible to further differentiate this argument. The struggle for emancipation of the dependent strata of bīẓān society results in members of this group stressing both their difference from and identity with their former bīẓān masters. This conclusion highlights yet again the ambiguity of slave condition, and demonstrates how patterns of social discrimination that have emerged in the course of slavery continue to shape the present. Finally it will be argued that the contradictions manifest in the slaves' and former slaves' discourses on identity reveal no false consciousness. Rather they bring to the fore how the contradictory nature of slave condition, which meant being both included in and excluded from society, continues to shape present day attitudes.

Today the process of emancipation of the servile strata of bīẓān society is still going on and it seems likely it will gain in significance. However, as will be argued in the concluding chapter nine, the aspirations of the former slaves and slaves means they are likely to further stress their identity with, and not their difference from the bīẓān, i.e. the former masters. This is not only the case in the rural areas, where face-to-face interactions and persisting knowledge of individual people's status and past make it difficult to struggle for dissociation from the society of the former masters. Indeed, the configuration of political power on the national level today leaves little room for other options. As has been shown for the case of the Sudan, the most beneficial choice for former slaves is to side with their former masters, wherever these control the vast majority of political and economic resources.

Chapter 1
Approaching Slavery in Bīẓān Society

Theorising Slavery

"There is nothing notably peculiar about the institution of slavery" wrote Orlando Patterson (1982: VII) in his introduction to "slavery and social death", for as he argued, "it has existed from before the dawn of human society right down to the twentieth century". The present discomfort with slavery arose as late as the Enlightenment, when the universality of human rights became a concern on the European continent. Rapidly taken up by Protestant churches,[1] the abolitionist discourse expressed discomfort with the great democracies of classical antiquity having been based on the practice of slavery, and also with the fact that the first US-American presidents Thomas Jefferson[2] and George Washington had been large-scale slave holders.

While in the Americas slavery has become an integral part of history because of its still recent past, it has been all but expunged from central European public memory. Here slavery has come to mean the history of others, such as the peoples of antiquity or of the Americas, even though major European powers were in their time the backbones of the transatlantic slave trade, and for a long time the European colonial powers did little to end slavery. What indeed leads to slavery being perceived today as a peculiar institution despite the contradictory evidence forwarded by Orlando Patterson (1982), is that it seems to be the complete negation of those ideas of individual freedom and democracy which after the breakdown of socialist states have gained world-wide hegemony.[3] In this respect Karl Marx's critique of capitalist ideology is still illuminating, for it highlights exactly what makes the difference between unfreedom in feudal society (which shares some characteristics with slave-keeping societies), and the ambivalence inherent in capitalist freedom. Together with his relations of subservience, and his obligations to work for his master's benefit, the serf (and likewise the slave) who becomes the capitalist worker loses all of his moral and material rights to be sustained, and remains with nothing else to sell for a living than his labour power (cf. Marx [1867] 1983a: 183). The close relation between trust in the virtues of capitalist economy (or rather, compliance with capitalist ideology) and the active struggle against what remained of the personalised

relations of domination such as slavery is highlighted by abolitionist discourses up to the present. Focusing on the establishment of justice for those who suffer under personal ties of dependence, the claims for a just remuneration of work, and free labour ideology always constituted pivotal points of abolitionist argumentation (cf. Klein 1993b: 15ff.). Karl Marx's objection that there can be no such thing as "just wages" in capitalist society has not entered the abolitionist discourse up to now, not even that of the progressive former slaves' self-help organisations in today's Mauritania.

Unpaid labour emerges as one central element of a common-sense definition of slavery, but it is by far not sufficient to define slavery as a distinct institution, for there are many forms of unfree and unpaid labour, such as e.g. serfdom. The second major feature of slavery which raises emotions today, is the coercive nature of slave exploitation. The slave as the property of his master, and subjected to the will of the latter, comes to represent the most totalitarian form of human alienation. This latter aspect, the treatment of slaves as chattels and hence as commodities, entails a number of far-reaching consequences. Excluded from the body of society and deprived of the social rights of the free, the slave has no right to kinship. All of his social relations are mediated by and at the responsibility of his master, while the slave himself is a legal minor. Another, and decisive, specificity of slave existence lies in the fact that coercion lies at its root, in the initial and frequently violent act of enslavement. It is violence that lays the basis for the legal fiction of the ownership of one human being by another and for the transformation of a freeman into a chattel. Physical violence thus becomes transformed into legal or institutional relations of power, giving the slave-owner the right to deprive the slave of the essentials of self-determination (cf. Finley 1968: 307ff.; Lovejoy 1983: 1ff.).[4]

By these characteristics, the slave becomes to some extent the antithesis of the free. Being free, however, meant different things at different places and times. While today freedom has come to be most closely associated with the rights of the individual, being free in societies whose structure is based on kinship – as bīẓān society continues to be in many respects – was first of all marked by one's inclusion in kin-relations, and hence membership of society. At the risk of essentialising slavery, one could thus argue that the exclusion of the slaves from kinship, which has been stressed by Claude Meillassoux (1986: 35) in his analysis of African slavery, constitutes the core of the dividing line between the free and the slaves.[5] The slave is an outsider, because he has no parents in his host society, and he will remain an outsider because he is excluded from kinship ties with the host society and is denied social paternity with regard to his own offspring.

This dichotomy between the free person and the slave, the member of society and the excluded, besides describing features central to the institution of slavery, can also develop into a crucial element for the definition of social groups, or else of society. Research on ethnic boundaries and their maintenance has demonstrated that there need not be a distinct ethnic territory and

an outer limit. Rather, ethnic differentiation is articulated most strongly in all areas of inter-ethnic contact and contributes to the solidification of ethnic identities (cf. Barth 1969a; Schlee/Werner 1996a). Slaves incorporated into a society can be discerned as such a group, and discrimination against this group can be turned into a means of identification for the masters. Antithetical descriptions of slaves and masters therefore are part of a wider ideological context, aiming not only at the maintenance of slavery as an institution, but also at the maintenance of the masters' identity.[6]

For the slaves, however, these ideological conceptions of their estate had quite a number of practical results. When treated as non-kin the slave had to suffer far-reaching consequences: kin relations among slaves, though existing in biological terms, are denied their legal and social meaning. It is the master who decides on marriages of his slaves. Even if these are admitted, the ownership rights of the masters override the slaves' rights in the newly founded families. Thus in patrilineal societies slave children come to belong to the owner of their mother. And if the slaves ever have the right to own property they are not allowed to transmit it. It will be the master who has the right to inherit from his slaves.

Controversies

In a way it is paradoxical that because of the absolute rights of masters over their slaves, the material welfare of slaves can differ considerably, and this despite their common estate. History gives a long list of occupations slaves fulfilled, and by far not all of these tasks implied coercion and menial work. Slaves could be important scholars, like for example the famous Leo Africanus, who having become slave of the Pope was responsible for a net transfer of oriental knowledge to the Catholic clergy; in addition we find eunuchs in Arabian harems, counsellors of kings (also often eunuchs), leaders and soldiers of armies, concubines and, at the end of the scale peasants forced to work on the master's fields or plantations, or do work in the household. These differences in the practical living conditions of slaves have led a number of scholars to reject the notion of slavery in the scientific analysis of African societies, i.e. to avoid the impression of a uniform phenomenon the term implies. The emphasis is laid on the diversity of living conditions slaves experienced and on the fact that manumission of slaves was commonly practised in a large number of African slave-keeping societies.

The main thesis Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (1977a) advance in their theoretical approach to slavery in Africa is the rejection of the notion of property to define what they classified as a distinct, African kind of slavery (indeed considered to be so distinct that "slavery" appears only in inverted commas). Although both authors do recognise the existence of chattel slavery in Africa, they perceive the concepts of property and freedom as western-biased and not fitting the African context as a whole. Africans, according to this perspective, belong to kin-groups. This African configuration of society means that freedom comes from *belonging to* a kin group, a patron or some

powerful group, the involvement in often hierarchical social relations, and is not related to the ideal of an autonomous individual. The latter would be perceived as threatened by dangers of all kinds and not free at all. This effective lack of individual freedom expresses itself in the notion of "rights in persons" that every kin-group has over its members. In this light the categorical differences between the free and the unfree are transformed to gradual ones on the large scale of African social hierarchies. Some of the features commonly attributed only to slaves can even be applied to the so-called free, e.g. the threat of being sold into slavery. As on the one hand the free begin to resemble the slaves, on the other hand (some!) slaves become much like the free. Forced to establish some relationship with the acquired slaves, the host societies have to include them. The paradox is formulated in the following terms: "But the problem for the host society is really that of including the stranger while continuing to treat him as a stranger." (Miers/Kopytoff 1977a: 15) The concern of the African slave-keeping societies thus becomes not the exclusion of the appropriated slaves but their inclusion. This whole process is seen to be fuelled by the permanent need to enlarge one's own kin-group. Instead of slavery as an institution producing social outsiders, there is a "'slavery'-to-kinship continuum" (Miers/Kopytoff 1977a: 24).

How far scientific perception may be shaped by its theoretical assumptions is revealed by the argumentation of Claude Meillassoux (1986), who considers the concept of "rights in persons" to be rather an outcome of modern western capitalistic thought and conceptions than African emic categories. The major argument developed by Miers and Kopytoff thus appears misconceived, resulting from the legalism, functionalism, and economism inherent in this approach. Focusing on the legal position of the individual and therefore the magnitude of its variations obscures the view of slavery as an institution. The distinction to be made is between the *estate* and the (individual) *condition* of the slave.[7] This analytical tool provides the means to tackle the fact that although slaves are considered to be chattels, for their exploitation they have to be treated as humans. One becomes a slave (and remains it) not because of the master, but because of the institutions of slavery and the structures that constitute the framework of its practice:

> La faiblesse de l'approche juridique est de considérer ici l'aliénabilité comme un attribut inhérent aux esclaves. L'aliénabilité n'est significative, pourtant, que dans le cadre des institutions qui en permettent la réalisation: la guerre de capture et le "marché aux esclaves", c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des mécanismes et des opérations par lesquelles une classe d'individus se trouve privée de personnalité sociale, transformée en cheptel, vendue comme marchandises et exploitée ou employée d'une manière qui permettra d'en recouvrir le coût, fût il de la capture ou de l'achat. (Meillassoux 1986: 11)

As an institution, slavery, according to Meillassoux, cannot result from strong but rather individual forces like the "permanent need to enlarge one's

own kin-group" envisaged by Miers and Kopytoff (1977a). The underlying paradigm of "the more, the better" is an element of modern capitalistic thought rather than of pre-modern African slave-keeping societies. But then, what else incited the existence, perpetuation and even expansion of slavery in the African context?

As an institution, i.e. a structural element of society, slavery has to be constantly reproduced. Slavery as an institution is not identical with the existence of some slaves in a society. To speak of slavery there has to be a group, a class of individuals, bound to a particular, servile estate that is reproduced as such over time (Meillassoux 1986: 35).[8] It is right here that empirical evidence enters the scene to modify the notion of reproduction of social institutions. For a number of reasons the mainly female African slave populations (like most others) were in permanent decline, and did not reproduce themselves.[9] Birth rates among slaves were far below those of the host societies and the slaves' frequently poor living conditions further negatively influenced slave demography. Manumission also contributed to diminishing the number of slaves. Nearly all African slave holding societies provided status mobility and progressive integration to the slave-strangers, for example in the course of intergenerational changes. African slavery thus – like the Atlantic slave trade that influenced the expansion and transition towards a more rigid and systematic exploitation of slaves in African slave systems[10] – created a sustained demand for new slaves that could only be satisfied from within the continent. In order to satisfy this demand and ensure a regular supply, enslavement and slave marketing had to become separate businesses in Africa (cf. Meillassoux 1986).[11]

In addition to much appreciation for offering insights on how slavery is interrelated with society and providing a framework to track conflict within slave societies, Meillassoux's approach has also received powerful criticism. Certainly the most trenchant arguments in this respect are that despite its impetus to move beyond the legalism inherent to functionalist approaches, Meillassoux's work ends up, though from a different perspective, essentialising slave estate. According to his vision the "social death" of the slaves is not perceived as an ideological construct, but as created by the slave mode of reproduction. Slaves thus, as in the work of Orlando Patterson (1982), appear as absolutely powerless and masters as almighty. The slave estate comes to represent not a legal fiction, but a social fact (cf. Glassman 1995).[12]

Nevertheless the distinction of slave estate from various slave conditions can be used as a powerful analytical tool to explore the struggles taking place between masters and slaves. Indeed this differentiation reflects the fundamental contradiction of the slave existence, namely the formal treatment of slaves as chattels, while their humanity remains the basis for exploitation (cf. Davis 1966: 31-35, 58-61; Lovejoy 1981).[13] Practices of slavery thus always take part in the social deconstruction of the slave as property. However, the notion of the slave as property is not only a legal fiction, but is an element of those practices and discourses by which masters maintain their domination

over slaves. Treating a slave as property, i.e. evoking his saleability or denouncing his kinlessness, was a means to threaten and hence to dominate slaves. Such threats had not to be overt to develop their power, but achieved this end also as a kind of a last resort for masters wishing to pull the balance of power back onto their sides. While slaves indeed in many cases managed to receive better treatment from their master and were able to reduce the range of the latter's direct control (i.e. to enhance their condition in Meillassoux's terminology), they were unable to alter the basis of the discrimination against them. Although Jonathon Glassman (1995) in his critique of Meillassoux is right when stating that better slave conditions were the result of the slaves' struggles, in his conclusion he comes close to trying too hard to define distinct, vested rights of slaves as a result of these encounters, and thus to contradict his own credo that such attempts lead attention away from the question of how slaves improved their lot.[14]

In accordance with Claude Meillassoux (1986), the present analysis takes a more radical perspective, querying the notion of distinct slaves' rights altogether. Indeed one such right which is often named is the non-saleability of slaves "born in the house", i.e. second generation slaves. In general this was true, but nevertheless such sales occurred, either as a result of a desperate situation the master was in or as a severe kind of punishment; furthermore selling slaves continued far into this century, at least in much of the western Sudan and especially at the desert edge (cf. Klein 1993c: 190 and 1983: 78; Meillassoux 1986: 125 and 1975b: 227).[15]

In the context of bīẓān slavery the notion of a slave estate as opposed to variable slave conditions is able to reflect the difference between the often ambivalent characteristics of everyday master-slave interaction and the rigid framework of Islamic jurisprudence, defining and legitimising the slaves' inferiority, and also serving as a recourse for the masters.[16] Indeed, many of the slave accounts forming the basis of this study reveal that slaves wanted and were able to achieve greater autonomy. However, both in the masters' and the slaves' perception such arrangements resulted from individual action, by either soft or generous masters, or else their counterparts, strong and demanding slaves. How much the slave estate remained a threat, despite the considerable success some slaves achieved in these struggles, can be discerned from those cases in which a slave master insisted on being the sole heir of a deceased "independent" slave (cf. the case of Brahim's father p. 62f.; such cases continue to be reported from Mauritania up to the present).[17] To all other slaves, especially all members of the slave's family, such events are a revelation of what remains the foundation their current condition is built on. Slaves indeed managed to live with a high degree of autonomy in bīẓān society, but this, their "right", depended on their actual power to defend it. Once dead, they and their power had gone, leaving their masters free to return to basics, i.e. to treat their (dead) slave as what he had always been: a slave.[18]

This short glance at the ambivalence of the slave condition in bīẓān society

shows that it remained a constant concern for those slaves eager to improve their fate. The only means to overcome the restrictions resulting from the slave estate was manumission. This latter act indeed plays a major role in Islamic jurisprudence, and hence ideology of slavery. Manumission is recommended in the Qur'ān, and in a number of distinct cases is prescribed as a religious penance.[19] Slaves could also contract for freedom for payment if they were allowed to develop their own patrimony (cf. Brunschwig 1960; Schacht 1964: 129ff.; Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 141, 169, 189, 221ff.; Lewis 1990: 5ff.). By becoming a ḥarāṭīn, literally a freed slave, slaves achieved the personal rights of a freeman. They were finally able to contract marriages of their free will, and develop kin relations, but problems remained. Most African masters, and especially those practising slavery in a household context, had a marked preference for slave women. In bīẓān society, this gender bias in slavery led masters to manumit slave men much more often than women. As a consequence, ḥarāṭīn men were often unable to marry other women than slaves, the children of whom would inherit their estate from the mother and belong to the mother's master. Also when freed slave men and women married and thus were able to constitute families with all legal rights, their slave past continued to cut their descendants off from an ancestry of freemen and hence paved the way for future social discrimination.[20] This whole dilemma of slave existence is put in a nutshell by Frederick Cooper, discussing the absorption thesis of Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (1977a):

> Even where slaves were readily assimilated, they suffered a devastating cultural subordination: their loss of their ancestry. Their destruction as a people was the other side of absorption. But where the slave's distinctiveness was not a limbic state but an ideological basis for exploitation and control, it was all the more devastating. It is at this point that the absorptionist approach most clearly shows its inadequacy and most case-studies stop short. For, if African societies were inherently absorptive, there was little for slaves to do but be absorbed. (Cooper 1979: 124)

Indeed there has always been only one alternative for slaves wanting to escape the power of their masters: running away. However, this option was no easy choice for a great number of slaves. Those who had been transported over large distances faced great hardship when trying to get back, and for those who had been enslaved for quite some time, returning home became difficult because everybody there had become used to arrangements that no longer accommodated the enslaved kinsmen. Eventually all second generation slaves were for this reason almost completely deprived of this option. Nevertheless, slavery in many parts of western Africa was unpleasant enough for an exodus of great numbers of slaves from different societies shortly after colonisation by the French had begun. By far not all returned home. Many overcame the hardship to develop a new existence based on cultivation. Others entered the new economic sectors that developed in the wake of

colonisation, or, in the case of Senegal, joined the Mouride brotherhood, which offered both a social network and a new corporate identity (cf. Klein 1993c: 182ff; Roberts 1988).[21]

Slavery in the light of these arguments is revealed to be the outcome of a distinct relation of power (*Herrschaftsverhältnis*), a designation shaped by Karl Marx ([1858] 1983c: 254). As such slavery is not static, but is subject to changes resulting from transformation processes in those social and economic relations forming its basis. Indeed the power of the masters can be challenged from two sides, in both of which the configuration of power between masters and slaves becomes affected. Either from the outside, when invaders take over power from the masters, as had been the case with colonisation, or by the subordinate in society themselves. That slavery nevertheless proves so difficult to overcome from within society, as has been outlined so far, results from the many implications such a complex relation of power as slavery has (this will be a recurrent topic in the following chapters as far as bīẓān slavery is concerned). Slavery encompasses and pervades all major fields of society, from the economic to the social. It is present in all those values, attitudes and notions which constitute central elements of the slave society's culture. As such slavery cannot be reduced to an economic problem,[22] but has to be analysed in all of its meanings to society. In order to produce insights on how slavery changes and how slave emancipation progresses, the present analysis makes use of the configurational approach developed by Norbert Elias (1988 and 1990).

This theoretic device allows for the systematic examination of how relations between groups change not only as the result of the groups' direct action, but also in response to processes of spatial segregation and external challenges to given power relations as well as to other factors. These insights, which are detailed in chapter two (cf. p. 78-91), will be reflected throughout the present study by the notion of configurations of hierarchy and dependency. Wherever group interactions are concerned these will be characterised as relations of hierarchy and dependency, while interpersonal interactions involving masters and slaves will be referred to as master-slave relations.

Besides these aspects this study develops arguments dealing with two more issues needing further attention in the study of slavery. Little has been said so far about the modes of domination maintaining slavery. The major thesis in this domain remains that slave resistance in Africa was consistently weak because the slaves rarely became a homogeneous group in the way they were on the plantations of the US South. Differentiations with regard to slaves, e.g. between slaves newly acquired and other slaves or slaves of the first and second generation were indeed effective means to undercut slave solidarity. Limited attention has been paid so far in this context to questions of gender and the different treatment of slave women and men.[23] Masters not only had a means to control their slaves by their power to deny them marriages and kin relations, but also because slave women and men had different aspirations as far as their individual ascension and integration into the slave society was

concerned. While women could ascend, although still with an ambivalent status, into the masters' society by being married by a freeman or by developing quasi-kin relations with the masters' and mistress' children e.g. by establishing relations of milk-kinship, this was not an option for slave men due to the rule of female hypergamy in bīẓān society. Conversely, work offered few options for slave women to achieve a better condition, while slave men as professional herders, trade assistants and the like could achieve a great deal of autonomy and occasionally, as a reward, become manumitted.

Studying the end of slavery in terms of an inquiry into social change also raises another set of questions. Besides examining how social relations changed it has to be asked what changed and why. This implies reflecting once again on the nature of slavery. Already about two decades ago Frederick Cooper (1979: 111) hinted at this problem in his assumption that slavery in Africa has been described by anthropologists as "benign" so often only because these studies did not consider slavery as changing in time and space, but based their assumptions on systems of slavery already in decay and therefore becoming more integrative. This conclusion, which has come to be accepted among scholars of slavery (cf. Miers/Roberts 1988a: 6), is supported by the evidence raised in this study. Although the French colonists, who had started the occupation of Mauritanian territory by the turn of the 20th century, refrained largely from pursuing an abolitionist policy (cf. Acloque 1998; Ould Cheikh 1993: 188), the relations of hierarchy and dependency at the desert edge became seriously affected. Slaves gained a greater range of alternatives to their life with the masters and the latter in turn had to do more to make their slaves stay. However, this evolution, at least in the case of bīẓān society, favoured above all men. It was they who profited on a large scale from promotion to ḥarāṭīn status during this century, while slave women did not (cf. chapter four). Indeed the development of slaves' conditions seems to have been contradictory. While the end of the slave trade made slaves more precious, and especially difficult to replace, the consequences of this trend were double-edged. As masters had to fear slaves running away, they had to treat them well, but on the other hand the lack of an external slave supply also meant those masters wishing to continue slavery had to rely more heavily on the single, remaining resource for new slaves: slave women. Extended practices of manumission applied to slave men were thus accompanied by a rigidification of slave women's conditions and the meaning of slave estate. It is indeed the weakening of the masters' power that made them rely more heavily on legal principles to justify and maintain their supremacy. The response of slave societies to external forces weakening the masters and promoting the slaves therefore has to be observed with special attention, for the result of the response is likely to be highly ambivalent.

In Mauritania, it is this strengthening of the ideology of a fundamental difference between masters and slaves that lives on until today and rules much of the discourses focusing on the integration, or else the exclusion of

the sūdān from bīẓān society (cf. chapter eight). While social mobility has always existed and continues to bridge the divide between enslaved and free, it is the formally correct legitimation of the end of individual slave estate that has become a great concern to many involved. Significant numbers of slaves in Mauritania continue to strive – and pay – for formal manumission because they perceive this act still as the most effective way to demonstrate their departure from the slave estate. By this practice, however, they reproduce and maintain the dichotomy of "slave" and "free", and hence keep alive the label "slave" as a social category laden with a symbolic meaning discriminating against all those still bound to the slave estate.

Slavery and Social Hierarchy in Bīẓān Society

Making use of slaves contributes to the differentiation of society. This is most apparent in those cases where a class of masters evolved, or as was the case in many western Sudanese societies, slavery, together with the capture of and trade in slaves, allowed for the evolution of strong military and trading groups, and thus facilitated state formation. The establishment of clerical states in the western Sudan, as was the case in the course of the ǧihāds in Fuuta Jallon, Hausaland and Masina, was based on the sedentarisation of the pastoralists involved. This shift in the mode of life was considerably eased due to the exploitation of slave labour. Slavery also paved the way for another kind of social differentiation. It has been argued that the evolution of the typical West African, rural-based Islam was accompanied and facilitated by the establishment of slave farming. Islamic scholarship therefore could shift during the 16th century and continue to do so until the beginning of colonisation, from the big trading towns to religious centres in the hinterland (Levtzion 1987: 4).[24]

In the western Sahara patterns of social differentiation resulting from the practice of slavery were less marked. Most slaves were used in households, and no plantations worked by slaves developed as has been the case around the big western Sudanese towns and within the powerful states of the area (cf. Klein 1993c: 171f.). Nevertheless, the percentage of slaves in bīẓān society was high, ranging from about a half to a quarter of the whole population or sometimes less, depending on various factors. The demographic significance of bīẓān slavery was comparable to that of neighbouring societies subjecting their slaves more rigorously to distinct productive activities, such as farming. Despite the more diffuse use of slave labour, the western Sahara also witnessed the evolution of distinct warrior groups and of an Islamic scholarship of great renown. The warrior groups, the ḥassān, lived off tributes from either clerical, i.e. zwāya tribes (ḥassāniyya/Arabic: qabīla), or groups of tributaries (znāga). These latter two groups built the productive backbone of bīẓān society and, though on a different scale (the zwāya more, the znāga less),

relied on and employed slave labour. Slaves therefore took part in the production of those values that later on became infused in the system of inter-tribal exchanges of tributes that allowed the warriors to live by and large without producing themselves. Dependent labour also contributed significantly to the wealth which allowed nomadic desert scholars to devote their lives entirely to religious learning. Unlike those scholars living in the very few trade towns of the western Sahara, who lived off trade and thus followed a common pattern of Muslim scholarship, the rural scholars were only marginally involved in trade, but lived off a large body of disciples and slaves.[25] Although slaves produced an important part of the goods appropriated by those dominant in society and hence ensured both their material and symbolic reproduction, it remains difficult to prove that slave labour, which constituted only one of several forms of dependent labour, had been most significant in this process. Though highly instructive because of the insights it opens on the connection between bīẓān slavery and economic development in the western Sahara, the thesis of Constant Hamès (1979), stating that in the context of the bīẓān trade in gum arabic (17th–19th century) a zwāya industry based on slave labour developed, can be questioned on empirical grounds (cf. Webb 1995: 98).

The present study will take up this initial interest in the relationship between bīẓān economy and slavery, and widen its perspective in order to analyse the significance of slavery and slave labour to the shape of bīẓān society and economy in different fields. The question is how slavery became so closely intertwined with bīẓān society and social hierarchy that social practices which emerged in the context of slavery are still so hard to overcome in today's Mauritania. Before engaging in this project, the patterns of bīẓān slavery have to be located in the context of the different types of slavery practised in the Sahel and western Sudan.

According to Claude Meillassoux (1975a and 1986: 87f., 117ff., 254f.) and Frederick Cooper (1979: 116), three different types of slave labour can be distinguished in African societies. Slaves were employed on plantations, where they worked under supervision in gangs for market demands; they lived in semi-autonomous villages and had to pay a more or less fixed share of their harvest to their masters, or they lived in their masters' households and replaced the labour of the masters' kinsmen.

In the western Sahara only the latter two types of slave labour occurred, although there were a few sectors in which a specialised production for market demands developed. Such cases are the salt mines and to a lesser extent date-palm cultivation. However, the most important bīẓān desert rock-salt mine at Ijil was not exploited by slaves, but a specific group of clients, the Azazir (ḥassāniyya: ʿaġzāzīr).[26] Indeed the question whether slave or free labour predominated in the Saharan salt mines, or if there was any slave labour in this sector is still controversial (cf. McDougall 1990: 248ff.; Lovejoy 1986: 115-52). In the oases, ownership of land and palm trees was not strongly centralised. The market production taking place in these

locations hardly had the character of organised plantation work, putting large numbers of slave workers under the authority of landlords, but remained within the framework of individual masters owning small plots and ruling over a small group of slaves or manumitted slaves.

Semi-autonomous villages of slaves were more common in bīẓān society, although the great majority was located in the south of bīẓān territory, where rainfed agriculture was possible. Bīẓān nomadic pastoralists, by settling their slaves in distinct communities in these areas, were able to get hold of a more or less regular supply of grain that was crucial to complement their animal-based diet.[27] However, in precolonial times warfare and raiding seem to have strongly constrained the benefit that could be obtained from these slave villages (ḥassāniyya: adwaba), many of which were not permanent settlements but were occupied only during the cultivation period. Consequently the majority of these agricultural settlements developed only after colonisation and pacification, and then became the locale of sedentarisation not only for slaves but also for manumitted and runaway slaves.

As regards slavery in bīẓān precolonial society, it can be concluded that the vast majority of slaves were employed on the level of household production. They replaced the work of freemen, or increased the work capacity of the bīẓān families. Employing slave labour could serve specific ends. Either it was used as a means to enhance the economic basis of the family production unit by enabling the further accumulation of livestock, or it helped assure subsistence production and freed the masters from manual labour. The latter thus became able to devote their energies to religious scholarship, to warfare, or simply to enjoy idleness or alternatively, the work of directing slave labour. It was the bīẓān women who became most closely associated with a lifestyle marked by inactivity. Together with obesity, this was a means to express affluence and emerged as the bīẓān ideal of femininity. Having thus outlined what places slaves occupied in bīẓān society, the following overview of bīẓān social hierarchy and social groups will complement this picture.

Status Groups and Social Strata

Sūdān

This study is concerned with the most apparent and manifest divide in bīẓān society, the one between sūdān and bīẓān, or literally between black Moors and white Moors.[28] In ḥassāniyya Arabic dialect "sūdān" has a different meaning from that in classical Arabic, where it designates black Africans, and also refers to sub-Saharan Africa as the land of the blacks (bilād as sūdān). In bīẓān society this original designation of the African outer border of Arab society has been turned into an internal one distinguishing the freemen from those having a slave past. Consequently, once it is not question of their ethnic affiliation, black Africans are not called sūdān in bīẓān society but kwār.[29] However, the division into black and white in bīẓān society is much less neat and obvious than these terms suggest. First it has to

be noted that phenotype is not a reliable indicator of social status in bīẓān society, as freemen of noble origin are frequently of dark complexion, while the reverse also occurs among sūdān. Second neither bīẓān nor sūdān are a homogeneous social and status group and additionally, several status groups fail to fit easily into either category.

While the sūdān are supposed to comprise all those members of bīẓān society who have a slave past, the composition of this group of ḥarāṭīn, who are free, and ʿabīd, i.e. slaves, can be seen as a paradox. As freemen the ḥarāṭīn – one could suggest – should be able to figure among all other free people, namely the bīẓān, and the major divide of society into free and servile hence should distinguish ḥarāṭīn and slaves rather than put them into one social category. That this is not the case reveals a good deal about the different meanings freedom can have in bīẓān society. The freedom resulting from manumission is not the same as that achieved by being born free (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 23).

> "Haratines". Le choix de ce nom qui signifie en Hassaniya "Titulaire d'une liberté acquise après la naissance" dénote du souci constant de rappeler à ces gens-là qu'ils ne peuvent pas prétendre aux honneurs dues à l'autre groupe de "Ahrar" ou libres tout court. (Ould Ahmed Meidah 1993: 9)

The ḥarāṭīn's very resemblance to the slaves according to this definition is due to the fact that they once had a slave past. Although they have become free by manumission, and hence are able to pass this status on to their children (provided that the mother is a ḥarṭāniyya and not a slave) the ḥarāṭīn are not equal because of their slave origin. To bīẓān the slave past of the ḥarāṭīn appears everlasting. Even several generations of being born free as a ḥarāṭīn are perceived as being unable to delete this past. This perspective of what being a ḥarāṭīn means is predominant in bīẓān minds, and beyond the literal meanings of "manumitted slave" the difference between masters and manumitted slave descendants has also been rationalised by folk etymologies, portraying the term to be derived from "*ḥurr ṯāni*" meaning freeman of secondary rank or "*ḥarrāṯ*" ploughman.[30] However, none of these etymologies is phonetically or semantically satisfying, and still today the origin of the word ḥarāṭīn remains unclear. More instructive is a comparison with the meanings of the term in Berber languages (of which ḥarāṭīn may be an Arabised variant), where corresponding terms refer besides the notions of slavery, manumission, dark-phenotype and half-caste to the idea of mixing blood or different races. This latter meaning has also become part of ḥassāniyya language, where ḥarṭan signifies the blending of equine races (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1989a: 95f. and 1989c: 395; Nicolas 1977; Colin 1960).

The close association of ḥarāṭīn with slaves and a slave origin in contemporary Mauritania is most prominently expressed by the use of "ḥarāṭīn" as a euphemism for both people of ḥarāṭīn status and ʿabīd (slaves). This equation is contested by those who thus feel themselves discriminated against – ḥarāṭīn

who have been manumitted for generations and ḥarāṭīn claiming to have no slave past at all.[31] These today decry the devaluation of ḥarāṭīn status brought about by the many people of slave descent, who in the anonymity of the big cities, or after moving into new areas of residence take on a new identity and claim to be ḥarāṭīn although they have not been formally manumitted. Indeed, hardly anybody continues to describe himself publicly as a slave in contemporary Mauritania, and the use of ḥarāṭīn as a euphemism hence is far from resulting from bīẓān practices alone.[32]

In order to defy this problem, ḥarāṭīn and ʿabīd, when wishing to refer to themselves as one group, commonly use other terms than "ḥarāṭīn" which are considered to be less pejorative and also not to devaluate the meaning of ḥarāṭīn as a freeman's status. In the area of Achram-Diouk the term most frequently employed to this end was "*sūdān*". It is for this reason, and in order to be able to distinguish consistently between ʿabīd (slaves) and ḥarāṭīn that throughout this study the designation sūdān will be employed whenever both groups are considered as one. Sūdān, however, is not the only term used to avoid the pejorative connotation of ḥarāṭīn. There are also other words, denoting dark colour too, which are in use among sūdān in Nouakchott to refer to themselves as a distinct group: ḥaḍāra (derived from aḫḍar, dark green) and ğal akḥal (literally black skin;[33] cf. Brhane 1997a: 59).

As among the ḥarāṭīn, and among the ʿabīd too, a number of distinct groups are distinguished. Similarly to many other slave societies, a distinction is made between slaves closely associated with the masters as a consequence of a slave ownership lasting for generations on the one hand and slaves having no affective ties with their bīẓān overlords on the other hand. Two terms are used to refer to the former group of slaves: tilād and nānme (cf. Ould Cheikh 1993: 183). Of these two in the region of Achram-Diouk only nānme appeared to be in use. While among the bīẓān and among a few slaves who still maintain a close relationship with their masters, this term effectively bears affective connotations, the designation nānme has come to be used by a number of sūdān in quite a different way. Saying that other slaves are nānme (which is done more often with regard to women than men) is indeed a means to distinguish oneself from others supposed to be backward, and hence to stress one's own independence and autonomy from former masters.[34] A second differentiation occurs in the terminology for slaves as far as slave men or women are concerned. While the singular form for a slave man is ʿabd, the slave woman is called ḫādem[35] (cf. the story of M'Barke, p. 67-69; Ould Cheikh 1993: 183f.; Villasante-de Beauvais 1997: 615; see also note 2, chapter 3).

Bīẓān

The notion of bīẓān has shifting meanings. As Raymond Taylor (1996: 3f., 47ff.) argues, bīẓān came to be used in the course of the 18th century by western Saharans in order to refer to themselves as distinct from the neighbouring black African ethnic groups, which by this time still appeared as

sūdān and hence conform to classical Arabic terminology.[36] However, even more than today the bīẓān at that time were a heterogeneous group. Many, at least in the Gebla region close to the river Senegal, were polyglot. For a considerable number of Gebla inhabitants the ḥassāniyya language was even not their native language, as this was still the Berber dialect of the western Sahara, the znāga language. One of today's two distinct notions of bīẓān, namely that of an ethnic group defined by its members sharing the ḥassāniyya language, underscores that ever since the 18th century a decisive transformation and homogenisation process has been taking place. Comparing past meanings with present ones provokes the query whether today's differential in the meaning of bīẓān, as either including sūdān because of their ḥassāniyya language or excluding them for not being integrated into bīẓān genealogies is a recent phenomenon or can be traced back to the origin of the notion bīẓān. While specific considerations of this issue are still lacking, it can be argued that the present dichotomy in the meaning of bīẓān does not contradict its early use as a means for expressing a distinct identity. Much like the Greek *polis*, bīẓān society was conceived by the freemen and these most naturally thought themselves to be the sole constitutive elements of society. Regarding slaves, pawns or other dependent and unfree elements as being incorporated into or associated with the freemen's society hence was not a matter to be considered. Nevertheless, this does not mean that when speaking of bīẓān, the freemen excluded the dependent strata altogether. While they were not constitutive elements of society, the dependent and unfree strata were still part of bīẓān society – with the only difference that they belonged to it much like other kinds of bīẓān patrimony. This alienated incorporation into bīẓān society became increasingly contested in the course of the 20th century. The members of the dependent and unfree strata began not only to claim their social integration, but struggled also to define their own bīẓān-ness and hence to compete with the bīẓān on symbolic grounds (cf. chapter eight).

Such a perception of bīẓān identity and status groups, or else bīẓān orders (cf. Bonte 1987a), as historical and dynamic entities is also illuminating for the issue of what makes up bīẓān social hierarchy. Classical descriptions of bīẓān society[37] differentiate three orders among the freemen. The ḥassān (warriors), the zwāya (clerics) and the znāga (tributaries). While all members of these groups shared the characteristic of having been born free, a social hierarchy did exist among the groups and also the members of the distinct orders. The ḥassān tribes (ḥassāniyya/Arabic: qabīla) were politically dominant, but accounted for only a small proportion of all bīẓān. Their counter-pole was constituted by the zwāya tribes. These were strong in numbers and also held control of most economic resources. Nevertheless many zwāya remained, despite tribal autonomy, in a dependent position towards the ḥassān to whom they had to pay tributes. The znāga were on the lower edge of the social hierarchy. They were most often closely associated with ḥassān overlords and sometimes zwāya spiritual protectors too. Znāga

tributes contributed essentially to the maintenance of the ḥassān as a group of warriors only marginally involved in productive activities, and also helped zwāya to accumulate a greater wealth.

This static representation of bīẓān society, however, coincides only marginally with the real picture and fails to reflect the dynamics by which tribes and members of the three orders continued to struggle for a relocation in the social space (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 366).[38] The major rationale in this competition was the issue of leadership in bīẓān society. While military and thus political power was held by the ḥassān (who prefer the designation of ʿarab (Arab), for ḥassān bears some pejorative connotations),[39] the zwāya (often called ṭolba[40] in the eastern parts of Mauritania), by their management of the divine sphere, had a powerful means of claiming at least moral leadership. Further, by producing the vast majority of written accounts of bīẓān society, they were able to transport their perception of society and social order much more effectively than the ḥassān, who were, however, helped in this respect by the iggāwen (bards) singing the praise of their ḥassān protectors and benefactors. Despite these many practices of producing difference between ḥassān and zwāya, the nature of this divide was by far not as clear-cut as one might suppose and many descriptions of bīẓān society portray. Social mobility among the bīẓān orders occurred and indeed the "repenting" of ḥassān, and abandoning warfare and converting to an existence as zwāya (towba)[41] was almost institutionalised (cf. Bonte 1988). However not only individuals crossed the borders of the zwāya and ḥassān order but whole tribes too. The Kunta and the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd are only two examples of tribes or else tribal confederations difficult to classify as either ḥassān or zwāya.[42]

The characteristics outlined here make ḥassān and zwāya modes of life appear as complementary models of bīẓān virtues, the opposition to which was essential to the creation and maintenance of two distinct spheres of power in bīẓān society. While in general the ḥassān were the more powerful group,[43] the zwāya were by far not powerless. Their religious prestige allowed them to mediate conflicts, and in some cases zwāya with great spiritual authority managed to acquire an even greater influence on the supra-tribal level than leading ḥassān chiefs had (cf. Ould Cheikh 1991b; Stewart 1973). Finally the integration of both orders by some tribes further underscores the view that the distinction between zwāya and ḥassān was seen by many bīẓān less as representing a social hierarchy than as representing complementary patterns of bīẓān-ness.[44]

The case is different for the znāga, the tributary order among the bīẓān (also called laḥme).[45] On the one hand the designation znāga refers to a not very prestigious professional specialisation in livestock rearing, and on the other hand is used as a name for tribal groups or individuals that have been defeated in battle and forced into tributary relations with a more powerful tribe or personal overlord. The readiness to accept the latter unfavourable status, however, seems to have changed over time. Today designating people

as being of znāga status is even more of an offence than claiming someone is a slave. This, however, does not hinder persisting traditions telling of bīẓān tribes which once became reduced to znāga status, but later managed to regain their strength and defeat their enemies and overlords.[46] While these memories of inglorious periods of tribal history are only partially suppressed in public discourses (a fact that may be explained by the outcome of these traditions), znāga people are very keen to get rid off their status affiliation. The means to achieve this end, however, are no longer the shifting luck in warfare and concluding of alliances that once enabled tributary tribes to achieve social ascension. Today more subtle strategies are applied. The znāga, who are known for their light complexion, first of all exploit their physical appearance to underpin their bīẓān-ness. Direct inquiries about individual status among bīẓān nowadays hardly ever reveal znāga, but only ḥassān and zwāya. That the issue of znāga status nevertheless is still not banished completely from the bīẓān social topography is at least partially a result of the contestation of this social order by sūdān wishing to stress their closeness to the bīẓān by demonstrating their superiority to the znāga. Discussing the location of znāga status in a representation of social hierarchy encompassing not only the bīẓān but all groups of bīẓān society paves a way for the sūdān to enter into competition with a group which is – according to the predominant view – considered to be part of the bīẓān social universe. Claiming the znāga status to be worthless by stating that znāga are uprooted people who are no longer able to ascertain or defend publicly their genealogical ties towards their origins, is indeed a rhetoric by which sūdān place themselves above the znāga, and hence locate themselves among the bīẓān, i.e. the people of known origins (cf. chapter eight; Ruf 1998b).[47]

Professional specialisation is the distinctive criterion for a number of further groups in bīẓān society. The iggāwen are bards and musicians much like the griots in most of West Africa. This group evolved to become the praise singers of the ḥassān elites and were (and sometimes still are) rejected by zwāya adhering to a strict interpretation of Islam, which sees music accompanied by instruments as evil. Nevertheless listening to the music of the iggāwen today is a favourite pastime of most members of bīẓān society and competes well with imported music of western style.[48] The maʿalimīn, the blacksmiths of bīẓān society, constitute another distinct group. Despised for a number of reasons, such as the accusation of cowardice and their habit of living by selling the products of their work, the maʿalimīn were also feared. Their mastery of fire and iron made it seem likely that they maintained close relations with the world of the supernatural powers and spirits.

Two more groups have to be named for the sake of completeness in this overview of groups inhabiting the western Sahara: the nemādi and the imragen. The former are a group of hunters and gatherers, of whom a few still live in the interior of Mauritania. The nemādi, who used to hunt with the help of dogs, are not considered to be part of their society by the bīẓān, who disdain the nemādi lifestyle. The imragen are a people of fishermen living on

the Atlantic coast. They used to be subjected to tributary relations with the nomadic pastoralists of the interior, who also depreciate this group and its mode of living.

A Methodology of Rural Slave System Studies

Researching slavery is a complex task involving major difficulties: one serious issue for a study like the present one is the difficulty of obtaining empirical evidence pertaining to slavery. Slavery and the slave past of individuals are neither topics generating glorious accounts and traditions, nor likely to be among those experiences one would tell freely to strangers and researchers. Besides leading to a deliberate veiling of the past, the structures of slavery contribute to a distortion of memories as well. Slave experiences like enslavement are likely to become repressed and to slip out of memory once acculturation into the slave society becomes the nodal point of the enslaved. Likewise the incorporation of many slaves into the slave society at an early age meant that these children lost the memory of their origins and indeed knew nothing else but the life of a slave (cf. Miers/Roberts 1988a: 6).

In looking for a strategy to enter into a dialogue about these sensitive issues of the past, and sometimes the present too, without introducing the topic of slavery directly, I came up with the idea of taking interviews about personal life histories as a starting point for field-research. By tape-recording the overwhelming majority of these,[49] and in general translating and transcribing them into German on the same day, great care was taken to document not only the interview but also observations and other relevant circumstances besides note-taking during the interviews. The emphasis on direct treatment of the interview data much enhanced an ongoing process of reflection which contributed significantly to uncovering new issues for research, adapting the research strategy and to revising the interview guideline. This approach soon proved to be both feasible and productive as regards coming to grips with bīẓān slavery. Asking about life and living conditions in the present and in the past enabled both the interviewees and me to speak about sensitive issues without – in most cases – making too explicit any personal involvement in master-slave relations that now seem offensive to many. Many of the questions arising in this context, such as personal status, were communicated as part of a subtext, or when a particularly intimate atmosphere had evolved, also directly. Taking individual life-histories and their localisation in a wider framework of circumstances such as nomadisation patterns, customs of nutrition and the like, were fruitful also in another way. This approach later on greatly eased the process of localising individual experiences in a wider context of social and economic life of bīẓān society as well as cross-checking distinct information.

Crucial to all empirical research is the question of sampling. From the

beginning this study was meant to cover not only one community or village, but to focus on a number of villages and localities with distinct characteristics within the region of Achram-Diouk. Experiences from an earlier stay in the area significantly eased this undertaking. When I arrived to undertake this study in 1995 I already knew many settlements as well as a number of sūdān and bīẓān living in the area. The choice of interviewees was based on a number of diverse rationales. On the one hand there were distinct personalities playing a central role in social life who were interviewed for this reason. Within communities, snowball sampling, and later information from survey data, were also used as a means to find further people fitting into distinct social categories for interview. On the other hand, looking for those deprived of social power meant investigating on my own and wandering around the villages (and later, during the cultivation season, going from one field to another) to look for people displaying little evidence of being influential in society and hence easily overlooked by local informants. As the region under research covers an area of about eighty kilometres in length and fifty in width, looking up particular people (who quite often were temporarily absent) and embarking on follow-up interviews later on, meant having to be highly mobile, i.e. having access to a motorised vehicle. This I was lucky enough to have been lent by the local development project.

The focus on interviews with individuals made it possible to seek points of view of dependents and other people and groups who have difficulties in making their voice heard in public. Consequently the majority of interviewees were sūdān, both slaves and ḥarāṭīn. Interviews with women make up about one fourth of the interviews (the total number of which is close to one hundred). Besides this perspective, the point of view of the masters had to be explored as well. Interviewees among bīẓān were chosen according to many criteria, in order to get a highly diversified sample. Members of both the ḥassān and zwāya elite had to be interviewed and special attention was paid to getting information from people central to the public life of the region, such as the local qāḍi, the local director of the school, as well as people active in local business, politics and administration. Second came the quest for bīẓān with close and ambivalent relations with both the sūdān and the bīẓān because of a split ancestry, i.e. a mother of sūdān origin and a father of bīẓān origin. Third, networks of dependent relationships were to be uncovered by interviewing former masters and their slaves in order to be able to contrast their visions of the past and of the master-slave relationship. While the two former goals could be achieved in a satisfying way, the last aim proved to be difficult. In many cases the residential dispersion of former masters and slaves, death and other factors made it impossible to get hold of the people concerned, while wherever these people still lived in close neighbourhood, information about these relationships remained effectively obscured. Nevertheless one case of specific people (a ḥarṭāni, his mother and the son of their former master) reflecting on just one shared experience could be unravelled and is presented in in the following chapter (cf. the narratives of Brahim and Zeyneb, p. 59-66).

Another aim was to conduct interviews with as little public attendance as possible in order to protect those talking about sensitive individual issues from the threat of gossip. Interviews were generally held at the residence of the interviewees, either in their homes or under their tents and during the cultivation season most often at their workplace in the fields. A few interviews with local notables were held at my own place at Debissa near Achram. While the goal of conducting interviews in an atmosphere of privacy could not be achieved by a long shot in all interviews, sensitive issues could be dealt with in the great majority. On many occasions it even seemed as if slavery, as a kind of a vanishing problem, raised fewer emotions, and hence produced less reluctance to cooperate in interviews than did topics more closely related to issues of the present, such as politics.

The individual life accounts, despite these many advantages, also proved to have characteristics making them difficult to exploit systematically. Their highly individual character gave them a kind of a monolithic nature, and pulling out sections and single phrases seemed to do a good deal injustice to this material. Indeed the topics treated in the interviews are closely interrelated, and the internal dynamic of the interviews often overruled the researcher's wish to gather data systematically or confirm evidence more precisely. Unlike the impression after a period of retrospective reflection and detailed analysis that had begun once back home (described in the following chapter, p. 50-56), the interview data during the field research seemed to be largely a mess. There were endless contradictions both within the interviews and among different interviewees asked about the same topics. And whenever I tried to remedy this situation after periods of frustration by a stronger emphasis on systematic inquiry, this incited even greater discomfort. Instead of becoming more precise and accurate, the data on distinct issues seemed to become ever more confused and contradictory rather than to condense into evidence. On such occasions it was most often the interviewees who put an end to the dilemma. Pretending a certain kind of ignorance towards endless circular questions focusing on details which seemed completely insignificant to them, the interviewees shifted the topic and hence made clear to the interviewer that time was passing and that it was limited too.

Comfort to the aching researcher's soul came from almost daily afternoon meetings with Khalifa Ould Kebab, my research assistant during all of the stay at Achram, who also did all translations from ḥassāniyya into French for me. Sipping the traditional three glasses of sweetened mint tea, which Khalifa Ould Kebab knew how to prepare in a masterly way and used to flavour with lots of fresh mint he grew for local sale, bīẓān society became less an object of confusing research but a mode of life to enjoy. It was the many discussions on these afternoons that offered me essential insights which both helped to readjust current research strategies and tactics as well as later helped greatly to develop the present analysis. Discussing with Khalifa Ould Kebab interviews and questions that had come to my mind during interview transcription was an experience crucial for increasing my insights into the

meaning of the narratives. On many occasions what first had seemed to me a contradiction thus became related by a distinct logic. These discussions and the reflective process they underwent also were an important complement to the strong reliance on translation during interviews. The ḥassāniyya dialect, despite the efforts of Khalifa Ould Kebab and many others to make me learn it,[50] still remains strange enough for me to be far from able to conduct interviews of my own. However, my knowledge of standard Arabic enabled me to engage in developing my own list of vocabulary of ḥassāniyya key terms and to develop transcriptions not only in Latin characters but in Arab ones. Together with the discussions I had on numbers of key terms with bīẓān and sūdān, this enabled me later to compare the ḥassāniyya expressions with the meanings of the corresponding roots in standard Arabic.

A smaller number of interviews with local intellectuals were held in French, but also in presence of Khalifa Ould Kebab. The subsequent discussion and reflection process, like that usually following the interviews held in ḥassāniyya, proved to be most fruitful in these circumstances too. However the number of translations the interviews later underwent in transcription was reduced considerably.

Besides the interviews focusing on life history, participant observation was an important source of insights into relations of hierarchy and dependency. Indeed body talk often revealed much of what discourses tried to deny in this domain (cf. Henley 1988). Systematic field research was undertaken especially to uncover current modes of land tenure. The action of the local development project, of the GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) and the SO.NA.DE.R (Société Nationale pour le Développement Rural) were also a topic of specific research among both project employees and the local population. As external support is a crucial issue for the modes of life in the Mauritanian countryside the action of the most important local Mauritanian NGO, the UCT (Union des Coopératives du Tagant), was discussed with both people of the region and a leading employee of this NGO. Finally, in order to get a grip of the demographic significance of slavery in the region of Achram-Diouk, a survey aiming to unravel the status of the leading members in all households of eleven villages and neighbourhoods was undertaken. As this was certainly the most sensitive issue of research, data were not obtained by direct inquiry on the ground, but through a number of informants coming from the villages and neighbourhoods (cf. chapter four, p. 129-133).

Research in the field was complemented by archival studies. In Moudjéria I was fortunate enough to have access to both the land register and the archives (henceforth: AM). The latter consisted of an old cupboard where, stowed away behind an old, apparently once confiscated gun, a number of colonial records about the region especially in the 1930s and 1940s had survived the vagaries of time. Scattered information on tribes, tribal chiefs and conflicts and finally the mental state of many administrators complemented this set of data, giving an initiation into local history according to the colonisers' point

of view. A second attempt to get hold of documents in local archives, however, failed. In Tidjikja, whence I had undertaken a trip for this reason, I was told that rains had damaged the archives (AT) which therefore were forbidden to be used until the damage had been repaired. As this reconstruction was likely to exceed not only the few days I had for my stay at Tidjikja, but also the duration of my research grant, I cancelled the undertaking. A subsequent trip to several remote locations having plaid a major role in Tagant history, however, did much to compensate for this disappointing experience. In the meantime, I learnt that the Mauritanian former regional archives (at least in theory) had all been moved to the national archives (ANM) in Nouakchott. Therefore, it is unclear whether any major documents remain in locations like Tidjikja. In the national archives, after waiting several weeks for permission for access I was lucky again. While numerous authors have mentioned that orientation in these archives is impossible, I cannot confirm these statements on the whole. Indeed the archives do seem to have been emptied of a number of documents containing sensitive information on certain personalities and tribes, or perhaps they were lost during transfer, but nevertheless there is an interesting stock of documents to be found. In my attempt to explore some of these, I was effectively helped by one old employee who seems to know most of the documents all too well, but is also probably the only person with this knowledge. While I had to choose the documents I wanted to consult from a rather ill-organised list (originally established by the French colonial administration, not Mauritanians) it was his few but pointed comments that helped me enormously to filter a few documents of great value out of heaps of insignificant material. Unfortunately, time constraints and later a computer breakdown, destroying a number of notes I had taken, did much to limit these researches. This gap was later filled to a large extent by Roger Botte, who, when we met by chance in Paris, generously offered me access to his copies of archival documents microfilmed in the late 1970s.

Finally the independent press of Mauritania, which despite the threat of censorship in many cases produces journalism of a high professional standard, was a source from which to follow ongoing discussions about national politics and naturally the issue of slavery in Mauritania.

Chapter 2
Changing Configurations of Hierarchy and Dependency

Coming to grips with an empirically based analysis of present day social life in the region of Achram-Diouk meant engaging in a process needing both empathy and distance towards the subject of the study, as well as the people I came to know and the experiences I had. To reflect how the arguments of this book were developed, three perspectives on the empirical data and analytical reasoning are presented. This triad is introduced by methodological considerations based on theoretical assumptions, the fieldwork carried out, and the strategies implemented to transform field data into the final text. Life histories of sūdān and bīẓān reveal contrasting experiences of slavery. The historical dimension which these narratives offer opens insights into the evolution of webs of (inter-)dependency between sūdān and bīẓān. This makes it possible to discern the sūdān's complex struggles for increased autonomy, as well as the dynamics of the bīẓān society's transformation in recent decades, the latter aspect being a major concern of the bīẓān narratives. Finally, these life-stories are successively examined to develop the different meanings of "getting free" in the context of the rural bīẓān society under study.

These changing patterns of hierarchy and dependency carved out of the life histories are presented as different *configurations*, a term introduced by Norbert Elias (1990: XIII, XX, IL, LXVIIf.) in the attempt to systematise his approach to "social change" – a term he vehemently rejected.[1] Configurations, or Figurations, meaning "webs of interdependency built by people" (Elias 1990: LXVIII, author's translation), are best illustrated by the metaphor of dance. While dancing different kinds of dances, people perform a plurality of relations, thus being interdependent. What the theory aims at is to link structural and individualistic approaches and to demonstrate the need for a holistic view. While the individual and the individual's disposition are essential to the constitution of a corpus of dancers, the dance itself, i.e. the performed interdependency, cannot be reduced to the action of the individual dancer. Both a structural and an individualistic perspective are needed to fully determine social significance. To Elias it is fundamental that the individual dancer is always a visible element in a play that can only be interpreted in relation to its non-individual, specific setting. The dancer both performs and reveals the interdependency he is bound to. Humans engage in

relationships that are animated by an inherent dynamic. The evolution of (social) configurations is neither the result of planned action nor of mere change, it is structured along its own characteristics. An appropriate understanding of processes of social change thus has to trace their genesis (cf. Elias 1990: LXVIII, X).

Elias' theorising does not stop at this point. He embarks on enlarging his theoretical outline into one of a general process of civilisation, or to use a term a little less laden with teleological implications: a global theory of social development. The key concept advanced is a sort of correlation between the development of human mental structures and the evolution of social configurations. This Elias tries to prove through abundant historical studies, discovering analogies between the historical development of the human psychological structures towards self-control and an increasing civilisation and pacification of social structures. This attempt has been denounced by Anthony Giddens (1992: 295ff.) as being a "homology". The argument goes to the core, as it calls into question the mutual transposition of psychological and sociological analysis by pointing out its methodological weakness. Elias' theory for this reason will paradoxically always remain contested on the very feature supposed to be its greatest strength – the integration of intense empirical studies in history into sociological reasoning. A deconstructive reading reveals the interpretations Elias extracts from his historic material to be bound much too closely to his interpretative framework, which is suspicious of teleological determinism (for a prominent elaboration of this argument, evoking the question of a change in human mental constitution over the centuries, cf. Duerr 1988).

Leaving out these potential flaws, the questions and the general orientation of the empirical approach laid out by Norbert Elias are still a tempting incentive to the interpretation of processes of social change and development. Here the configuration approach will be related to the permanent redefinition of the status of both the dependent and the free people in the rural area of Achram-Diouk. The actual processes of social change there, together with their various settings, cannot be explained without an accurate understanding of past developments and the heterogeneity of the individual's experience of dependency.

Methodological Considerations[2]

Why present the same empirical data through different perspectives? One of the merits of recent self-reflexive and post-modern sociology is that it has put a question mark over uniformity in scientific writing and thus makes a plea for multivocality and plurality of styles. The enforced quest for new forms of textual representation of scientific reasoning was generated by critics of the misrepresentations or the "white patches" produced by traditional approaches. Emerging feminist research has made a major contribution to the development of these arguments.

In Anthropology one main concern of criticism was to give a voice to the

other. Two early approaches in this respect are from Marjorie Shostak (1983) and Camille Lacoste-Dujardin (1977). Both focus on the life of a single woman, to offer insight into the life of women in an alien society. The subjectivity involved is not denied, but rather put to use to work out the process of research. The informants are no longer anonymously subsumed under the authority of the anthropologist, but are given space for their own articulation. Once the anthropologist's knowledge is contextualised, it becomes vulnerable to enhanced critiques. James Clifford (1986: 109) notes: "The new tendencies to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text is altering ethnography's discursive strategy and mode of authority. Much of our knowledge about other cultures must now be seen as contingent, the problematic outcome of intersubjective dialogue, translation and projection." It is precisely the contingency of knowledge resulting from the intersubjective and fragmentary character of fieldwork that post-modern writing wants to reveal by turning from representation to evocation (cf. Tyler 1986: 130f.). The chapter at hand acknowledges this challenge by presenting empirical data and evidence through different perspectives. However, this is not identical to the project of polyphony:

> We better understand the ethnographic context as one of cooperative story making that, in one of its ideal forms, would result in a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of a framing story or encompassing synthesis – a discourse on the discourse. (Tyler 1986: 126)

Despite these objections, the following texts are all considered to be framed. Tyler rightly stresses the (omni-)presence of relations of domination in the reproduction of the other's discourse. Interpretative practices are already included in the generation of the original dialogue (cf. Tyler 1986: 127). This impregnation of any of the discourses with the author's work and ambition is hardly ever to be eliminated, as the perspectives presented cannot escape the total control of the author, and because polyphony is not a matter of stylistic devices: "Dialogic texts can be just as staged and controlled as experiential or interpretive texts. The mode offers no textual guarantees." (Rabinow 1986: 246)

The following biographic life accounts, their interpretations and the following systematic elaboration of distinct configurations of social hierarchy and dependency, are not supposed to constitute another cornerstone of stylistic devices. On the contrary, much more obviously it relates to a classical arrangement of different levels of data aggregation, a shift from supposedly "soft" to "hard" scientific reasoning, from description to analysis – with a strong emphasis on analysis. The post-modern challenge consists precisely in enforcing a re-reading of this classification. Not only does presenting biographic accounts in such a prominent place add a facet otherwise difficult to integrate into system-oriented analysis. These narratives

present an integrated, though not hermetic set of individual interpretations. They present life-stories that organise events, contexts and meanings according to individual patterns, and thus reveal in which situations social structures interfere with individual action, and how everyday life produces contradictions to challenge social settings. This is described from the individual's experience and according to his enunciation. For this reason, the biographic accounts provide two perspectives: they evoke typical traits of social hierarchy and its transformation as well as the distortions and deficits of the typologies and ideal type social categorisation involved. Therefore the different sections within this chapter and the following chapters are not only to be seen as a stepwise initiation into bīẓān society's webs of social hierarchy and dependency, but as distinct complementary analytic perspectives, each trying to get a grip on the same topic as well as evoking different spheres of imagination.

In fact the interrelations between the different chapters of this book are much closer than a first hand classification along different levels of reference to field data and other sources and references might suggest. All result from the same fieldwork and set of data. Their writing included mutual reassessment and reasoning, thus the chapters cannot be conceived as totally independent of each other. Although the interview representations were not changed after their initial elaboration, later editing would have been possible and provided a powerful means of evoking meaning. But the question of interpretation has to be put more radically, for it is still tempting to draw a border between data presentation and interpretation and thus associate the biographic account with authenticity and the systematic analysis with interpretation. However, the contours of this distinction are blurred. Any description portraying meaning assumes and incorporates interpretation, as has best been demonstrated by Clifford Geertz (1973) in his reasoning on "thick description". The biographic narratives tape-recorded in the field are descriptions of life histories produced in response to the request of a stranger. In this respect the (biographic) interview reveals a prominent characteristic inherent in fieldwork. Engaging in a process of understanding ("*verstehen*") implies permanent shifting between different interdependent perspectives of reasoning (fact, context and meaning; cf. Clifford 1988: 16f.). Conducting an interview requires the maintenance of mutual understanding (or at least recognition), assumed through mutual interpretation.[3] Each interview is a co-construct of the interviewer and the interviewee along interpretative patterns of the specific interview, as well as of the interviewer's evolving interpretative scheme throughout the fieldwork. By their very nature, these accounts are not authentic emic discourses tapped by the anthropologist.[4] On the contrary, the case studies presented here are descriptions most obviously resulting from interpretative action on two distinct levels. They were developed from specific contexts of reasoning in the field in Mauritania, i.e. from the immediate historicity of field research, and later in Germany selected and edited to present stories telling of social change and stratification

in the region of Achram-Diouk. As the edition of these somewhat co-authored narratives marked the beginning of the systematic written elaboration of this book, a cross-reading of the different chapters is revealing of the development of the interpretative framework and its ties with people's personal experiences as expressed in the life-stories.

Writing Biographies

Carving a biographical life narrative out of dialogic interviews, consisting of a constant flux and re-flux between questions and answers (sometimes also a question-question-question-answer scheme is more suited to describe the situation) already raises in itself important questions of textual representation. How to put a text that originated in a spontaneous, topic-shifting dialogue on biographic subjects into an easy-to-read monologic narrative, accurately centred on the topics most crucial to the study presented? Most commonly biographic narratives take the form of a monologue. Although introductions can make the reader aware of the existence of interviewers and later transcription and translation, these factors and processes are invisible in the narrative (cf. for examples Cross/Barker 1992; Olivier de Sardan 1976). The reader is confronted with individuals obviously intrinsically motivated to present their life and other narratives in either a chronological order or focused on key events. The biographic narrative seems addressed directly to an audience the imagined narrator most probably does not know. If not impossible, this rarely is the case (Richardson 1990: 130). The interviewer and the editor become an indiscernible part of the final product, the textual account. Performed as such the genre is a lure to the reader, trapping him into imagined representation. The "I" the reader is confronted with is not the single self-narrator it is in an authentic autobiography, but a co-authored I. What at first seems to be first hand, descriptive narration, is in fact the outcome of complex interactive and interpretative work. The naturalistic look then is a feature added by the almighty author in the background.[5] There are attempts to deal with these shortcomings of textualised biographic information. Two strategies are to be distinguished. Strategies of involving the intersubjectivity of fieldwork and those aiming to give most accurate representation of the emic discourse by employing highly articulated translation. Intersubjectivity as the constituent and driving force of the narrative is best worked out in biographies of individuals (e.g. Lacoste-Dujardin 1977; Shostak 1983). A different strategy is developed by Smadar Lavie (1990). She elaborates allegories of Mzeini Bedouin life by a typified collage of interviews conducted during thirteen years of field research. The implications of intersubjectivity are integrated and expressed through polyphony, here put into the form of dialogic text. The argument also has a further dimension, as it tries to display the making of these dialogues, and thus makes a bit more transparent the excluded "middle" of text and fieldwork (cf. Agar 1990: 73).

> I wanted to engage my voice with the voices of Mzeini men and women, while avoiding the poetically powerful exoticizations typical of Western multivocal depictions of Other worlds . . . I also wanted the text to be written in such a way that it could be translated back into Arabic, its language of origin, and be read by those about whom it was written.
>
> The solution was to transcribe, whenever appropriate to my purpose, a polyphony of voices, including my own, directly out of the raw material of my diary-style fieldnotes . . . I chose to transcribe very strictly, as theater-script-like polyphonic dialogues . . . I accompanied these lines by stage directions straight from my diary. (Lavie 1990: 36)

Stating the author's deep concern with intersubjectivity up to the final text is a major concern of this writing, but this strategy has a second outcome: to produce a strong appeal to the reader, to accept the author's ability to write the other's narrative. Thus it accomplishes a most classical element of anthropological writing: the establishment of the anthropologist's authority. This double bind is most obvious with Smadar Lavie when citing one of her interviewees: "Comparing my work to the other ethnographies, the old man said, 'All these people write about us, about what they think we are, except one – the one that just writes us, exactly as we talk, and laugh, and gesture [with our hands], just as we are.'" (Lavie 1990: 37) This passage, as well as many others throughout the book, recall the experiential mode of ethnographic authority criticised recently (cf. Clifford 1988: 16f.; Rabinow 1986: 245). Camille Lacoste-Dujardin presents a similar confirmation of her work, although with a slight self-doubting undertone: "Il approuve mon projet. Quand plus tard, je lui transmettrai les premiers résultats de mon travail, il me décernera ce précieux compliment: 'C'est tout à fait ça! Comment avez-vous fait? . . .'" (Lacoste-Dujardin 1977: 37) These statements most directly show that the need for the anthropologist's authority to write the Other is not altered by the choice of textual representation (cf. Clifford 1988: 15f.; Geertz 1988: 4f.). What is changed indeed, is the author's concern with making his aspirations at least partially visible to the reader.

There is no standardisation of the methodology, the use, and presentation of life stories. Nevertheless two main trends can be identified, one focusing upon the "symbolic in social life and meaning in individual lives" and a second, considering "interviewees as informants – in ethnographic fashion. The aim is to get accurate descriptions of the interviewees' life trajectories in social contexts, in order to uncover the patterns of social relations and the special processes that shaped them." (Bertaux/Kohli 1984: 215)

The narratives presented here are best associated with the latter approach. Carrying out interviews focusing on the interviewee's life history was conceived as a means of both introducing the topic of slavery and social dependency, and of providing data for a general contextual framework. Indeed, the concern with the interview's biographic foundation grew throughout the fieldwork. A topical, and a chronological, event-oriented interview-guideline was developed and constantly revised. Included in this

ongoing process of refinement was a constant shift in topics in the main focus, much resembling the saturation that marks off the point where new cases merely confirm the validity of former findings (cf. Bertaux/Kohli 1984: 226). However, this I only came to uncover back home while reflecting on how to come to grips with my data. Insofar, all narratives have a strong emphasis on questions of social hierarchy and dependency – as far as these topics could be unearthed – and are marked by a fragmentary character, due both to the historicity of the research and the eventuality of the interviewees' remaining mute for various reasons.

Reading and re-reading interview transcripts in a quest for hidden meanings, I realised that most interviews told a story. This was unexpected for me, for most of the interview settings opposed arrangements to facilitate personalised narration. The topical focus and the initial concept of the biographic interview as a means to unravel webs of dependency as well, rather hindered the unfolding of a fragile, not previously conceived narrative. Finally, many problems had occurred in collecting biographic data, which forced me to the provisional conclusion that my chronological, key-event driven concept of life history was strange to the overwhelming majority of rural Mauritanians. This hypothesis is strengthened by the exceptions to the rule: it was no problem to ask openly for a life account when speaking to local intellectuals, i.e. secondary school trained people, and some ḥarāṭīn "organic" intellectuals in the Gramscian use of the term (cf. Gramsci [1929-35] 1971: 3, 6).[6] In fact, these ḥarāṭīn were among the few to have participated in either traditional Qur'ān education or modern-type schooling. Nevertheless the narratives produced, especially by school trained interview partners, took the character much more of a curriculum vitae than of a rich life-story. What follows is a somewhat paradoxical conclusion, the narratives produced during the interviews have a hybrid character. They reveal the individual's life through the medium of external incentives, the result of a complex co-operation. It is this, right from the beginning, most obvious co-constructive character of the biographic texts that hindered me in treating them as emic, auto-biography-like narratives.

Somewhat caught fast between these restrictions on authenticity, further increased through (in the most cases), various stages of translation, and a fragmented but on the whole highly instructive content, I had to choose an option for the presentation of these data. What the biographic data, taken as life-stories, were able to narrate was the diversity of life experiences people of different social strata, but all originating from the same small rural region, had gone through, and how differently they both perceived and were coping with their actual situation. To present the stories, somewhat cramped in the transcripts, I chose to take the plunge of interpretation and shape out of the interview dialogues more or less monologic biographic narratives (cf. Richardson 1992).

The texts presented are all based exclusively on interview transcripts and field notes. They are fictive, as they perform a collage of the interviewees'

statements resulting in a monologue revealing interviewer-induced key topics and comprising elements of dramatisation as a result of the editing and collage process, driven by the fieldnotes and memory. These devices are not applied monolithically, and the narratives differ with regard to the degree of their implementation. Some narratives, or some of their sub-paragraphs present only slightly edited transcript material, while others result from intensive use of collage techniques and textual rearrangement. In addition the monologic structure of the text is interrupted in several cases. The single-person/single event focus in one case is split up. Several narratives of interviewees who are closely interrelated are synchronised and thus present to the reader an imaginary communication. Also – if found necessary – the original dialogue of the interview is brought back into the account, e.g. when a sudden, unexpected shift in topic, in the mood or something else which was directly related to questioning occurs. This especially is true to the narrative of M'Barke, an old slave woman (ḫādem). One question in an already difficult interview setting proved to be most offensive. Although I am personally still ashamed of unknowingly disrespecting the old woman's sentiments, the crisis provoked in the interview proved to be most instructive to the anthropologist. In fact, much as in a crisis experiment (cf. Garfinkel 1967), the old woman's insults revealed the extreme sensitivity of matters of legal descent among slaves, and thus former slaves – a matter much obscured among the younger generation, busily engaged in "forgetting" these aspects of family history.

Finally, the texture of the narratives presented, despite editing and collage, will not deny their origin in various interview settings, the main aspects being highlighted in introductory remarks. The interviewees' identities, and some names of places, are changed in an attempt to protect the informants' privacy. Unfortunately, up to today the narratives presented have not been approved by those they are supposed to represent. Nevertheless I hope to show them to the interviewees on a later occasion. For the moment all I can do is to thank all persons involved in my interviews for their will to co-operate and the trust – I wish to affirm once more – they expressed towards me.

Contrasting Life Stories

The stories presented have been chosen to create an insight into the diversity of life experiences I encountered. In this respect they aim to give an impression of the region's life stories as a whole. The stories also present typical aspects, although the individual cases presented are rather experiences at the margin of the rural society. As so often, typical or stereotyped images are best revealed in an atypical setting. And as the stories presented are based on authentic, individual accounts, they are not ideal-types, and there is no aspiration to create any. What instead is intended, is to trace cross-cutting

patterns and ties characterising and relating those involved in the configuration of hierarchy and dependency.

The first narrative presents the story of *Badeyn*, who discovered his slave origin only at the age of fifteen. Having formerly been fully integrated into the household of his mother's master, he then started a career typical for the many ḥarāṭīn who created independence through their own work. *Brahim*, another ḥarṭāni, is a sort of organic intellectual. He attended traditional religious education of his own will to cope with what he called "ignorance" among the ḥarāṭīn and slaves, hence he experiences being at the margins of his own community. He has to cope with the contradictions between his own (and his family's) aspiration to emancipation and his commitment to traditional bīẓān ideology. Brahim's story is occasionally backed up by narratives of *Zeyneb* (his mother) and in one case *Moustava* (the son of both Brahim's and Zeyneb's former master), both providing contrasting perspectives of Brahim's narrative. *M'Barke*'s story is of a completely different kind. The old slave woman evokes most impressively the woman slave's condition, clearly distinct from the men's. *Valha* is a member of the tributary, znāga stratum of bīẓān society. This status nowadays is hardly ever admitted publicly, for it is conceived of as being even more dishonourable than ḥarāṭīn or slave status. The narrative gives a very interesting perspective of bīẓān women's everyday life, as neither Valha's family, nor anybody in their camp ever had slaves. It is just one example that pastoral life was to a certain degree independent of slave labour and its inputs. Two more narratives reveal the bīẓān perspective. *Tourad* is a true intellectual in the term's western sense. He is a teacher, fully bilingual in French and classical Arabic, took part in the country's early seventies leftist student movements, and is now engaged in local tribal politics. His life-story exemplifies much of the bīẓān intellectuals' attitudes. A commitment to a western type of modernity is paired with a fundamental, western-like misconception of their own society. Tourad's identity is split, as his father was of noble zwāya origin, while his mother is of ḥarāṭīn-status (probably of slave origin and manumitted to engage in a legal marriage). *Youba* finally faces similar identity problems induced by his split origin of a noble ḥassān father and a ḥarṭāniyya mother, but the outcome of his social positioning is different: he chose to integrate in a ḥarāṭīn community. His life is characterised by long wage labour migration, indeed much of it would resemble that of other ḥarāṭīn, were it not for some decisive differences.

Sūdān

Badeyn

Badeyn's narrative refers to the grey zones of slave dependency in a generalised household slavery context. It reveals two contradicting principles, both ruling the master-slave-relationship. First comes a sentiment of nearness, and in many cases affection, resulting from the close co-residence in a household, or else tent. This aspect is most immediate to the individual level.

Second comes the social division into free and unfree, in this case as the difference between affiliated and associated parenthood. This is how social texture forms the basis of individual types of dependency. Badeyn lived successively in contradicting status positions: noble origin, slave descent, and a sort of self-attained freedom and independence. Although this life-history confirms the normative power of the hierarchical value system, it also reveals contradictions in it resulting from everyday life practices. Here it becomes apparent what weaknesses an approach based solely on an elaboration of the dominant ideology would have. Domination depends on the knowledge needed to create and maintain (cultural) distinctions, but this monopoly of knowledge can be disrupted: Badeyn lived a noble's life until recognition of his origins was enforced by a third party, and he was thus excluded from this kind of existence. The text presents a major episode of the interview along with detailing, chronologically organised information.

Badeyn: I was born in S. It was a bīẓān family who brought me up, without father or mother. In the 60s, there was an epidemic in S., it's called Mahamrou. At that time I was two years old, perhaps three years, because I just had a little sister. That year, the people tell, it got the whole of S., perhaps one hundred people were killed by the epidemic, my father, my mother, my sister and more. For six months I couldn't see anything, because there was something coming out of my eyes.

There was that bīẓān family, it was them who took my family as slaves, they brought me up. When I was young, I thought that family is mine, that it is my own family. I believe, the man is my father, the woman my mother. It continued like that until I was fifteen. I thought they were my parents. I knew nothing. Only while having fun with the children out in the street I got to know – it was the children who taught me about my parents.

I ran home, there was my [adoptive] mother sitting and weeping till the end. I tell you, after that I entered my second class in school. That was still in S. I did school until my fourth year, the CFD exams, then the woman [the adoptive mother] divorced and another man married her. At that moment my studies were wrecked. It was him who destroyed them, he was a bīẓān without any colour, he had something he should be saved of, he started treating me as a black.[7] And my youth did not understand of what use studies are.

I left S. with them and continued another two years in that situation. I did all construction for them. Finally, I went to the mother, I treated her as mother, I told her I have been happy with everything she did for me in those days, but that now I am no longer happy, that I want to go where I am able to live. She would be my mother as long as she would be in need of me and I would be her son. But she being like that, I'd leave. When I went off she ran behind me. It wasn't her who had changed, it's only the man, it is him who decides, not her.

I visited a military camp. There they needed a washer, I started to do the job. After a while I left and started as herdsmen for the camels of a friend of mine, also from my tribe [a bīẓān]. Later I went to town and worked as washer once

again. At the same time I built bricks for the construction of houses and was an apprentice[8] to a baker. I also worked as day-labourer loading and unloading trucks, and I built wells.

After some time I came back to the Tamourt en-Naaj and married for the first time. The SO.NA.DE.R had started the first development project there. In one year I earned enough money to rest for a whole year, 240,000 UM! I organised myself to go on with the money, then the SO.NA.DE.R left, they moved to Achram. I managed to find a šarīv, for whom I washed the clothes some time ago. So I had a friend there, who was chief of the garage there. That was how I came here. I did the job until the first wave of discharges occurred. I was the first on the list to be fired. It was because the first, here people say, is the one who has two arms, i.e. the one who has two brothers. With him it won't be like that, he who has the brothers is right. One won't be able to put him off.

I started to work on the fields, to grow some millet. The harvest was good. After that half a year I went back to the SO.NA.DE.R and they employed me until now.

During my first time here I travelled every month to S. in order to visit my family. After two years I wanted to change that situation, and get her to move with me to Achram. But she was what one nowadays would call a slave. I went and asked her parents to give consent to my wish, they agreed that she moved. It was her masters who refused. I kept on with this situation for another year, and looking for a solution in S. Later I married here in Achram for a second time. Here I have five children, in S. are two from my first marriage. Every two to three months I send money to their mother for the children there.

Here I have bought some fields. In total I have five fields now. Some of them are behind a dam, the others behind a small dam. Every year I work the fields together with my wife. I also have some goats, all in all about 40, I do not like to have sheep, they are too stupid! Goats are much more intelligent and much less complicated than sheep. I also have one cow. For some years I also worked as baker here in A., but now I find it too tiring to get up so early and do my job in the garage afterwards.

Brahim and Zeyneb

Brahim's narrative is characterised by being both very typical and untypical of slave/ḥarāṭīn biographies of the region. Again, as in Badeyn's narrative, a tension is obvious between the well-defined "indissoluble" origin, i.e. the slave estate defined through birth, and on the other hand an achieved social knowledge, which put into practice contests the status-defined role set. The ambivalence of Brahim's situation is evident: through personal effort he gained certified religious knowledge[9] that enables him to respond to the hegemonic discourse of social hierarchy and thus to surmount the boundaries drawn for him by social structures. A second outcome of the knowledge gained through traditional learning is the at least partial adoption of the social hierarchy's framework, whose effect is to cement Brahim's original low status.

It should also be observed that Brahim's excellent memory – and his mother's too – constituted a never-ending stock of topics for discussion (and the generation of questions) for me. The following compilation, however, stands out, for it contrasts several points of view on a substantially commonly lived and deeply intertwined experience, as expressed by people of close relationship: Brahim, Zeyneb, his mother, and Moustava, her (or else his) zwāya master's son. Of special interest are the different perceptions Brahim and Zeyneb have of the process of their successive liberation.

Brahim: I was born about 1956 in the Oued El Abiod, near the well Kharge. I was with my parents, the herds of goats and cattle, there was nobody else with us. We had some date-palms too, it was my father and some of his brothers who planted them when I was very small. The name of the well was Kharge, because it was so effectively hidden by the trees and bushes, one had to look carefully to find it, so dense was the vegetation at that place. I stayed with my family and at the same time I attended Qurʾān lessons. I herded the goats and worked the fields and at the same time went to the Qurʾān school. During summer I stayed with the master [of the Qurʾān school], during the rainy and the cold season I went home and herded the goats. The master [of the Qurʾān school] was of another tribe, he was of the Awlād ʿAlī, who are not part of the Taǧakānet.

While we were at the well of Kharge, the two camps were always close to each other. During the rainy season and winter, we then moved to Liwa, where we had the fields. It lies to the west of here, some of the people here and I myself still have fields over there. Every family has a small dam of its own and every member of the family cultivates and makes his own field.

There were a lot of bīẓān with the [Qurʾān] master, they passed a lot of time in that activity. In fact, I was the only sūdān there.

Author: How did that come?

Brahim: Well, I was the third son in my family, at that time we were nearly rich, so I was not really obliged to work. But I was bothered by the ignorance [of the sūdān], I did not want to stay without learning. That's the reason why I looked for a task, the possibility to study. I found that man [the Qurʾān master] and asked him if he would accept me to study with him and he agreed. With him I learned the alphabet and started the Qurʾān. When the rainy season came, he went off to look for pasture for his livestock. I looked out for another [Qurʾān] teacher. He gave me a book, by that time I already could read and started to write. With another master I found two more books dealing with questions of prayer and zakāt,[10] the šarīʿa. Every time the [Qurʾān] masters left with their livestock for the south I stayed there at Kharge; I did my studies always only half a year, during the dry season, the rest of the year I worked on the fields. I spent six years with the first master, from 1970-76, and another two with the second one. You know, once you are able to read and write, studying becomes less complicated, because then you can continue the work on your own and afterwards ask somebody to correct your mistakes.

There were a lot of students with the [first Qurʾān] master, he lived in a camp

of about 60 tents and had about 90 to 100 students. His wife gave lessons too, everything concerning the women and girls was her duty. While the camp of the master was near to the well of my parents, I could walk home every evening, but when they left for more distant places, we had to stay with them. We did not bring our own food with us, I never saw that with the students coming from other camps. We helped the master's family with its work. He had about 60 goats, 30 cows and 3 camels. Everybody helped to water the herds or to milk them. My family also gave the master sometimes 10 mūd[11] of millet while the harvest was going on.

We left the place of Kharge in 1982, there were only some palm-trees left, growing only a small amount of dates. All the people who once came to that well left it to come here when the new well was constructed. We too wanted to approach the new dam here, that was constructed in 1978[12] for the first time. We hoped to cultivate a lot of millet here.

I am the only one of my brothers still here. The first left in 1982 for Nouakchott, in 1986 he went to the Arab Emirates to work there as a policeman, two more brothers are traders in Nouakchott, the younger one left here in 1993, the older one in 1989, then there is one of my brothers who is now taxi-driver in Nouakchott and one who is with the National Guard there. Two of my sisters are married and live here in the village. Three of my brothers' wives live here as well, two of them live at Nouakchott.

I prefer staying here instead of going to Nouakchott. Here I have my own millet, my own field, my own work, here I have something to do, and I have food enough to eat. In Nouakchott everything is related to work. Relying on my animals there, I would survive for only one month, I couldn't let them graze there, for there is no pasture. I would be obliged to buy them fodder, and I can't afford that. I would be obliged to sell them and live off the money. After a short while the whole money would be eaten up, and I would remain with nothing! Then all those goods, being cheaper in Nouakchott than here, won't make any sense to me. No, without getting a job you can't live in Nouakchott. I never stayed there for long.

Experiencing the 1969 Drought

Brahim: I remember 1960-65 there was a drought, that was a time without millet, but the animals were only slightly affected. 1966 was a good year, 1967 ran short of pasture at the end, 1968 again was without problems, and in 1969 finally, there was nothing at all. At that time we had two herds of small stock[13], 270 sheep and 100 goats and another 60 cows. After the drought there remained only three cows. The goats were the least affected, they remained with a number of 50. Altogether we had about 100 small ruminants left when the drought was over. We didn't start a big movement with our animals during the drought. We stayed at Khaoulete, that is near, about 30 km to the east. When the pasture was finished we came back, but not to the well, there were too many people there at the time. We chose another well in order to get clean water for the animals.

After the drought, we responded to the death of the animals by increasing the number of our fields.

Zeyneb (mother): It was my husband who had some animals. . . .

I think there were about 60-100 small ruminants and about 10 cows with my husband. After the heavy drought [1969] he lost nearly everything. He remained with 3 cows and in 1970 he died.

Our master lost a lot of his animals too. That's why we kept together and didn't move around that year.

I then stayed with my children, until today. We continued to cultivate our fields. We had our work. I did not return to the master, why should I? The master, when he comes and asks for something, we will give it to him. He has got nothing to give us. In those days he had something, and I didn't, he gave me what I needed. In that time he didn't ask me to give him anything. I continued to cultivate with my children, we had good harvests. When he came, we gave him a part of our millet. And we continued eating our millet and buying animals of it.

Moustava (master's son): Before the drought, there were already a lot of diseases diminishing the number of my father's animals. These years were not terrible, it just killed some animals every time. At the beginning of the drought in 1969, my family was left with 30 cows, no other animals remained with us. At the end of the drought all cows were finished. We lost all animals.

As there was nothing left, I went off to look for work. I mounted a truck and went to Boghé, where I found a job as manager of a boutique [shop]. There were people of the Legwāṭiṭ, they were big traders, it was them to give me the work. And I continued to work for them for about six or seven years. They paid me 4,000 UM, every time I got money I sent it home to my family. They never augmented the salary, they even wanted to lower it, because there was a lot of people looking for work. Nevertheless I accepted the situation, I was even fortunate, for they had trust in me, otherwise they never would have paid as much as 4,000 UM.

Brahim's Father's Life and Death

Brahim: In 1970 my father died. He had worked to get the animals, every time he had a lot of millet he sold some to buy animals with the money. He also had a second job, herding. Every two months and ten days he had the right to receive one goat. He had done that work for several families since his early youth, so he had got a lot of animals. Then he had another job, he watered the animals, that is the only work I saw my father do. I never saw him herding, I only heard of him doing that sort of work.

Each time someone wanted to sell a female goat or sheep for slaughter, we exchanged one of our male animals with him. So we could manage to get the herd grow faster.[14] I don't remember exactly what size were the parts of my father and my brothers in our herd, but every one of us had his own animals, with his own brand. My father didn't give some of his animals to us, we were

paid for our work of herding other people's animals. When after my father's death his master came to pick up his animals, he took all of my father's, but left those of my brothers and me. At that time, my father also gave him a part of the harvest, but this was not fixed, the fields were not fixed to one place and neither was the contribution.

Zeyneb (Brahim's mother): Already at the time of the presidency of Mokhtar Ould Daddah the sūdān lived in adwaba [sedentary camps composed only of sūdān]. I remember we paid the ʿašūr[15]. The animals we had were our own, they didn't come from our master, but from our own work, my husband's, my children's and my own work on the fields, and herding of other people's animals.

Yes, I am like them [her masters], I married after they married. My husband sometimes stayed with me and my masters, sometimes we also went to his masters. We were always together and never separated. For some time after the marriage, I continued to work for my master. My husband had fields. And we continued like that, moving around with my masters, until they didn't need us any longer. Then we settled with my husband's family, near their fields. We had no masters! He was a sāyib [slave who wasn't guarded]. His master didn't need him, and if he did, he came to him and asked.

When my husband died, his master came and took off two of the three cows that remained with us after the drought, and some of the small ruminants too! He told us that my husband had been his ḥarṭānī,[16] and therefore he had the right to take my husband's animals. Yes, he was right about that point, he did not want to be unfair to us, he was even kind with us, as he didn't take all the animals that were left with us. This is part of the šarīʿa, it is a Mauritanian habit. This did no harm to us. I am not saying anything, I only tell you because you don't know the habits of Mauritania.

Seeking Manumission

Author: The white family you told me you belonged to, are they still around here?

Brahim: Yes, they live in Leqraye and in Kdân, that is between Ghabbra and Foum Gleita, there are a lot of Legwāṭiṭ there [a zwāya tribe], one of them [of the family] is a municipal counsellor and a trader. We are almost like brothers to him. . . . Yes, it is possible that they do help us when we are in need, that's true for all of them, that's mutual, I help them, they help me. . . . Once I received a darrāʿa [men's traditional dress] worth 2,500 UM from them. I helped them with the construction of a small dam [French: *diguette*] once, I went to the project in order to get them some assistance in the construction. I also sent them [the family] 125 mūd of millet,[17] that was at the time of harvest, and it constituted my whole harvest that year. I did that several times, it is part of our mutual relations. I also herd his cows, if we have pasture around here whereas he has not and comes and asks me to do so. He is my comrade, and every time I go to Leqraye I visit him and stay with him, as he is the only one I know there.

Author: The last times you occasionally mentioned that Ould Haidalla [leader of the military regime 1980-84] announced the end of slavery on the radio. I am still

confused about the question when he held this speech, do you remember the year?

Brahim: I remember well the time of Haidalla, normally you would speak of two years related to Haidalla, first the year he came into office, second the one he was pushed out. His announcement concerning the end of slavery, that was at the end of his first year in office, the beginning of the second.[18] In this announcement he proclaimed a deadline. It meant that anyone having a slave had to prove the slave's origin, i.e. he had to provide proofs. If he failed to do so, then the slave no longer was his slave. He had to enumerate the slave's fathers up to the tenth father. If he only could trace about four or five fathers, then the slave was no longer a slave.

Author: Did Haidalla say that in the radio?

Brahim: No, that is a question of jurisprudence, that belongs to the domain of the qāḍi [judge]. That was the time Haidalla introduced the šarīʿa . . . he was very severe about everything he did, everything he ordered had to be executed. . . . His announcement concerning the liberation of the slaves was on the radio, but he didn't speak of slaves or anything like that, he just said that all people were equal, that there would be no-one to oblige another [to do something]. All people, the white and the black are equal, they are like brothers. He did not speak of ḥarāṭīn or slaves, he just said Mauritania should be a country of equals, where all people work together and don't oblige one another [to do anything]. That was also the time of problems between the bīẓān and the sūdān, because the bīẓān wanted to force the sūdān to come back to them. If the bīẓān went to see a judge, the judge would send them back, he would let the sūdān be totally free. This happened after the announcement of Haidalla in the radio. Before it wasn't like that, but after I never again saw a white beating a slave or a sūdān. Before, I saw that frequently with the sūdān of A. [village nearby], they are not like the other sūdān. . . .

Slavery is something which has officially come from Allah, which has always existed in the times ever. I know very well the difference between a freed person and a slave. The announcement Haidalla made, that was of a general sort, but I, I know what I know, I didn't trust that announcement. What I wanted was something official, a public declaration, because they [the government] also can say that they will undo their decision. I wanted manumission directly from my master. I found him here, so we went directly to the qāḍi. There were also some others, i.e. there are others belonging to the master, who were not my brothers, but of other families. They were already manumitted before the announcement. After the announcement, I went to the master too. I followed him and told him that there has been an announcement, that there are no more slaves in Mauritania, and that everybody has heard of this message on the radio. You have slaves, I told him, but you know very well that they won't be of any use to you, that they won't work for you. Thus there is no need to say that you have slaves. At that point he accepted [my argument]. First he liberated me, and later he made a written manumission for the whole family. There were two copies of the manumission act. One for the master and one for the family. It was

him [the master] who made a further copy for himself, for one never knows what will be in future. If there is only a manumission contract with me, perhaps his [the master's] sons would think that there are still slaves. If the contract is only with me, it is less clear than with a copy [being with the master]. Today we are like brothers, if one sees us together, he would think we are father and son.

Zeyneb (Brahim's mother): When I was small I lived with the bīẓān. The master and my mother [she only remembers little of her mother, whom she considers not to have worked much], my brothers and my sisters. We had a tent beneath the master's tent. The master had one son, and we lived with him, we were one family, black and white. That was the time when there were only few fields and everybody in the camp had animals. They were neither rich nor poor, they had cows and goats. In that time there weren't many fields, and herders and cultivators could stay together [in one camp] and the owners of the herds could watch them. I didn't dress at that time [i.e. she was under the age of seven].

I did the work of pounding millet, fetched water and also herded goats, there were a lot of animals. Herding was unusual for girls, but the men all had to work on the fields. My mother didn't herd. Cultivating the fields behind the small dams started by the time I had children, then it increased one by one.

In this time the camps of the sūdān and of the bīẓān were [already] separated. The adwaba was the camp of the sūdān, the sūdān always remained near the fields, whereas the bīẓān moved around with the herds to get good pasture. This continued until the harvest, then the bīẓān came to take their share of millet. When everything was distributed the bīẓān left and the sūdān remained.

For some years, until I had four or five children, I kept with the master during summer, I fetched water. Whenever the rain started I left for the fields. When I didn't want to carry on like that, I fortunately had my daughters. All of them did one year with the master, one after the other they went to him, to do him his work. Before, I had shared the work for the master with my sister, one period of the summer it was her turn, the other mine. This continued until we had children. It was the sons, who were the first to leave him [the master], they couldn't bear the work with him, they kept with the adwaba or they went off to work. He [the master] wasn't in need of them, they left him when he couldn't resolve their problems any longer. That's why they left in order to look for work and give something to the master, if they didn't it didn't matter. If they came back from their work, they only came to the adwaba [not to the master], they were already married men. In order to marry, they properly asked [the master], and he did them their marriage.[19]

Our master was a very good man, he was very kind to us, he didn't make us work for somebody else, he only took what was left behind us, he gave us clothes and shoes, he always did things that pleased us, and he was full with animals [i.e. rich in animals]. People came to stay with him and drink milk. We kept with him until the times when the animals were diminishing and finally all had disappeared. The master kept with us like a family member, every time he was in need of something, we gave it to him. We always kept in relation to him

until last year, when he died, he was already old. There is his son who comes after him now, he is like our brother, he drank of my milk when he was small. He frequently visits us when he is in need of something. Nowadays we only give him the zakāt, but if he has no millet we also give him some more. And he too, if he has got something he will give it to us.

We left the master in 1969. It was because he had lost his animals. He no longer had the means to sustain us, and we too did not have any means. The separation between us took place because I was the mother of a family, I had a tent of my own and my children, and I worked for myself. They [the master] also had their work of their own. The only thing shared between us were the fields. We take a part and they take a part of the harvest. Nowadays, we only give him the zakāt.

During the drought [1969] we lost a lot of our animals as well. But we remained on good terms with the master. This continued until the time of the first democracy in Mauritania in 1982, that was the SEM [Structures d'Éducation des Masses; cf. p. 272f.] at that time. With this, we found ourselves in two opposing camps. It was just politics that divided us. At that time, I already had my own tent. Since 1960 I have had my own tent, my husband, my children, and we just gave him a part of our harvest. Since 1983 we have been freed, we no longer belong to him.

Author: How did that come about?

Zeyneb: In 1983 there was a presidential decree, it was transmitted over the radio [cf. note 18, this chapter]. The president said, all should see each other as brother, if one would like to get something from somebody, he should ask for it. What was the property of the slaves should remain their property. Our master had already manumitted four men before that decree. These were two of my sons and two of my sister's sons. All the others he only manumitted after the decree. It was us who asked him for manumission after the presidential decree. We asked either for paid or unpaid manumission. We sent Brahim to go and speak with him about our manumission. The master then manumitted us for free, we didn't have to pay. He made us an official document on a paper. He did that for every member of my family. Then we made another document concerning the whole family. That one today is with Brahim.

Today the master's son comes to us when he is in need of something, but we have stopped working for him. But if he is in need of millet, he will receive something from us. We give him the zakāt, and if he is in need, we will give him more than that. If he has millet of his own, we will just give him the zakāt. He sometimes gives us some of his dates.

M'Barke

My introduction to M'Barke resulted from a favour to a zwāya interviewee. His wish for a lift to Khouba, a place some 35 km to the south, offered the opportunity to visit a place of very recent sedentarisation. In the middle of May the spot was nearly deserted. The sun was beating on the barren, stony plain, temperature in the shade was around 45°C. Besides some distant zwāya

tents near to a few bushes, the camp was composed of some of the most miserable sūdān tents I had ever seen anywhere in the zone. Desperately seeking a sūdān interview and always under the attentive eyes of my bīẓān hosts, we ended up under the tent of M'Barke. She was a very old slave woman (ḫādem), hard of hearing and almost blind. My research assistant, Khalifa Ould Kebab, was uncomfortable about starting an interview with her, as he classified her among the "complicated persons", i.e. people reacting at best unpredictably to a stranger's questions. I for my part felt uncomfortable as well. The village's appearance was depressing, the most bitter poverty was obvious in every corner. Except for two tattered chickens, no signs of animal property were to be seen, and the few sūdān around, above all the children, were visibly suffering from malnutrition. Even the tent we were sitting under was so small that, small a group as we were, we hardly managed to shelter from the midday sun. Interviewing M'Barke was an experience of learning from one's own mistakes – and at the expense of the interviewee. The occasion of severe dissonance was created by asking a question employed numerous times before without problems. However, changing circumstances may change experience. To ask an old woman who had lived a slave's life about her marriage can be an insult in that these people often were not allowed to contract legal marriages. Legal exclusion from parenthood, however, does not mean exclusion from parenthood-like practices amongst the master's family: indeed a boy of about seventeen from the master's family joined the interview to see and hear what was going on. Sitting close to the old blind woman, he could not escape being intensely caressed by her, although this embarrassed him severely. He nevertheless had to respect someone who had participated in bringing him up.

M'Barke: I was born in a place called Twueyle, which is near Djonâba. That was in the year of the first banknote, it also was the year of the diseases.[20] Khalil [her zwāya master] is older than me, I drank of his mother's milk when it was nearly finished, it was just before his mother stopped breast-feeding him. I am not of this place, I am not of the people of Khouba, I am a ḥarṭāniyya for the Ahel D. of the Tmoddek and they are backed by Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar [the former ʿamīr of Tagant], that Allah may welcome him in paradise. I've been to the east until Khouba belongs to the Tmoddek. Then we came here to watch the place for the people wanting to make their fields here. We stayed here, me, my children and my brother. We came here in the year of the battle between the Tmoddek, those born in that year now are already grown up [this means an age of about 20 years, probably the event took place in about 1974]. In those days we were always in the east, we kept close to the ʿamīr Abderrahmane, sometimes we went up the Tagant. We cultivate the fields near Achram and Chelkhet Arkham, for everybody who knows the Tmoddek, knows them in these places.

The Tmoddek are based on livestock, they have no fixed place, they are always found where there is good pasture. Ouneije, Djonâba, Asmaʿa, all these places are for the Tmoddek, they belong to them. When I was young the

Tmoddek had all sorts of animals, goats, sheep, cattle, some male camels too, camels were only used for transport. There were a lot of donkeys too. And there were maḥaẓra [Qurʾānic schools] as the Tmoddek were zwāya, they did not make war, they were defended by Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar.

I only remember my mother, we were all with my mother with our masters. There were three brothers to me and two sisters. I worked with my mother, who fetched water, pounded millet and gathered ʿaz[21] [wild grains suited for food]. She also gathered another sort of grain that was found on trees [eyzin].[22] You had to lay it into water for five or six days before it was ready to be eaten. All this has stopped now, there is no eyzin any more. It was tiring, it took much time to prepare food with it, and it smelled bad. It also provoked a disease called igwindi, you started coughing, and there was no milk to cure the pain.

My mother pounded the millet three times a day, there was breakfast, lunch and dinner. We prepared bāsi, ʿaiš and couscous with the millet. Millet was eaten three times a day, but all of it was not a lot of millet, for we had milk. Today we pound the millet only once a day, in the afternoon.

When I was young, I worked a lot, fetched water from the well, watered the cows, cultivated the fields in order to get my millet, gathered grains from the trees, pounded millet, I am a sūdān woman. The work of watering was during the dry season, then we were near Achram. It was up to us, the women to do that work, we watered a lot. We watered the cattle, the goats and sheep, the donkeys, we pounded the millet, we cooked, prepared the couscous, herded the goats if there was no shepherd, all that work we did in one single day. For sure, I was a nānmiyye [tent-slave woman]. The times I worked like that are long ago, I worked until I got faint, I have sons and daughters to do that work now. All that work I did for Allah.

Author/Research Assistant: When did you marry? [M'Barke ignores the question]

Author/Research Assistant: [louder, as M'Barke was hard of hearing] When did you marry? [Now most people around start giggling, this is when M'Barke gets angry]

M'Barke: When did I marry? It takes a long time you ask too much. What will that be about? You don't know and I don't know. You are impolite. You ask for things that nobody ever asks for. I told you I am mad, I just know ten and ten. And you will get headaches of asking all your questions. You [two, author and research assistant] are young, I told you, you are young. The youth has its time. You now are writing, and I don't know what you are writing. The young women stay with their parents until they marry, or they get a child without marrying. I am tired of telling, my tongue is tired, I told everything I know.

[Once M'Barke had denounced our failure to meet the very special conditions of respect applying to slave women, our awkward silence made the situation gradually ease off. The peculiar hierarchy of two young men intrusively asking questions of an old woman considering herself deserving of more respect, but not disposing of the means to achieve this position in discourse, was re-established.]

My first child was born during the drought when the people had nothing to wear [1942-43]. One of my sons is in Nouadhibou, he is a mason, until some years ago he always sent some money to me, but that has stopped nowadays.

All other children keep here all the time. We have our fields around here. We have fields behind dams and also behind the small dams [constructed two years ago by the project]. We have been here for a long time, but in the time we cultivated the fields with our masters, the fields were not here. The fields here in Khouba were initiated by us, we were three [sūdān] families. Only later all the others came here to join us, they came one by one. There have been people from the Lʿaweysyāt who had come here to cultivate fields, some from the Idewāš and the Tāgāṭ too. But the Tmoddek always destroyed these fields [the dams]. All this was only done by the sūdān of the Tāgāṭ and the Idewāš. We will stay here now. Every time one of them comes to make a field, we will send him back and destroy his field. We will stay here forever. The people you see here already have a well [constructed by an NGO]. We came here in the time the old man who just went away was still young [a man of about 60-70 years, who just had withdrawn from the conversation]. In that time, the only problem here was that of water. There was no water here, only thirst. Every day we had to make long walks with the donkeys, to fetch water from Djonâba. It was us who proposed the well here, and Ahmed [a Tmoddek zwāya], he works in Nouakchott, he got the well for us. He is an important person and works in an institute. We want to have a big village here, we want to become a centre. The well isn't carrying much water, it should be deepened.

We don't have any sheep or goats, some of the people here have one or two, these often are mniḥa [a loan in animals restricted to the usufruct] by zwāya people. We'd rather like to have goats, but we lack the means to acquire them, you will help us. If we have a good harvest, we get more millet than necessary for eating. Then we can buy animals. This is possible, but it is not my concern.

Znāga

Valha

Valha is a woman of znāga origin born around 1960. Until some years ago, she lived in a highly mobile camp specialised in the rearing of goats and sheep on the Tagant. This camp experienced slow but continuous decay through the ongoing drought conditions, which degraded the pastoral resources. Valha now lives alone with her very old father and her twelve-year-old son in S. She mainly lives off the money her husband, working as petty trader and night watchman in Nouadhibou, sends to her. She runs some petty trading activities and is engaged in some of the economic activities of the local women's co-operative. In addition she cultivates a small garden where she grows vegetables for her own consumption and sometimes for sale.

Valha: I was born in a place near Kiffa in a region named Saba, it was in a camp. I don't have any sisters, but four brothers. My mother died early, when I had reached the age of about twelve years. My father is still living, he is very old now, and stays with me in my house.

In my youth I had a lot of duties, I fetched water for my family with the

donkeys, pounded millet, went to the Qur'ān school, spun wool, tanned hides. The wool was spun only for ourselves, we made the tents out of the wool. To make a layer of woollen cloth, you have to take a wooden stick, one just like a pen, and turn it in your fingers to make a yarn out of the wool that you twist with the other hand's fingers. Before you can start to spin the yarn, you have to beat the wool with some wooden sticks. Spinning is done by several women at a time. During one day, a woman can spin between three and five rolls of yarn, each weighing about one kilo. To weave a layer of woollen tent cloth of ten meters [50 cm wide], you have to use about 7 kilos of yarn. The weaving was done by a weaver and paid for. The women just spun the yarn.

Fetching water was sometimes easy, sometimes tiring. It depended on the camp being near to or distant from a well. The camp moved from one place to another, sometimes it did so after ten days, or just after one night, and sometimes it only moved once a month. At the age of seven I started pounding millet. My mother was a bit lazy, she then stopped preparing meals. Every day I pounded two kilos of millet, it took me two to three hours of work, afterwards I prepared the couscous. My mother spun wool and tanned hides, she also went to the market places in Tidjikja and Moudjéria to sell goats and buy clothes, millet, and tea. No, it wasn't my father who sold the animals, I think he never was good at commerce, he didn't know the prices or didn't know the places to go to for trading.

I don't remember exactly when I attended Qur'ān school, I remember well how once the master beat me, because I didn't learn my lesson. I finished two parts of the Qur'ān [two out of sixty ḥizb]. Today I can read, but I don't write. At the time I was very interested in the [Qur'ān] school, but I had a lot of work to do. It was my father who encouraged me to go there, but my mother opposed him, she thought it would prevent me from drinking enough milk to grow fat.[23] Today getting big is no longer important for young girls, but then it was an obligation. Now I can read, but I don't write. I haven't gone far in my studies.

My father was always out with the animals, led them to pasture, milked them. He did this work together with his sons. We had about 200 goats and sheep, sometimes the herd grew in numbers, sometimes it diminished. I heard my father tell he had once cultivated fields, but I never saw him doing that work.

Previous to the big drought in 1969 we had 400 goats and sheep, of which only 30 sheep and 60 goats remained one year later. 1970 was a good year and we gained 100 new animals. With these 200 animals we left the Tagant in 1971 for the south, it was the first time we left the Tagant. That year my mother was already dead. She never left the Tagant. There was no fodder to be found there in that year. We stayed five months near Barkéwol before returning to the Tagant. Some years later we stopped going back to the Tagant and kept in the Aftout, for it made no sense to go up the Tagant when we knew it hadn't rained there. In 1986 we went further south than Barkéwol, we went to Sélibabi [most southern town of Mauritania] to find pasture for the animals.

Our camp was on the Tagant, we are people of the Tagant. We used to make

long migrations from the Oued el Abiod[24] on the Tagant to the Assaba. The number of tents in the camp always changed. It happened that there were up to twenty tents, but often there were between eight and ten. There were just these tents, all the people there were my parents, they were my mother's sisters.

It happened that we had sūdān with our camp. This was during the dry season. It was always the same two families of ḥarāṭīn who came with us, in order to fetch water and pound millet for the whole camp. They came from the south and were not of our tribe. They were just looking for work. We paid them according to the amount of millet pounded, for example one mūd of millet per day was paid with 1,000 UM per month. Fetching water was included in this salary. The ḥarāṭīn families were big, and all of them pounded millet, very tiring work if you do it the whole day. We were between five and six tents in the camp during that time, otherwise two families of ḥarāṭīn wouldn't have been enough to do all that work of pounding and fetching water. This arrangement started when we met the sūdān families on our way to the south in the beginning of the hot, dry season. They always came to the same well near Foum Gleita where we met. The sūdān didn't move around as we did, they either cultivated their fields or kept close to the well. This arrangement with the sūdān families started in about 1980.

I got married at the age of fifteen, it was the son of my father's brother [wuld ʿamm, patrilineal cousin]. He came from Nouadhibou on that occasion, where he already was engaged in commerce. They didn't ask me, I was still small at the time. After the marriage I kept in the camp with my parents, and he went back to Nouadhibou and sent money. I never left the tent of my parents, for my husband didn't want me to live with his father's tent. He was in discord with his father, because of the second marriage the father had entered into with a woman my husband disapproved of. His father came here regularly, once a year he visited me, in order to get some money and I gave it to him. You always give money to the parents, even if they are not poor. A short time ago he came here with his wife, on that occasion he died. Later his wife came again, and I gave her money too.

I came here to Achram in 1988. My father was ill and we looked for a treatment here in the health station. Later he didn't want to return to the camp, he felt too old to move around all the time. So we stayed here. By that time two of my brothers had already left our camp. In 1970 the first of my brothers left and went to town, the second followed him in 1984. Today only one of my brothers is still herding animals. Two of them now are traders and one is a fisherman. When I left the camp and came here in 1988, there were only three tents left with the camp. I took 40-50 goats and sheep with me. I lost nearly all these animals during the drought in 1992. Today I have 12 goats again. It is a long time ago, we distributed our father's herd among us. Normally this happened with the marriage. The father decided on the share each child was given on that occasion.

My husband was in Achram already from 1983 on. He was engaged in trade

here. But in 1993 his commerce worsened and he left again for Nouadhibou. After one year he came back for two months, then he left again. He sends money regularly, about every two months. He also sends me cassettes, so I can get news from him. All this he sends me by people we know well.

The time I lived in the camp I liked being there. Nowadays I know life in the village. Before I just knew life in a camp and couldn't imagine what life in a village was like. Today I live well here. I wouldn't return to the camp nowadays. Once, a long time ago, my husband asked me to accompany him to Nouadhibou, but I refused. I have never been there, and I don't know the city. I've heard life is difficult there: the food is very expensive and a lot of poor people come and beg for money or food. But actually I'm thinking about moving there again . . . Here I am running a small shop. All the merchandise is with me in my house. I buy everything I sell from a trader in Achram, he gives me the merchandise on credit. When I get money sent by my husband, I go to his shop and pay my debts. The profit I make out of trading is just enough to buy something to eat. I don't want to get more out of it. I also work in the shop of the women's co-operative. This happens about once a year. The last time it was my turn, I worked for one month in the shop and my share of the profit was 10,000 UM. I never worked in the fields, I have a small garden to cultivate vegetables for my family and for sale. Last year I sold for 2,000 UM, but this year I stopped selling, as I didn't want to. This year I grew tomatoes, onions and carrots.

Bīẓān

Tourad

As a school teacher Tourad is one of the major intellectuals of the region. He went through what can now be considered a classical career in the public sector. Although born in a still predominantly nomadic Mauritania, he spent nearly his whole life in towns and villages. Having been educated almost exclusively in French, he now mainly teaches Arabic to his pupils. While in the early 1970s he adhered to the leftist movements in Mauritania, he later converted to what he calls "tribal politics". As a son of one of the region's most famous religious learned men, he is of noble origin. With regard to this last point, however, the situation is in fact somewhat complex. The father successively entered into several marriages, and Tourad was born of his father's late liaison with a ḥarṭāniyya, a freed slave woman. His mother in those days was adored for her beauty, and married several times as well. Today she and her present husband, a ḥarṭāni, live together with Tourad and his family. Having to care for his mother, Tourad, is constantly forced to confront his split descent in daily life.

Tourad: I was born in D. in a camp . . . on a hill, but I have lived my whole life in the city. I was born in a camp where my mother was, but my father was in town. It was in 1954 and I never went to live in the bush. In 1969 I went to the collège in T., I was fifteen at the time, until 1971 I was a pupil there. With the national

strike [of the leftist students movement] that year, I was expelled from school, as all participants in the strike were. That marked the end of my formal studies and in the beginning of 1972 I was back in [his natal town].

The strike had two objectives, first we wanted a rise in the state's scholarships and that all pupils should be boarders, i.e. should live in the school's dormitory. Second there were objectives related to the MND [Mouvement National Démocratique] that concerned the nation. The pupils everywhere represented the spearhead of the movement. We wanted an Arabisation of the schools and a higher quality of education. I for example, I didn't learn Arabic at school, in T. we only had French teachers, and there was only one hour of Arabic a day. Thus we only had five to six hours of Arabic a week, all the rest was in French. The movement demanded that the French teachers be sent back home, we wanted a real Arabisation, to make Arabic the official language in the primary and secondary schools. Therefore we exerted pressure on the government and tried to convince the population of our goals.

At that time there was a dialogue between the leaders of the movement [MND] and the government, it was Mariam Daddah, the president's wife, who built up serious contacts to some young leaders of the movement. This resulted in the liaison between the government and the movement that split the latter. It took eight to nine months to take place and finally there was a majority within the movement to join Ould Daddah [Mokhtar Ould Daddah, Mauritania's first president after independence]. It was said the party should be exploited for the sake of the country, but in reality the people have been corrupted. There still are these two [political] factions nowadays. Those who were with Ould Daddah are closely tied to Morocco, the former minority now is with the UFD [main opposition party, Union des Forces Démocratiques]. Finally there is a third fraction, composed of people like me, who left politics. I left politics in 1974, ever since I have been affiliated to local politics, tribal politics. . . .

After spending some time in [towns] B. and C. I went to Nouakchott to take an exam[25]. I became a teacher. The first two years I was in towns in the interior and near the river [Senegal], during this time I acquired the Arabic certificate. Ever since I have been Arabic teacher, I am bilingual. Most of the time I teach Arabic. Until some years ago I was transferred to a lot of places, mainly on the Tagant. Every two to three years I went to a new place. Bilingual teachers were in great demand, because with them you can economise by not having to employ two teachers, a French speaking and an Arabic speaking one. . . .

Author: Did you never live under a tent?

Tourad: In my youth I never lived under a tent. But since I have been living here in Achram, I regularly go out to the bush during winter. We spend four to five months under the tent. We take some cows and goats with us. I have started this habit since I have had my own family, since I married a second time in 1982. You have to know, in the bush you can save a lot of money! There are a lot of advantages in being there, for you can avoid many of the problems you have in town. There is not the problem of bread, as there is no bread there, there is much less the problem of meat, because sometimes there is meat to buy and

sometimes not, also you won't buy all these little things for the children, etc. All this saves an awful lot of money. How long we stay out there is defined by the amount of rain. One therefore could say our life is divided into two parts. But our life is not that of most people here, I think it even is an exception that a family lives like that. Normally you will find those people who always live in the town and those people always living in the bush. In order to be able to switch between the two modes you have to have animals. Those without animals can't live like that.

Research assistant: [present in the interview held in French] But there are also people living out in the bush in order to cultivate!

Tourad: That is the bush of the cultivators! We are not like that, the people here make the bush of the fields without having animals, that's feasible. It's even widespread, as all people here are cultivators.

Author: But you are solely engaged in animals?

Tourad: We only are engaged in animals, most commonly we do not exploit the fields. We have other people, we have parents who care for the fields, so the problem is not imposed on us. Whenever the winter season is coming, we go off to the bush and leave the question of the fields to our family. It's my mother who is always here, she occupies herself with the fields. She does this work on her own. If there is a profit with the millet, I will take a part of the millet and she will too. In fact, she worked in order to get millet, and it is my field she works on as well, the land is my property. Thus it is quite usual that she will give me a part of the harvest. . . .

Author: Your father, did he live under the tent?

Tourad: Yes, he lived under the tent for a long time, he lived there until he reached the age of thirty or forty years. Until he became qāḍi [an official qāḍi paid by the state] in A., he had always lived in this region. Until some time ago he had everything, sheep, goats, even camels, houses, date palms, everything. But all these things were gone before he died. First there was the drought, that decimated the animals, then successively the problems began. The houses were sold, the palm-trees too, and so on, until there remained nothing. I got nothing from his estate, there was not a sou left when he died [in 1971, after ten years of retirement from his office]. But for us Muslims this is good, a truly religious man often does not leave material goods.

Author: And in your youth you didn't herd the animals of your father?

Tourad: No, no, it was the time of slavery, of course! There were women and men to care for the animals in those times, this was not the job of the big chiefs.

Author: And do you remember any number of slaves with your father?

Tourad: At that time I had hardly come to exist, I was a child, I knew nothing of it, I didn't occupy myself with it. There are people who do the work, people who stay with my father in his family, they do everything, there are the ones who take care of the camels, others take care of the cows and so on. All that relates to these people didn't interest me. Why should I care about them? Care about the fate of people occupied with herding animals that don't exist anymore? These

people don't exist anymore and neither do these animals, the father [Tourad's father] doesn't exist anymore, so all this is of no interest.

Youba

Youba is a son of one of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar's brothers, who being themselves of noble origin by father *and* mother, in the first decades of French colonisation had opposed their ḥarṭāniyya-born brother's ambitions towards the emirate (cf. p. 105-108). Youba, equally well born by a ḥarṭāniyya, was less lucky than the famous ʿamīr. Today he is not with the rich and influential people of noble origin, but lives, after returning from a long cycle of wage labour migration, in simple circumstances amidst the sūdān in A., one of the villages inhabited almost exclusively by sūdān.

Youba: I was born in M. in 1949. My mother, an . . . was there because her mother was from M. and the mother's husband . . . was already dead at that time. My father here is from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. He married my mother here, I was the only one to be born in M., all my other brothers and sisters were born here. Today only we children, like my brothers and me remain. Father and mother are dead.

At the age of seven I went to school. I passed the CFD and went up to the fourth class. Then I left school, and went to Nouakchott and started working there. After some years there I came back here. Ever since I am here, I have been in this village, I built this house, I built some dams, I cultivate this soil, that's my occupation.

At the age of seven there were about 16 tents in my father's camp. During the rainy season we were on the Tagant, wandering around Daber, Kehmeit, Bourraga and Achram [a second Achram on the Tagant]. During the dry season we were down in the Aftout, most often the camps then were near Garaouel [a permanent source]. All tents in the camp were of ḥassān, there were no maʿalimīn and no zwāya, but there were servants.[26]

Author: So did you count the servants within the 16 tents you mentioned?

Youba: Yes I did, one counts the tents of the servants, these are tents, there are people living in there, one counts them.[27]

Author: Yes, sometimes there are people who don't count them, who tell that they are just one family, together with their servants.

Youba: They are just a family as everybody's. Look, if a servant has houses here, and if you then start to count those houses, then do you count the servant's houses or not?

The servants pounded the millet and they also fetched the water from the wells or sources. They did this work with the help of donkeys. At this time, the camps were always near the water places, they did all the work. They also herded my father's animals. He had two herds of goats and sheep. Each one with more than 200 animals, most of them were sheep, both black sheep and white sheep. These herds were herded by two servants. They were not paid, they were ours. My father had about 120 cows, too, and 6 horses and 4 or

5 camels, all of them males, they were just for riding. These herds were not much work, even milking wasn't, as during the rainy season [major lactation period] many of the females were given as mniḥa[28] to poor people. There were also ḥubs[29], not many, only with a few people. All this is finished nowadays. All these loans were for the poor people. You have to know them before giving a loan, and if you don't, you can ask somebody who knows about them. He will tell you everything.

Our family had four servants and four women. Each of them being together with a woman had a tent of his own. There were three such tents with us. In the whole camp there were five tents with servants. The ḥassān had thirteen tents. There were ḥassān without servants as well, and sometimes our servants worked for them too. Some of the ḥassān were poor, some only had two or three cows, and a few goats and sheep, say 30-40. About five families had nothing at all, another five were modestly poor, with only few animals, the rest were better off.

I passed my time at school in A. They had a kitchen and a house where the children attending school lived and could eat. School lasted from October till June. My father came to visit me and give me some money. I was his only son to go to school, I had brothers bigger than me, but they didn't go to school. There are also brothers of my mother, and sisters too. At that time somebody who had many animals didn't like to send his children to school. The one who took me to school was the ʿamīr, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar [it was the ʿamīr's duty to recruit the children for school]. He came to my father to ask for me, then my father gave me to him. He didn't come a second time, my father was a brother of Abderrahmane. My brothers kept beneath the tent all the time, they did not attend the school run by the state, they had their education with some zwāya. They learnt one quarter or half of the Qurʾān. They also rode camels and horses, they did nothing but ride them, they never herded animals. There were other people to do that, one of them is called Dedoud, another Messaoud, another Ahmed, and one Laghlave. This is the one who is still here [with me].

My father always had these big herds, from time to time he sold some animals to somebody who took them to Senegal in order to sell them there and bring back tea, cloth and clothes. In those times these transactions were profitable. In the past money wasn't like it is today, in former times you could buy a cow for only one Ougiya [UM].[30] We didn't suffer shortage, we had a good life. The first time we experienced shortage was 20 years ago, it was during the big drought [1969]. Out of all the animals only 100 goats and sheep remained, together with four cows, one horse and one camel. They all died. We stayed here in the Aftout throughout the whole year. Yes, there were people moving to the south in quest of pasture, and there were those staying here. At that time we didn't have anything to move with, with those animals remaining we couldn't move any more. My father was always here, in the Aftout and on the Tagant, he never left this area. He has a lot of dams here and on the Tagant, the animals always found pasture around here. The only reason why all the animals died was the drought, the animals got diseases and died. There are a lot of diseases . . . After the

drought we increased cultivating the fields. So we found a lot of millet. Everybody did so, the shepherds too, they now are cultivators. My father died much later, in 1979.

Author: So when did you leave for Nouakchott?

Youba: The time I left, Nouakchott still was very small, my mother was married by another man . . . [a famous journalist at radio Mauritania, member of another ḥassān tribe], so I started a training at the radio in 1962. I left the job after eight months, there was no remuneration with it and no hope that my situation there would change. In 1963 I joined the army, we earned 300 UM per month, but we got food and accommodation for free. Two years and three months later I left and started work as timekeeper with SACER, the company building the road between Nouakchott and Rosso. Later I did another seven months with the SNIM in Nouakchott, until Haidalla took their house.[31] This happened about 1980 or 1981, then I came here. In fact I didn't spend the years of the drought here. Everything I know about the drought comes from my brothers. They told me what happened.

In the city I found some money, but not much. Here it is better, much better, one can find much more. There one finds nothing, there is nothing, there are a lot of bandits around there nowadays. They don't get work, they just steal, they eat the theft. Here everything is calm. If somebody is working he will be better off here than in Nouakchott. You know, all these Mauritanians that were in Dakar, ever since they returned, there is nothing left to get in Nouakchott. Before it was always possible to get something, this now has stopped completely.[32]

I have a lot of plots here, dams and small dams. There are six on the Tagant and seven or eight around here. All the plots we have are for our tent [ḫaima], the family of A.M., I own them together with my brothers, some of whom are in Nouakchott now. It happens that they come and cultivate here. We own a quarter of the A. dam, which measures about 1,000 metres width to 1,000 metres length, eight mūd of seeds are needed to cultivate it, and the yield can be as much as 4-5,000 mūd.[33] And there still are other plots, Amriche, Aoudach, Asmaʿa, Jreif. Some of these are exclusively for our family. We normally lend plots from them [to people needing land for cultivation], Amriche for example is shared among thirty families cultivating there, and there are other plots like that. We are not paid for lending them to all the people asking for them. The habit of lending plots in return for a part of the harvest is only practised by the Leġwāreb [a neighbouring zwāya tribe]. We don't do that, we just give. The Leġwāreb, if they lack the facilities to cultivate, they have to get somebody to do the work in their place. In order to do so, they provide him with the necessary seeds, and he will later share the harvest with them.

My harvests usually are between 200 and 300 mūd, it's just enough to eat of during the year. I can't afford to buy more animals, although I would like to. I have two sheep and two goats. My eldest son, who is now seventeen, doesn't cultivate with me, he is in Nouakchott.

Exploring the Change

The Paradox of Manumission

The biographic narratives reveal the image of a highly diversified, often contradictory social landscape, where status positions are achieved and maintained by making use of various sets of social practices and values. With regard to the slaves struggling for enhanced autonomy and to gain social recognition, the fundamental difference, as explored by Claude Meillassoux (1986: 11), between the individual condition a slave experiences and his estate is obvious. The game of ending slavery from the slave's perspective is about successively cementing practised condition into statuary definition (cf. Glassman 1991: 289).[34] This is a paradoxical project as such, because the condition always symbolises the individual's relationship to the slave estate, even if this might be vanishing over time. This ambivalence, which is fundamental to any slave condition, reveals that the whole process of social ascension is precarious for slaves. It is only possible through the tacit consent of all people involved, and therefore is always open to reversal. In this regard, it is true, there can be no real freeing of slaves, manumission merely represents a new condition constructed on the foundations of the slave estate (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 121f.). The practice of a public, focused taboo as regards the former slave's origin that is at the core of either legalised or self-attained manumission, finds itself subverted by the persistent knowledge of the event, i.e. the true origin. The notion of ḥarāṭīn, which has come to mean "manumitted slave" in the Mauritanian context, is the best evidence of this (cf. p. 39). Although the former slave receives the legal rights of a free man, the reference to his former estate, his slave origin, is a public matter. Claude Meillassoux is perfectly right when stating that real freeing of slaves needs a complete anonymity, the complete deletion of the slave's past and origin:

> Parmi les populations que j'ai étudiées, les véritables affranchis, c'est-à-dire les esclaves ayant récupéré toutes les prérogatives et l'honneur des francs, on ne peut les nommer, ne même admettre qu'on les connaît comme tels, sans leur faire perdre aussitôt le bénéfice de la franchise dont l'objet est précisément d'effacer à jamais le stigmate originel de la capture ou de la naissance servile. De telles familles existent. (Meillassoux 1986: 122)

The fatal determination which the slave estate entails is evident. To one of slave descent, any social status will in effect be a slave's condition. The act of manumission, the legal attainment of a free man's rights bears a fatal double bind: without knowledge about the personal dependency, the slave estate, there can be no such socially powerful act as manumission. Manumission thus always manifests what it is supposed to end, the knowledge and control of origins, and the power of those possessing it. Of course, knowledge of origins as a matter of power and control will vanish in time, or rather in the course of generations, but as long as social categories such as ḥarāṭīn do

prevail, there is only a shift from specific, personalised to abstract, social knowledge of descent. Nevertheless today's struggle for social ascension and integration is real and ongoing, thus some ways out of the impasse have to develop. Neither demographic change nor the instruments of legal manumission can keep up to the pace set by social change (cf. chapter eight).

As much as the fundamental category of estate is needed to apprehend the circularities of slavery and manumission, any attempt at understanding the institution whilst neglecting the dynamics of the slave's condition must fail. Being a slave follows the logic of a perverted dialectic of estate and condition. There can be no slave estate (and use of slaves) if in practice the humanity of the slave were not recognised, i.e. if there were not a slave's condition partially neglecting the inhuman logic of the estate, associating the slave with a legal commodity (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 9f.; Finley 1968: 308). This condition, on the contrary, could not be upheld without the master's permanent option to withdraw from practising condition and to apply estate. This is only one aspect of the condition-estate relationship, one which does not consider temporal and spatial evolution. Maintaining slavery and thus the slave estate requires the maintenance of the hegemony of the social system. The initial violence of the slave appropriation has to be transformed into structures of domination, preserving the slave estate through the social control of space in time.

Most probably the change in the topology of social dependence during this century has been the most determining threat to slavery. Colonisation ended the territorial and political hegemony of the masters and thus called into question the founding element of the structural violence needed to maintain the slave estate. If a slave had the option to go where nobody knew him, then unlike manumission truly liberation took place. This logic provided the decisive incentive for some West African slave populations to leave their masters shortly after colonisation had become effective (cf. Klein 1988 and 1993c, Roberts 1988; Cooper 1979: 118).[35] Besides this fundamental, abrupt end to the slave estate, change was induced on a small scale level. Colonial forces, especially in Mauritania, were far from exercising an evenly distributed control of the local territory. Far more their power ripped strategic patches of territory out of the indigenous people's control. Thus the master's web of social control was infected by white patches of an anomic type, inflicted by the colonists. It was first in the few nuclei of modern (colonial) urban areas where the control of the other's origin failed to work properly, due to the lack of reliable references induced by increasing anonymity. The process would not have been possible, however, without offering a material basis the new existence could be based on. Wage labour performed this function (cf. Roberts 1988).[36] With these patches becoming more and more numerous and consolidated, leaving the territory of slavery did not even have to be permanent. Shifting between the different spheres of social hegemony became possible, with a new, free-type status achieved in the new social context, and the individual backed with the means to defend it even on

hostile ground. The pertinence of this new topology of dependency is the real threat to slavery, for it challenges its framework, or in the terms proposed by Patterson, its outer dialectic:

> There is an inner dialectic, by which the basic forces of slavery are revealed: master against slave; power against powerlessness; alienation against disalienation; social death against social life; honour against dishonour. This inner dialectic, however, works itself out as part of a wider, outer dialectic: that of the dynamics of the relationship between slavery, seen as a single process, and the total complex of processes which we call society or the social formation. It is this outer dialectic which, in the last analysis, determines the outcome of the struggle within the inner dialectic. It determines, for example, whether master or slave wins; whether powerlessness is what it appears to be or something else. (Patterson 1979: 47)

In the internal logic of the slave estate, there has never been space for systematic counter-power from the slaves. Although there always was slave resistance, the better conditions achievable for the slave depended on the master's grace. Manumission thus, according to Islamic jurisprudence, was conceived as "a pious act that was good for the master's soul" (Patterson 1982: 227). Honour in the unchallenged master-slave relation thus always has to be on the master's side.[37] The slave as the "social outsider" (Finley 1968: 308) is by no means considered to contest the master's honour, hence this fact has to be enacted in interaction in order to constantly reproduce the structures of social representation. The case has strong analogies to the play of honour and shame in the North African Kabyle society as instructively described by Pierre Bourdieu. This play is a deeply relational one and to step out of the relation, i.e. end it by force, is to stop performing honourably, hence to dishonour oneself. Handling insults by a social outsider under these circumstances is a tricky matter, for one who is honourable has to ignore any actions an *amahbul*, an impudent, shameless man undertakes – annoying as they may be. Responding publicly would mean the noble's acknowledging an inferior's ability to insult him, hence making responsible for his action someone conceived as principally irresponsible for his own behaviour. To solve conflict, or better to get rid of harassment, the noble can appeal for mediation by a third party, e.g. by a relative of the *amahbul* (cf. Bourdieu 1972: 15ff.). The most important aspect of behaving honourably in the Kabyle society thus is to maintain the public fiction of the non-provocative character of any *amahbul* action, to maintain as distinct the spheres of social life.

Many aspects of this interplay between deviant and honourable behaviour can be traced within the master-slave relation. The production of honour for the master depends on the reproduction of the social dichotomy of honour and ignorance, of master and slave behaviour. This relation is found at the basis of the fictive paternalistic ties between the two parties, which define the

slave as a legal minor, and the master as being responsible for him (cf. Ould Cheikh 1993: 182). To a considerable extent this fiction works. The slave has no honour to lose when offending anybody, he thus can even enact his social opposition to the master by speaking of the unspeakable, e.g. publicly referring to matters of sexuality (cf. Tauzin 1989b). Conflict with another party raised by a slave is handled much like those involving an *amahbul*. The slave, the legal minor, is irresponsible, hence his master, obliged to watch the slave, has to compensate for the damage. This legal rule, in fact very much resembling an owner's responsibility for damage inflicted by his livestock, could be made work to the advantage of slaves. There are several narratives, especially from Mauritanian colonial administrators, that slaves adopted the habit of changing masters by cutting or biting off a piece of their hoped-for new master's ear. Their old masters thus were obliged to hand over the slave in compensation to the mutilated individual.[38] The slave's non-honour, hence the non-responsibility of his behaviour is most clearly demonstrated here; the mutilated bīẓān is not supposed to inflict any punishment on the slave who has injured him, but is to be given justice by the slave master (cf. Ould Mohamed 1988: 57).[39] This interplay of honour and shame could be juggled successfully, as long as the triangulation of the relations between nobles and slaves worked out. But the slave is an outsider of a different kind than the *amahbul*. While the latter will always remain part of the society, this is not necessarily the case for the slave, nor is it always necessarily his wish.

A slave running away from his master explodes the paternalistic framework which at this very moment is revealed to depend on the master's ability to watch his slave. It is not the master's individual honour the fleeing slave thus challenges, as he can be compared to animals getting lost, but he does threaten the slave society's paternalistic ideology. Individually, a master could ignore a slave's flight despite the economic loss this might entail, but such a decision hardly results from individual reasoning. The masters' reactions have to meet the exigencies of coping with the undermining of slave control resulting from the slave's ultimate disobedience. Dealing with deviant behaviour such as slave flight is not a matter that produces honour, it is simply beyond the fictive social ties of paternalism and hence beyond the spheres of honour. Getting a slave back means re-entering the grounds of honour and re-establishing the master-slave relationship which is the precondition for the production of symbolic goods like honour. Nevertheless, catching an escaped slave and forcing him back ultimately dismantles the relations of power poorly veiled by the paternalistic practices following the initial violence of slave raid and trade. Slave punishments too were designed to maintain the system in moments of latent crisis of the masters' hegemony. Individual loss experienced by the masters through the mutilation or killing of slaves was not enough to enable slaves to publicly demonstrate some sort of power. There are reports of slaves being mistreated, and most brutal punishments were inflicted on slaves who had tried to escape. One such practice is reported by an old slave recaptured after an attempt at flight from

his host Rgaybāt tribe. Back with his masters, he was mounted on a camel not watered for a long time, and his legs bound together beneath the animal. The camel was watered, and its expanding belly dislocated the slave man's hip joints, hence disabling him for the rest of his life (cf. Caratini 1989: 102).[40]

Whenever the outer dialectics made the master-slave relation change to a degree that meant that masters had less power to threaten fleeing or otherwise disobedient slaves, the slaves' power in bargaining about their condition grew considerably. This is why, though there was no consistent colonial anti-slavery policy (in some regards, colonial policy was indeed reactionary),[41] colonisation brought a new pace to changes in slave conditions. While during colonial conquest many French commanders had behaved much like indigenous conquerors,[42] colonial administrators following them frequently developed a taste for enmeshing themselves in the game of local tribal politics (cf. Féral 1993). In the eyes of the colonised this made the new rulers appear to be nothing but new masters superimposed on the old ones during the initial years of colonisation. They also introduced a new "master's lifestyle" – but not necessarily one more desirable for the dependents. This new style can be seen at its most imaginative in the term "esclave du commandant". Such was the common designation for people living in the "villages de liberté", installed by the French during their conquest of the western Sudan as early as 1849 to attract dependent people, and build up an unfree labour-force (cf. De Chassey 1984: 92; Ould Cheikh 1993: 187).[43] More significant to the change in master-slave relations were the French military posts, introducing a new element into the rather limited bīẓān urban sector, and hence rapidly restructuring the topography of urban settlements (cf. Ruf 1995: 138f.). These urban nuclei provided new patterns of social life, which, based largely on wage labour, provided slaves with a real alternative to their previous state of life, or at least the model of one.[44]

Under these circumstances masters had to cope with a double contestation of their power. Colonisation called into question both the slave condition and the foundations of the slave estate. While coercion as a medium of maintaining the master-slave relation on the individual level might have worked for a long time due to the limited extent of colonial power, it broke down as a general means of upholding slavery, once many slaves lived in areas where it was relatively easy to withdraw from the direct control of their masters, an opportunity obviously used in the Tagant region (going by the complaints of local notables; cf. note 35, this chapter) and the south-western zones of the colony (cf. De Chassey 1984: 93f.). As only a limited number of slaves absconded, those continuing to stay near their masters, or at least maintaining relations with them, probably had good reasons to do so. Economically, leaving meant taking considerable risks. Wage labour opportunities emerged in relevant numbers only after the independence of Mauritania. Until then the bulk of opportunities of working for money was located in the cities and the plantation sector of Senegal.[45] Seasonal migration patterns of both slaves and ḥarāṭīn give a hint that instead of an abrupt

interruption of ties with the masters, many preferred their slow and mutual change.[46] To comprehend this option, the discussion of the relations of honour between slave and master has to be taken up again.

While the slave was unable to challenge the master's honourable position within the master-slave relationship, the slave's existence was the precondition for unfolding the space for honour manifested in the distinct lifestyles of slaves and masters. A slave staying close to a master now became ever more a deliberate choice, and as a consequence slaves had the means to bargain about their condition. Symbolically maintained, the master-slave relation gradually transforms itself into an affair of mutual interest. Here it is the paternalistic ideology surrounding with slavery that provides a whole stock of representations, including a configuration where strong slaves confront weak masters but do not abandon the interplay of honour within the master-slave relationship. Involving the slave in the relationship, admitting him into a role as actor means acknowledging him some honour, recognising him socially. This practice marks the breakdown of a rigid distinction between master-slave relations on the one hand, and patron-client ties on the other (cf. Patterson 1979: 36). Increasing slave autonomy within the dominant ideological framework up to the point of being accorded manumission, i.e. a status transformed from that of slave, (ʿabd), into manumitted slave, (ḥarṭāni), is revealing in this regard. Although it might result from an inverted power relationship between slave and master, the act of manumission is able to maintain the fiction of the master as the dominant actor, the one providing the most honourable action. Direct submission is replaced by relations of patronage and guidance, walāʾ (cf. Patterson 1982: 241ff.). These relations can be enacted publicly to the honour of both, slave and master, whereas the struggles leading to status transformation are of no public concern, and no matter of honour.[47]

These tracks channelling changes in the master-slave relation enacted within the paternalist ideologies framework are one fundamental reason why the formerly uncertain practice of social taboo on social relations of dependence is condensing more and more into a real "culture of amnesia", creating a sort of mutual muteness aimed at respecting each others' honour.[48] Achieving such consent on keeping silence on matters of status, and especially relations between estate and condition, in fact means joining an accelerated process of subversive status transformation. To be sure, the step is gradual, for in private most will go on knowing about their own, and many others' slaves, but already the manner of speaking of these in public is changing, and the empathy of the interests involved is dwindling. It is much like a Mauritanian proverb, used by my research assistant, Khalifa Ould Kebab, to characterise the ambivalence in master-slave relationships in the face of the slave's flight: "Don't try to get back someone fallen into a torrent." There is no way to withhold a slave who has decided to leave; instead one must prevent any such decision, for otherwise one would also be swept away by the stream, i.e. experience another defeat. This of course is a ḥarṭāni's view. But it refers

clearly to the mutual character of the consensus on keeping public silence on the subject of former master-slave relationships. Again Khalifa Ould Kebab: "If for example you see a white family now paying some sūdān to work on their fields and they didn't do that before, this will mean that they don't have sūdān any longer, i.e. their sūdān aren't with them any longer. You know this, because otherwise they wouldn't have paid somebody for the work. If ever they have somebody to do this work for them without payment, they wouldn't choose to give away their money like that." Changing status, or rather changing the individual master-slave relationship, is not a public concern; it will always have to remain a private affair, for otherwise it would not work within the framework of honour. In the context of rural life and most close face-to-face relationships privacy in fact is a lure. Changing the master-slave relationship privately under such conditions does not mean that nobody will know what is going on, but that there will be an unspoken agreement not to allude to the subject publicly. Again it becomes evident that changing the slave condition is not the locus of collective action, but rather is a matter of individual bargaining on relations of power and honour.

Getting Free

When Badeyn left his adoptive bīẓān mother, he did so upon his individual decision, for he had no option of regaining his former condition of being treated like a free-born child. This surely was not the result of a changed attitude of his fictive bīẓān mother, to whom he still has an emotional attachment, and who cried about the fact Badeyn had learned of his origin. Neither was it a consequence of the adoptive mother's new husband behaving like a "bīẓān without colour", i.e. behaving "whiter" than most other bīẓān. It was rather due to the impasse *Badeyn* himself now had to face in local society. Individually his condition perhaps could have changed for the better with passing time and new constellations in the coming at home, but socially and in his own mind, he never would have had a chance to escape an existence as a mere slave child, having no legal, i.e. parental ties with his host family.[49] What else was there for an ambitious young man to do, than rely on what most probably is at the core of ḥarāṭīn identity, and what Ann McDougall (1988: 379) called the ḥarāṭīn "work ethic"? In fact, in most of my conversations with ḥarāṭīn work was a major topic, but then it was in many of the conversations with bīẓān as well. What differed was the emphasis laid on the subject and the work-related topics stressed (see chapter five).

Badeyn leaves his mother with virtually nothing in his hands – and nothing but uncertainty ahead. To go out and look for a job to rely on is an astonishing biographic pattern if evoked by a member of a society in which the corollary of social security first and foremost is achieved through family and affiliate networks. Neither were available to Badeyn. He had no parents to rely on (they all died in the epidemic when he was a small child), nor had he direct access to affiliates, e.g. closely associated members of his tribe, for he had to leave his masters, i.e. the supporters of his tribal affiliation, without

approval. Although this cannot be proven empirically, he presumably really had nothing else to rely on, than to sell his labour power to gain his – now independent – living. The self-made ḥarṭāni at this moment of personal history thus bears startling resemblance to the Marxian proletarian who is defined by being free both of means of production, and free to sell his labour power (cf. Marx [1867] 1983a: 182f.). The difference is that he had not been deprived of his property in means of production, for a slave never had this, but at best precarious rights of use over land and animals.

Of course, again I have to note, this case is at the margins of the master-slave relationship, but only in that it reveals the most extreme edge of what the basic configuration of a self-manumitted slave's condition is. Badeyn is well aware of his deprivation, he remarks that he was without any "arms" to support him when fired for the first time from his job as a mechanic at the local development project. Later, when the project was gradually closing down after the expatriate experts had left, again the question was raised of who of the 65 employees would have to leave first. Again he presented the image to me of being without "arms" in the project to help him (the šarīv[50] who once helped him to get a job had moved to another place a long time before). Already foreseeing my next question he reiterated that in this locality he was completely alone, for he had no family to rely on. Affiliate support was weak because he had married into a foreign tribe, thus lacking nearly any local support except for solidarity from a small ḥarāṭīn community among which there were many members of his own tribal origin. At the time I doubted that he would be among the first dismissed, for I knew him to be a well trained mechanic; but as often was the case, he was right, not me.

It was always work which determined Badeyn's life – for the good and the bad. Getting a particular job offered access to specific resources, among those the creation of new affiliations, thus reversing the pattern revealed in some bīẓān narratives (cf. Moustava's job in a Boghé shop and Youba's first job at Radio Mauritania). The first stage in the long and multi-faceted working life of Badeyn marked the break with all his former relations. Working as a washer in an army camp was wage labour without any allusion to traditional bonds. Away from his home area, Badeyn had time to grow out of his former condition, perhaps a prerequisite for his later return as a camel herdsman for a "friend of his", who in fact is one of the major bīẓān of Badeyn's tribe. Discussing the various aspects of different jobs was a never-ending topic with Badeyn, who turned out to be a sort of practical labour encyclopaedia. The narrative in fact represents only a part of his knowledge. Building a well in different soils, herding camels or goats, healing men and animals by traditional means, cultivating any sort of local plants, constructing clay houses, baking the bīẓān type of French baguette, or repairing a four-wheel-drive Mercedes, Badeyn had at least one answer to any kind of question, hardly any kind of work existed, apparently, he had not yet mastered.

The way in which the commitment and necessity to work is decisive in a ḥarṭāni's life becomes most evident in the history of Badeyn's first marriage.

Having had some good time working for the SO.NA.DE.R (Mauritania's national company for rural development) in his natal region, he married a slave woman. Problems arose when the company closed down its local operation and moved to Achram, some 60 km to the south (linked to the place by a, then partially very sandy, and hence difficult track of 100 km). Having both gained some experience on the job, and being in need of a new remunerated job, Badeyn decided to leave for Achram. By chance he found that a šarīv for whom he once had washed clothes was the leader of the project garage. Having one "arm" at the right time at the right place turned out to be helpful also for Badeyn. While on the job side, thanks to his self-elected, work-mediated affiliation with some bīẓān nobility he was lucky, this turned out to be fatal to his small, young family. After living for some years as a sort of monthly weekend commuter, he wanted to get his wife to move with him to his work-place, Achram. This most normal aspiration failed due to the woman's slave estate. It was not up to the woman's parents (whom Badeyn had asked first, thus enacting bīẓān customs to the full) to give consent to the project, but her masters, whom he had asked second. As long as she stayed close to her masters, Badeyn's wife could live under conditions much like those of formally manumitted ḥarāṭīn, but her masters' attitude changed when threatened by a slave willing to leave with her husband for a place 60 km as the crow flies south, and out of their tribal territory. Direct control of the slave, profit from work delegated to her, and control of her children, legally property of the masters, in this case would have been seriously weakened. And when the passing of a couple of years' time had not changed the masters' mind, Badeyn had to found a new family, marrying a true ḥarṭāniyya of the local Ahel Swayd Aḥmed tribe.

Getting free in Brahim's case reveals both similarities and contrasts to Badeyn's case. Brahim grew up in a slave family, thus he took on his mother's status and belonged to the mother's master. His father continued to belong to his own master. Neither of the zwāya masters were bad; they let the slaves marry and left them on their own much of the time (an attitude by no means shared by all bīẓān, as can be seen in the narrative of M'Barke). As his family was relatively well off, Brahim even had time for traditional education during summer. This is remarkable, for his father died as early as 1970, i.e. before Brahim began his learning. Later, after colonel Ould Haidalla's announcement of suppressing slavery, the master formally manumitted the whole family – on their request – by a written contract, and without claiming compensation.[51]

It is Brahim's mother, Zeyneb, who alters this image: things have not always been so harmonious, for her master's family was in need of slave labour for a long time, but above all female slave labour. In the course of her life Zeyneb managed step by step to change the scope of obligations towards the master. First, after marrying, she could limit work in the master's household to the summer season, while during the rainy season and winter, she cultivated with her family. In the summer the master's family was most in

need of support, because fetching water was hard work, with water-places often distant from a camp moving in quest of ever-rarer pastures. Milk at this time of the year also was running out, so that dishes prepared with millet became much more important to the pastoralists' diet, hence demanding much (female) work of pounding and preparation. Finally Zeyneb's personal involvement in the master's household work ended with her having daughters old enough to be sent to the master to replace her. Only then was she able to stay with her husband all year long in the adabay, the sedentary camp of the sūdān located near the fields, still contributing to the master's income by sharing the harvest with him.

The career of the slave men differed significantly: they left the master much earlier for such spurious reasons as "not being able to bear the work with the master any longer".[52] They were primarily engaged in cultivating the fields, and apart from sharing their harvest with the master, interest in *male slave labour* seems to have been low when compared to *female slave labour*. This might be specific to the case under discussion, for the master's herd obviously had already declined before the severe drought in 1969 decisively decimated its numbers, which in turn reduced the amount of predominantly male tasks of watering and milking animals, especially large animals. Therefore it can be argued that agricultural revenues had gained in importance to the master's household, even before the long drought challenged the region's pastoral production system. At any rate agriculture, together with the gathering of wild plants, was an important asset to the subsistence of the slaves themselves, and hence helped to keep the costs of slavery low. As a consequence of the decline of pastoral productivity, the master's son preferred work as an employee, a shop manager for one of the well-off members of his tribe, to reconstituting the father's herd. While the master's son left the rural area to work for a wage, Brahim's family continued and even increased their agro-pastoral activities – and continued to share their harvest with the master's family.[53] In addition Brahim, his father and his brothers had started doing paid work for some other bīẓān to their own benefit. Herding, following a widespread rule, was paid for with one goat every two months and ten days, and watering small stock and cattle was remunerated in animals as well. As these were respected as a slave's individual belongings (until the slave's death), these activities demonstrated the limitations of the slave men's commitment to the master's income. Times apparently were not too bad. The family, though lacking a father, was able to constitute some herds and hence some wealth by their own work. Brahim, the youngest of all of his mother's sons, was free to leave during summer for his Qurʾān studies.

Although there seems to have been no clearly defined rule about sharing external revenues with the master, to state that the masters never profited from their male slaves working on a wage labour or otherwise remunerated basis, would be to ignore the characteristics of the master-slave relationship. This is revealed in the passage concerned with those sūdān already working abroad. Should they come home, they were supposed to give something to

their master, but according to Zeyneb it didn't matter if they did not meet this exigency. Brahim in a way reinforces this impression when describing the flux and reflux of goods between his master and himself. The master provides merchandise like the darrāʿa, the traditional men's dress mentioned earlier, while the slave/former slave provides millet when he harvests; helps cultivating the master's fields, herding animals and in this case even negotiates assistance from the project for the construction of a small dam. Whereas the slave contributes to the master's undertakings by means of his labour power and its outcomes, in certain situations the latter provides goods acquired by market exchanges. In view of the different attitudes expressed by slaves with regard to sharing harvests and wage labour benefits or animal possession, however, another reason for this pattern can be advanced. The output of harvests is much easier to measure and control than individual property in money or animals.[54]

Throughout their lives, Brahim's family was engaged in increasing their independence from the master and his family. The first and major medium of performing autonomy was to increase spatial and symbolic segregation. The increasing affluence of sūdān to the adwaba (sedentary settlements of slaves and ḥarāṭīn) marked their at least seasonal physical separation from the master's family and camp. Residing sedentarily near the fields meant furthermore a lifestyle distinct from the master's. Although this difference manifested itself gradually, for both nomadic camps and adwaba in those days (some still now) lived under the same type of tents, bred animals and occasionally moved around, the ascriptive features associated with both camps and adwaba reveal a difference in the conception of these spheres of bīẓān and sūdān. The latter are immobile, always bound to their fields, while the former are mobile, and follow their animals' needs for good pasture. Getting out of the camp thus meant taking a part in shaping this dualistic representation of the sūdān as cultivators and of the bīẓān as pastoralists, despite the fact that many sūdān worked as dependent or hired herders and a number of poor bīẓān already to a considerable extent engaged in agriculture (cf. p. 267-270).[55]

While separation in space was a major medium of increasing independence in the case of Brahim's family, the aim was not to disrupt these ties, but rather to alter them gently. Their action fits most neatly into the concept of aspiring to enhancement of estate by means of a step-by-step improvement in their conditions (cf. Glassman 1991: 289). Therefore their strategy in terms of space is not to move out of the range of control of their master, as Badeyn did, but to move to a well-known place at its borders. However, Brahim's relative independence from his childhood on, is not to be misinterpreted as the family being independent of their master's will as a whole. Zeyneb's narrative reveals very clearly the hardships slave women had to face when trying to increase their independence. As the master already was a kind one, he let his woman slave marry "officially", i.e. she was allowed to enact some ceremony and he respected the marriage and accepted that it entailed some

change in the practice of slave labour.[56] Zeyneb's commitment to the master's household's work from this event on was limited to the dry hot season and she had the right to live together with her husband under her own tent, and hence to constitute a proper family residence effective at least for some parts of the year. It was a most important achievement to be able to live an honourable life, i.e. close to the ideal presented by the masters.[57] This arrangement, which also served to reduce the costs of maintaining a whole slave family throughout the year, could only be changed further in Zeyneb's interest by having her daughters replace her. Although Zeyneb's condition changed, her estate could not be improved. She was still personally in charge of providing the labour power claimed by the master. Nevertheless, this configuration marks a breaking point in the balance between slave condition and estate, for it now is the mother who mediates the master's access to her children. As a reminder, one of Zeyneb's major arguments why she stopped living with the master was the existence of her children: "I then stayed with my children, until today. We continued to work our fields. We had our work. I did not return to the master, why should I?". This type of downsizing control over the slave women's offspring via the formation of a nuclear family might have happened in earlier generations too, but with the installation of the segregated patterns of mobility, reinforced by an increased economic autonomy through cultivation and breeding of small stock, and on the other hand the decline of the master's economic resources, the slave families' potential to withdraw their children from the master's exigencies grew considerably.

The importance of not confusing slave condition and estate becomes evident with the incident accompanying the death of Brahim's father. Directly after he had died, the master appeared to get back the father's animals, part of the master's legal property, as he is the inheritor of his slave's belongings. There are different aspects to be considered in this action. The master might have been in a difficult economic situation forcing him to take this action, for Brahim's father died in 1970, i.e. directly after (perhaps in consequence of) the heavy drought. Had the master not been in severe need of reconstituting his own stock of animals, perhaps he would not have relied as heavily on his dead slave's animals. A second idea is less speculative. None of those concerned really wondered or complained about the master's intervention, for all declare it was his right to do so. There is no obligation of the father's master to sustain his male slave's family, because these are the property of the wife's master (cf. Abd el Wahed 1931: 297). Once the father had died, his master no longer had any sort of relation with this family. So if there ever was one, now there was then no longer any question of bothering about disturbed relations towards this slave family, nor of bothering about their survival in a difficult economic situation – this was the task of the slave wife's master.[58]

Treating a slave man merely as a slave, i.e. as a slave "who is not guarded" does not mean giving up the prerogatives resulting from the slave estate; they

are just postponed. Regression from condition to estate could be enacted at any time, e.g. in the case of the master in need or entering into conflict with his slave. The pursuit of this logic reveals another fundamental crux of any *benign slave condition*: it is individual up to the point that it depends on the very relation of a (living) master and a (living) slave. What else but the slave's death could better symbolise both the end of the slave's struggle for better conditions and the end of the master's obligation to meet these individual exigencies?[59] Thus acting as Brahim's father's master did did not offend anybody. This is why nobody bothers about the event, there is no respect to be expected for the dead non-person the slave is. Brahim's family was always aware of the threat resulting from the precarious legal situation their property was exposed to. Rather unusually for a pastoral society, Brahim claims that from his youth on, every member of the family had his own animals, marked by separate brands. This is nothing less than the attempt to construct a niche in the de-socialising framework provided by the denial of kinship, and thus legal personhood, to slaves. Even a marriage, concluded and publicly celebrated with the two masters' consent, does not imply any of the common social or legal rights free people attain by this contract (cf. Abd el Wahed 1931: 294-98; Meillassoux 1986: 128ff.). A slave marriage is not only bound to the masters' consent as its prerequisite (the masters replace the missing legal parents), but to its continuation. The due slave marriage is valid until revocation by one of the masters (see also the failure of Badeyn's first marriage). Herein lies the fundamental difference between marriage among free and unfree. For the former the first marriage is a means to step out of the parents' household and patrimony, i.e. to leave this sphere of control (cf. Tauzin 1984a: 89), but for the latter it is nothing more than a reallocation and reconfirmation of their relation of dependency towards the master.[60]

While in everyday practice slave families attained a condition enabling them to maintain patterns of family life much like those of their bīẓān masters, they could not completely reproduce the household-economic model these were based on. Instead of building a family patrimony, the slave families were forced to manage their rights to belongings individually on a level not experienced among free bīẓān. Among slaves living under conditions like Brahim's family's, goods were gained individually and – at least legally – had to be treated alike. Inner-familiar co-operation was drastically constrained by the fear of the master being able to take goods arbitrarily. In case things would come to the worst, the situation had to be handled to the family's advantage. The clear-cut dispersal of belongings among the individual members of the family, which resulted from the individualistic mode of their appropriation, was manifested through the application of distinct brands to the animals. This measure fitted neatly into a strategy aimed at securing the family's belongings as well as possible. The many limitations arising from the slaves' legal situation threatened above all the assets of dead slaves. Whereas this intra-familial organisation of belongings could diminish the risk of collective expropriation, it cemented the constraints on collective accumula-

tion as well. Because slaves were denied social parenthood, their kin had no rights in heritage. It was the masters who were the legal guardians of their slaves and thus had the right to appropriate their dead slaves' belongings (cf. Teffahi 1948: 13f.). This is why Brahim takes so much care to explain that he never got animals from his father, but earned all of them on his own. The logic of accumulation in a household economy based on redistributive arrangements between the generations is thus turned upside down in the context of slave families struggling for enhanced autonomy. Rather than have the young work as long as possible for the joint patrimony, and eventually give them a share (cf. Caratini 1989: 54), the slave elders are interested in seeing the young accumulate on their own as early as possible, while they resign control of these resources themselves. Although this most refined version of economic slave existence might be untypical, it is revealing of the main direction the attempts of slaves took when trying to fix spheres of autonomy within the legal framework of bīẓān slavery.[61]

An analysis of symbols serves to stress this aspect. Bīẓān mark their animals only with a tribal sign. Within bīẓān families property is organised individually as well, but these distinctions are not revealed through the use of distinct brands; branding furthermore is reserved for the big animals which wander around without constant observation (cf. Caratini 1989: 52, 96ff.). The logic behind this differentiation in symbolism is evident. Free people's property in animals is threatened by the outer world, i.e. animals have to be identifiable on objective grounds if lost or stolen. The tribal brand informs potential thieves whose revenge they will have to fear, or more simply facilitates inquiry after lost animals. Only very rich families thus have their own brand in addition to the tribal marks (e.g. different branches of the emiral family). Within the bīẓān family, and usually within the unit of nomadisation, the animals are known individually by their many characteristics, hence there is no need to introduce a symbolism of property on this level.[62] The case of slave families owning animals is different, as revealed by Brahim. They are unable to defend themselves or their belongings directly against intrusion from the outer world. Due to their estate they are legal minors. In any case of conflict exceeding the narrow boundaries of their camp, they have to rely on their masters to be defended in the tribal context, and be able to negotiate conflicts. The slaves' animals, whenever necessary, thus bear first and foremost the brand of their masters' tribal affiliation. The power to manage conflicts with the outer, intertribal world could only be achieved by this appeal to the masters' symbolism. Those brands slaves occasionally introduced on their own are of an altogether distinct character. They are located in the interior of privacy, not the outer social world. They distinguish family-members, not tribes and fractions. These brands therefore symbolise both the slaves' subsumption under the symbolic world of their masters, and the range of their social actions, effectively limited to self-enacting a further variety of the masters' conception of their estate relegating them to be social outsiders.

Chapter 3
Slave Women

Tent Slaves and Female Slave Affection

The true and profound emotional affection the relationship of slave women with their masters can be laden with, is obvious both in the narrative of Zeyneb and of M'Barke. M'Barke's commitment to her master's family led her to introduce herself already indirectly, by the reference to her master and his status: "I am not of the people of Khouba, I am a ḥarṭāniyya for the Ahel D. of the Tmoddek and they are backed by Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar [the former ʿamīr of Tagant]." M'Barke presenting herself as a ḥarṭāniyya for her master's family leaves no doubt that she still is a slave woman, a ḫādem. Her commitment to the masters' fate seems perfect, as she adopts the euphemism commonly used among modern-time masters when speaking of those still regarded as their slaves, rather than claiming to be a free ḥarṭāniyya, as almost all interviewees did in their introduction. M'Barke virtually seems to have no words of her own;[1] having lived such a long time in the universe of her masters she adopted their phraseology in trying to cope with the change in her own situation.

Formally this uniform image is confirmed with her saying later: "For sure, I was a nānmiyye[2] [tent slave woman]." Rather than being a confession the statement conveys pride. Not all slaves were tent slaves, not all slaves were so close to their masters as these. Probably life was much better under such conditions than being completely at the margins. But M'Barke's pride in having been a nānmiyye is located also in another sphere. Being a tent slave means being different from her masters. She was a sūdāniyya, a slave woman because she was obliged to do all sorts of work all day long; this marks the difference between her and her masters. Speaking of her work, she remembers her own life, not her master's. A decisive break in her life as nānmiyye appears with her stopping work, hence at the times she became faint, later blind and had her children replace her. Her work was the obligation of her life, which she devotes to Allah. No masters can interfere with this retrospective interpretation, can deprive her of her own definition of honourable devotion contrasting with the masters' attitude. Although never leaving the framework of her deep commitment towards her masters, and never opposing her masters, M'Barke is neither able nor willing to withhold the ambiva-

lence of her condition when conceptualising her own life in her account. This certainly is due to the many dishonouring experiences in her life, the most prominent of which is her being denied marriage, fundamentally negating her social personhood.[3] Presenting herself as being a ḥarṭāniyya "for" the Ahel D. is revealing, her sociality is bound to her allocation within the master's family, but paradoxically this is precisely the place where she is inflicted with social deprivation. Affection and deprivation are inseparable and come part and parcel from the masters. The ambiguity of affection and rejection, of inclusion and exclusion hence is the fundamental experience of living this configuration of master-slave relations.

Slave-Master Milk Kinship

M'Barke's engagement with the master's family, stated in her initial presentation to the strange visitor, is much more than putative. She is of the same age as Khalil, her master, and as a baby M'Barke drank of Khalil's milk, i.e. she was suckled by his mother, and thus became his milk-sister. Zeyneb's case differs slightly, but is characterised by the same mechanisms of integration. She too was committed to doing reproductive work for her master, thus freeing the master's wife from the most menial work. Although she does not identify herself with her master to the extent M'Barke does, the master still is the major category of reference: "Yes, I am like them [her masters], I married after they married. My husband sometimes stayed with me and my masters, sometimes we also went to his masters. We were always together and never separated." This is a revelation as it marks just what it is supposed to hide, the precarious character of her condition of being like the masters. Despite not being able to be equal to the masters, she knows very well *how to be like* them, or more precisely, how to be like the mistress whom she serves and observes throughout the day. The aim of her life thus is clear: to adopt some of the most significant aspects of a noblewoman's behaviour. The most prominent of these, and undoubtedly one of the most visible, is the withdrawal from specific tasks. This habit of achieving the status of a "big" woman, i.e. a woman of elder status, is not unique to Zeyneb, for already her mother, she tells, did not work much, she merely fetched water and stayed near the fields. This probably was the case at the time Zeyneb and her sisters reached the age at which they could replace her mother's work for the masters. Although she stresses the ambivalence in the relations to her master's family by enumerating many of his good sides as well as the problems remaining for her own family, it is clear that there are complex, affective ties towards the master's family. There has been and still is an intimate relationship between the two, and there are ties manifest, cross-cutting the fundamental hierarchy between the freeborn noble master and his slave. Both Zeyneb and M'Barke gave accounts of their relations with their

master's family in terms of milk-parenthood. Zeyneb suckled her master's son, thus becoming his milk-mother, and M'Barke was suckled by her present master's mother, and therefore is his milk-sister and her milk-daughter.

Getting parents by milk is strongly reminiscent of the fictive integration of slaves through the masters' paternalist ideology, expressed by labelling slaves as children and legal minors, but the differences are crucial. Milk-parenthood is a tie actively established out of consent between two women. In the cases at hand, it implies on the one hand a freeborn noblewoman and on the other her slave woman. Unlike transferring existing social categories into a different context, i.e. using kinship terminology to hint at slaves and masters, milk-parenthood is contracted intentionally, and the reciprocal legal rights involved are known, and even more important, controlled by the women involved. The great import of this institution will become apparent from the following overview of the legal aspects and the definition of milk parenthood.

Milk-kinship, riḍāʿa or raḍāʿa, as it is called in classical Arabic (rzāʿa in ḥassāniyya),[4] is common among all social strata, either bīẓān and sūdān, and until today frequently practised throughout Mauritania. It is established by a woman breast-feeding another woman's infant. The relationship thus established between the two children is rationalised by Islamic jurisprudence as a shared (milk-)descent from the same father, i.e. the woman's husband at the time of breast-feeding. This is because women's milk is considered to be caused by the men's fluids, a point of view which clearly superimposes patriarchal conceptions of parenthood onto this female-controlled resource of parental ties.[5] Milk-kinship entails marriage restrictions analogous to blood-kinship. Having once drunk from the same woman's breast results in being considered as milk brothers and sisters, and having the woman as milk-mother. These relations are the most intimate within the framework of milk parenthood, which also considers more distant levels of parenthood (cf. Héritier-Augé 1994). Legally the institution's range varies according to the interpretations provided by different schools of jurisprudence. The Risāla elucidating the māliki school of jurisprudence, the one prevailing in North and West Africa, defines marriage restrictions due to milk-parenthood, either with regard to the offspring of the breast-feeding woman and her husband:

> Sont prohibées pour vous . . . vos mères qui vous ont allaitées et vos sœurs de lait . . . Quand une femme allaite un nourrisson [étranger], les filles de cette femme et les filles de son époux, nées avant ou après, deviennent les sœurs du nourrisson. Mais il est permis au frère par le sang de ce dernier, d'épouser les filles de cette nourrice. (Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 179, 193)

The restrictive aspect of milk brother- or sisterhood is obvious in the ḥassāniyya terminology: a brother or sister by milk is called meḥrem (sing.), i.e. forbidden to marry, or relative of a degree prohibiting marriage (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1990: 89, 110; Taine-Cheikh 1989c: 400ff.).[6] Besides its legal implica-

tions of marriage restriction, the institution is important to the practice of social life. Being related by milk offers girls and boys the opportunity to communicate with members of the other sex, of different social status, and of the same age in public as intimately as with brothers and sisters of their own blood.[7] An important asset in a gender segregated society, laying especially severe restrictions on public communication between young men and women who are potential spouses. A problematic aspect of the institution is that not all relations of milk-parenthood might be known when a marriage is concluded. The consequence is relationships entered into which only later, through a third party's testimony, will turn out to be incestuous, and then have immediately to be dissolved (cf. Héritier-Augé 1994: 157). These cases can lead to serious mental stress, hard to cope with.[8] Another point is that intensive practice of joint breast-feeding over several generations within small communities could lead to marriage restrictions being so numerous, that milk-kinship turned out to be a social nuisance (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 47).

To my knowledge little has been published on the topic of milk-parenthood and the most detailed studies available focus on the impact the institution has on marriage prescriptions practised by the Saudi-Arabian urban population, among whom the institution is described as vanishing (cf. Altorki 1980; Héritier-Augé 1994: 149). Occasionally the topic surfaces in local studies providing further insights such as the sensitive discussion of the emotional dimension of milk kinship by Carol Delaney (1991: 157f.). Until today dependent drawa woman continue to breast-feed children of the dominant šurva in the Moroccan deep south. This unidirectional flow of milk continues to create intimate and enduring bonds between families cross-cutting social hierarchy (cf. Ensel 1998: 80-87). With regard to Mauritania Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1993: 186) highlights that the complex and ambiguous sentimental ties ancient slaves had to their masters were often strengthened by milk parenthood, as well as shared affiliation to an age-set, ʿasr. Timothy Cleaveland, in a study on Oualâta, cites an informant who asserted that milk-kinship during the 19th century was important in facilitating social access between non-kin males and females, including the slaves often living in the same (urban) household (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 46). Ann McDougall (1988: 378) provides indirect evidence when stating that for slave women in the Adrar "Even in the late 1940s, their best options were still the 'traditional' ones: becoming a favored concubine, family wet nurse, or in rare cases, the wife of a noble or a well-off hartani." This type of slave woman's involvement in the master's household is also reported by Poulet (1904: 11, cited in Martín 1991: 44), a former French administrator in Mauritania. He mentions that in early colonial times, bīẓān women rarely breast-fed their children, but took a wet-nurse among their husband's slaves. The practice is common and carried on even until recent times,[9] but its frequency seems to be diminishing. Throughout the 24 interviews I carried out with sūdān and bīẓān women, Zeyneb was the only one to tell of a slave nursing a noblewoman's child. There are multiple explanations for this phenomenon. First

there might be a lack of intimacy, hindering the women from telling of this experience. Although this is possible, various other reasons might be more feasible. Both bīẓān and sūdān tend to limit the extent of interrelations and intimacy with each other admitted to in their accounts, and hence are both likely to obscure such sorts of slave contributions to the master's household. As revealed in the previous chapter, increasing autonomy on a large scale was linked to increasing spatial segregation. Legally married slave women attained this level of autonomy often following the birth of a child. Co-residence during the period of breast-feeding, a prerequisite to establishing milk-kinship, thus became more seldom, or from the opposite angle, more easy to avoid than before.[10]

Understanding the practices and strategies related to milk-kinship between masters and slaves is difficult, due to the lack of direct empirical evidence. Conclusions can only be drawn from the transposition of the general characteristics of milk-kinship into the context of a master-slave and more specifically mistress-slave women relationship. Probably one of the best descriptions of social practices related to milk-kinship is presented by Édouard Conte (1991: 74). Milk-kinship in the beginning of Islam, as it transpires in reports from the prophet Muhammad's surroundings, had a profoundly ambivalent character. It either served to extend matrimonial alliances or aimed to hinder them, depending upon its association with sanguine or elective parenthood. The more complementary than contrasting character these two different strategies of alliance have, becomes evident in the light of bīẓān practices. Matrimonial relations were often rather unstable in bīẓān society, divorce and re-marriage were – and still are – frequent and not socially disregarded. Under these conditions especially women had to seek security within a stable support group. This was provided above all by their own family, to which they returned in case of divorce, but solidarity could also be found within the circle of milk-kinship (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 47),[11] which was more stable than the unsteady matrimonial alliances. It was the mothers who decided which relations of milk-kinship were established, and hence it was they who had the power to prevent specific matrimonial alliances of their children. Besides intentionally precluding later marriages, milk-kinship was most frequent among close kin and people living in great intimacy, and therefore also restricted options to pursue close-range matrimonial alliances, such as e.g. the preferential marriage with the patrilateral parallel cousin (cf. Héritier 1994: 316f.).

With regard to slaves, milk-kinship might have been treated less rigorously than among noble families. Discerning the vertical extension of milk-kinship, including the ties to the breast-feeding woman's husband, is a rather complex matter (cf. Altorki 1980). How bīẓān treated these relations with regard to their slaves, living at best within precarious marital relations, and with slave men who by definition were unable to fulfil the social role of a genitor, is an interesting question I am unfortunately unable to elucidate neither on the grounds of Islamic jurisprudence, nor on the basis of empirical data. In social

practice, the lack of the male element might have been less important, and rather strengthened the character of milk-kinship as an exclusive form of female alliance implying milk-sisters, milk-brothers and milk-mothers but no milk-fathers. This degree of relation also is the one unanimously presented as implying the right to treat non-kin publicly as intimately as one's own kin (Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi 24.12.1995, cf. note 7, this chapter). Milk-kinship between masters and slaves as a means to facilitate everyday interaction within the intimate space of a tent might be one aspect of the complex. But given the fact that the possible intimacy is an outcome more or less remote in time, implying more the children of opposite sex than their parents, it seems to be at best a secondary issue.[12] More important is the intimacy relations of milk-kinship establish between two women, in this case a noble and a slave woman. Becoming the ally of her mistress, much like other noblewomen involved in milk-kinship is a means for a slave woman to become more equal. Breast-feeding and establishing a – although secondary – legal parental relation is to act socially like the mistresses. It means leaving the framework of the slave existence as eternal non-kin and social outsider, and hence achieving social ascension. This is the major outcome of a slave woman's relationship with her noble milk-daughters and -sons. These bīẓān members of the master's family have to treat their slave milk-mother with respect, much like a kin-mother, and to respect rules of social intercourse with regard to their slave milk-sisters and -brothers as well. Becoming a parent by milk does not mean stepping out of slavery, although it does provide the chance of improving one's condition decisively. One achieves individual respect and the right to enact recognised social relation, otherwise withheld from slaves. However, as the case of M'Barke shows, these achievements did not necessarily coincide with the end of all aspects of social deprivation resulting from the slave estate.[13]

There are two distinct contexts explaining this transformation of the master-slave relationship. As shown in the different slave narratives affective ties – although remaining ambiguous – developed frequently between slaves and masters. This affection could result, if not in manumission, in the master wanting to have his slave treated with respect by his successors. Revealing in this respect are stipulations concerning slaves to be found in bīẓān last wills. In one such case a mistress was reported to have assigned her six slaves the status of a ḥubs, a pious endowment that brought about a legal state of indivisibility bound to various regulations of usage (Interview Abderrahmane Ould Ahmed, zwāya, 13.7.1995). This decision forced the woman's four inheriting children at least not to sell off single members of this slave family but to keep their ownership collectively bound to it. The spirit of indivisibility resulting from their status as ḥubs, however, did not prevent the slaves from being assigned to work for individual heirs, and hence from being separated at least from time to time. The relevance these kinds of post-mortem arrangements had in changing the status of slaves is also highlighted by the numerous regulations Islamic jurisprudence developed on the topic of

post-mortem and contracted manumission (cf. Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 221ff.).

Quite a different aim could be achieved through the practice of mistress-slave woman milk-kinship ties, once matrimonial relations between male masters and female slave offspring are in focus. Noblewomen letting their infants be nursed by their slaves, or themselves nursing their slaves' children, induced both close social ties and matrimonial prohibitions, a highly ambivalent result: the slaves are recognised as equals in a distinct sphere of social relations, for they are prohibited from marrying in the same way as free people could, but this similarity only applies to female slaves. The interdiction on female hypogamy in bīẓān marital relations prohibits women from marrying men of lower social rank. Although nowadays occurring in a few cases, a marriage of a bīẓāniyya with an ʿabd still is socially most inconceivable and has far-reaching consequences (cf. Bonte 1987a: 64; Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 657f., 666). For a bīẓān woman realising such a liaison this step will mean changing sides and opting for living among the sūdān. It was far more likely for the bīẓān men to enter into a marital relations with slaves. Within a rather limited range, milk-kinship established by noblewomen with their women slaves was able to preclude such alliances, as either marital or sexual relations of the milk siblings became incestuous.[14] Extended relations of milk-kinship between masters and slaves, besides creating intimate bonds, also strengthened segregation between the social strata in the second generation. Bīẓān women wishing to preclude their sons from marital relations with particular slaves, had, in the establishment of relations of milk-kinship, a means to expand their control well beyond the first marriage, concluded under the parents' auspices, and most likely to fulfil the norms and values of preferential marriage providing equal status through matri- and patrilateral ties (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 678f.).[15]

Establishing milk-kin ties between masters and slaves in this perspective becomes more a move in the game of handling gender relations within bīẓān society. Slaves, either female or male, had to pursue alliances with their masters in order to enhance their condition within the slave estate. Slave women had two options, albeit opposing ones laden with ambivalence. Either they became the slave master's favoured slave and a sort of concubine, and hence sought support from a free man, or they allied themselves with the mistress, became a wet-nurse, and entered the female world of alliances the bīẓān women mediated by milk-kinship.[16]

Concubinage

Concubinage in its common sense is a vaguely defined term, bearing pejorative connotations. Primarily it denotes a more or less fixed extra-marital (sexual) relationship between two people of different sexes. The subject

has a long history; it is dealt with at some length by ancient Greek and Roman law and even before. Concubinage was a means to circumvent problems resulting from misalliances especially between free people and slaves. Islamic jurisprudence, while giving the slave master the right to share his woman slave's bed, later took up this last point. Concubinage was in this context regarded as a distinct legal status, lower than that of married women, which could be attributed to slave women (cf. Abd el Wahed 1931: 296ff.).[17] Sexual intercourse, however, did not of itself create a relation of concubinage (although it could in specific circumstances).[18] If as a result of a sexual relationship a freeborn man and a slave woman a child was born and recognised by the master to be his, the slave woman was assigned the status of *umm walad*, mother of a (free man's) child. This status gave her well defined rights clearly superior to those achieved by concubine status. Though still a slave, the woman through this act attained a legal status providing her with significant rights. She is no longer to be sold, and the master is bound to renounce making profit out of her, or exploiting her in any other way. Furthermore she, as well as all her children not originating from the master, had to be manumitted by the time of the master's death. On the other hand, the latter got the right to enjoy her, and to claim all his rights towards her children. These remained – following their mother – bound to the slave estate until manumission became due with the death of the master (cf. Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 225ff.; Abd el Wahed 1931: 301f.; Fisher/Fisher 1970: 99f.).

In theory this seems quite nice, but there were numerous circumstances by which the obligations resulting from concubinage could be avoided. The most important obstacle to obtaining the status of umm walad was getting the master to acknowledge his paternity. Although slave women were in no legal position to dispute their master's testimony, the question under which circumstances a denied paternity will be accepted or not constitutes an issue analysed in detail by the Māliki school of Islamic law (cf. Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 227). The masters' obligation to recognise his offspring from concubinage was more or less a question of morality. Denying the fact simply meant that you owned your own children as slaves or at least, that you had nothing against them living as your slaves. The extent to which the question was tainted with hypocrisy becomes even more apparent in the blatant gender bias in the attribution of the status of umm walad. Everything was fine if the child was a boy, but if it was a girl, both mother and child remained slaves (cf. Abd el Wahed 1931: 256ff.; Lovejoy 1983: 216; Lovejoy 1990: 180f.).[19]

With regard to bīẓān society the question of concubinage is a controversial one. Some authors deny the institution existed, while others advance the opposite view (cf. e.g. De Chassey 1977: 82). The problem with these statements is the lack of underlying empirical studies, and hence the little they tell about what kind of relations existed between bīẓān masters and their slave women. One definite case of concubinage, reported from an ancient

urban centre in the Adrar in the first half of the 20th century, however, increases insights into bīẓān practices of concubinage. There a notable bought from some Rgaybāt a slave woman who had been kidnapped in the Trarza, to install her as his concubine in the town of Ouadâne (cf. McDougall 1988: 368f.). What seems at first glance a typical case of concubinage is hardly an indicator of practices of concubinage in bīẓān society. The social as well as economic milieu of the few small Adrar trade towns differed in many respects from life in bīẓān pastoral nomadic society. The bīẓān trader who bought the slave woman and wanted her to become his concubine in his second residence thus reproduced a pattern of slavery more common among the Saharan urban trading communities than among the overwhelming majority of the pastoral nomadic bīẓān.[20] Besides this singular and atypical case, another argument for the significance of concubinage in bīẓān society can be developed from the lack of distinct phenotypes for bīẓān and sūdān. Being black is neither a characteristic unique to slaves and their descendants, nor does it denote inferior status. Many noble bīẓān are black, a most prominent example being the former ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. Some tribes, such as the Šurva of Oualâta and Néma, are as black as their Bambara neighbours (cf. Miské 1970: 111).[21] More detailed, due to its recognition of the aforementioned arbitrary attribution of the status of umm walad, is the position of James Webb, focusing on the historical period from 1600 to 1900:

> Many female slaves were the concubines of their owners. The male progeny of these master-slave unions were Bidan, if the union was legitimized by freeing the slave woman as usually seems to have been the case; female offspring had slave status. (Webb 1984: 159)[22]

Compared to this conviction, the almost opposite view held by Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh is somewhat startling, and the contradiction thus raised needs further exploration:

> Soulignons encore que la société nomade maure, ignorant généralement la polygamie, n'a guère connu l'usage d'esclaves concubines et l'emploi des eunuques dans la garde des harems, et n'a donc jamais, semble-t'il, pratiqué la castration sur ses serviteurs. (Ould Cheikh 1986: 55)

Another statement that fits in this second line of argumentation is made by René Caillié, an early 19th century French traveller, who lived for about five months, disguised as a scholar seeking Islamic education, among the Brakna bīẓān. In his later fascinating eye-witness report Caillié (1830: 128f.) portrays the bīẓāniyyāt, the bīẓān women, as proud and powerful, and – apparently without having noticed any exception to this rule – concludes that they would never allow their husbands to have a concubine besides them.[23] A more or less public practice of concubinage hence seems less to be bound to the existence of the institution as such, than to the balance of power implied in the society's gender relations. An argument stressed by observations made

by Aline Tauzin (1989b: 77), who depicts the bīẓāniyyāt as being most concerned about possible relations between their husbands and the slave women. Therefore the bīẓāniyyāt watched the attitude of the slave women towards their children – a slave child enjoying better treatment from his mother than his siblings might indicate the noble, but obscured origin of his father. Although practised, institutionalised concubinage was socially inconceivable; the bīẓāniyyāt's concern about their husbands extra-marital sexual relations reveals adultery to have been a real concern, no matter what status the women implicated had. This becomes evident from the consequences such an affair could have: a wife becoming aware of her husband committing adultery had the right to – and often did – leave him to return to her parents.[24] A husband wanting his wife to come back hence had to present her numerous gifts in order to calm down her anger, and bring her around (cf. Tauzin 1984a: 89). The question whether concubinage between masters and slaves existed therefore has to be reformulated. As an institution, following the precepts of Islamic jurisprudence and paralleling a marital relation, concubinage, or the attribution of the more far-reaching status of umm walad was very likely to have been marginal in bīẓān pastoral nomadic society.[25] There was no consensus on the institution among bīẓān women and men. As it had already been the case in pre-Islamic times, concubinage – or here more precisely the attribution of the status of an umm walad to a slave woman – remained a kind of a last resort saving masters from the pain of having a child of theirs be a slave. However, only boys tended to evoke this sort of mental anguish that would entail bīẓān masters to claim fatherhood.

The various institutions of concubinage, now understood in a wider sense, designating varying forms of legitimised extra-marital sexual relations as they were handled in many Sahelian rural societies (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 135; Olivier de Sardan 1983: 141), were a solution to a specific problem of free men in slave-holding societies: namely how to manage sexual relations between free men and slave women. Its application was a matter of specific circumstances, and – much like the concubines of royal and other courts (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 191ff.) – likely to be a matter of social standing.[26] Disputing the frequency of bīẓān concubinage therefore provides no direct means to apprehend the impact of sexual interrelations among masters and their female slaves, but rather the number of these to be kept in secrecy, or resolved by this or other means compatible to the social framework. One major bīẓān solution to the problem was successive marriage, resulting in the complete liberation of the slave woman and her children:[27]

> *Question:* Mais est-ce que le maître peut avoir des relations sexuelles avec sa ḫādem [slave woman]?
> *Answer:* Oui, bien sûr, il peut coucher avec elle et avoir même des enfants; mais il ne le reconnaîtra jamais, car pour cela il faut qu'ils soient mariés. Par exemple, si le maître est marié et que la ḫādem habite avec eux dans la maison, ils peuvent avoir des rapports sexuels, mais toujours en cachette

> de l'épouse. Si la ḥādem a des enfants, il peut considérer que ce sont ses enfants à lui mais il ne le reconnaîtra jamais parce qu'il n'y a pas eu de mariage légal; il va dire que sa ḥādem a couché avec un autre. Alors, si le propriétaire n'épouse pas sa ḥādem, ses enfants seront en même temps ses ʿabīd et ils seront même hérités par ses fils légitimes. Le mieux dans ces cas c'est qu'il l'épouse, après l'avoir affranchie bien sûr; comme ça les enfants de sa femme ḥarṭāniyya auront les mêmes droits que les autres. (Interview with Bullah Mint Zenvūr, bīẓāniyya (ḥassān), Kaédi 8/9 October 1991; cited in Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 670)

The central role attributed to marriage for the legitimation of sexual relations between the male masters and female slaves apparent in this statement by a bīẓān woman is reflected in bīẓān terminology as well, but there are some ambiguities that have to be highlighted. Marriage could mean different things depending on whether it concerned free or slave women. This becomes apparent once the different meanings of the term ğāriyye are explored. According to a contemporary bīẓān interpretation, a ğāriyye appears to be a slave woman who has formally recognised sexual relations with her master, despite the latter being married (cf. Brhane 1997a: 73f. and personal correspondence 2.12.1997). In this light, the ğāriyye appears to be nothing more than a concubine whose "lower than married women" status fits neatly into the framework drawn by legal orthodoxy, which allows the men polygamous relations and thus contradicts the monogamous practices resulting from the bīẓān gender relations described by Bullah Mint Zenvūr (cf. Interview above). More traditional meanings, probably less influenced by contemporary re-evaluation and codification of Islamic jurisprudence, however, attribute a different significance to ğāriyye. According to Catherine Taine-Cheikh (1989b: 312, 346) the term designates a concubine, a slave spouse, a slave woman married by her master, and thus refers to a whole range of ascending statuses slave women could achieve and had to struggle for when seeking social promotion by becoming a ğāriyye. The goal slave women entering such relations had was clear. They did not want to remain concubines, but to be married by a bīẓān man. This is also stressed by the meaning of the verbal derivative ğowre, meaning "marrying one's slave".[28]

The emphasis sūdān women laid on marriage as prerequisite for establishing ğāriyye is further accentuated by the ḥarṭāniyyāt and ḥedmān (slave women) terminology relating to the issue. Rather than using their masters' term, they prefer to speak of being a šedūni, i.e. "being married by the masters", which is used explicitly in the plural (personal correspondence with Meskerem Brhane 2.12.1997). While the conditions stated by the marriage contracts in these circumstances could differ from those concluded among bīẓān (and hence discriminated against the slave women, as can be seen below), the terminology strongly suggests that marriage was the central institution slave women aspired to in order to achieve full social recognition of their master-slave (concubine) relationship. Marrying in this context, however,

meant different things to bīẓān men and slave women. As Bullah Mint Zenvūr (cf. interview above) stressed, a man manumitted and married a slave woman because of his concern for the fate of his children resulting from this liaison. For the slave woman, becoming a ğāriyye meant less marrying a single bīẓān man, and establishing an individual, lasting relationship, than ultimately leaving the slave estate by merging into the circles of the powerful in bīẓān society.[29]

Notwithstanding that the framework outlined so far makes it possible to recognise and legalise sexual relations between masters and slave women, it remains subject to the bīẓān practice of monogamy. At any time, and with very few exceptions, there can be only one legitimate spouse, irrespective of the woman's initial status. Establishing a new relationship, might – as in the case of concubinage – precede the end of an existing marital relation, and thus have to be done in secret. Secrecy, however, is not an issue in sexual relations between male master and slave women only. It is just as much a feature of the extra-marital sexual relations of men and women of any status; and these are, as I will limit myself to suggesting, quite probable to occur in any society.

Only very recently has attention been drawn to an institution peculiar to bīẓān interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, revealing both of the bīẓān will to respect social norms and of problems arising from this will which are only resolved by a sort of legal safety valve applicable to sexual relations parallel to the primary legal framework. Sarriye[30] means a "secret, clandestine marriage", derived from the original meaning of "secrecy, confidence" in standard Arabic (cf. Wehr 1976: 404). It is concluded much like a regular marriage, as it involves two testators and a qāḍi, who will compose a written testimony of the act, but differs in its secrecy. The aim of the ceremony is to preserve honour, and hence to avoid illegitimate children resulting from the secret sexual relations. Sarriye by these means can resolve various problems arising, among others, from the fact that emotional affinities are of minor importance within the framework of preferential marriage patterns. Sarriye can also bridge divergence in status or age of the spouses, and can help men to handle monogamy a bit more "flexibly". Nevertheless the institution does not definitely challenge the bīẓān practices with regard to marital relations. In the case of a secret spouse becoming pregnant by her secret husband, the latter can divorce his present wife, and turn the secret marriage into an official one (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 681ff.). This setting, in which the principle of successive marriage succeeds in superseding all institutions paralleling marriage whenever the issue of legitimate offspring is concerned,[31] fits again neatly the scenario of the liberation of master-slave woman offspring, as outlined by Bullah Mint Zenvūr (cf. interview above). Rather than by attributing the legal status of a concubine to the slave woman, the master will legitimate his future children by manumitting the slave woman, and marrying her.[32]

Much like the arbitrary role men take in the attribution of institutional concubinage, sarriye is revealed to be a means used by men to deceive their

spouses, and to enter the fields of polygamy. While the men gain within sarriye, the women engaging in it offend the women's consensus to uphold monogamy, a commitment which also has a prominent place in the oral marriage contract (cf. Ould Ahmedou 1994: 121f.; see also note 24, this chapter). This female consensus has developed from shared interests. Bīẓāniyyāt have to defend and manifest their status and power within the bīẓān gender relations and matrimonial alliances. To this closed circle, a ḥarṭāniyya offered sarriye by a bīẓān man is an outsider and will remain unable to enter the net of solidarity developed by the community of bīẓān women. Nevertheless, being legally married provided an important step in social ascension to a slave woman, for besides her being manumitted together with her children, the latter would follow the status of their father. The essence of the bīẓāniyyāt statement that a woman concerned with matters of status depending on marital relations first of all has to consider the fate of her children, rather than her own (Interview with Bullah Mint Zenvūr, cited in: Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 671), reveals the impact strategic considerations have on the establishment of matrimonial alliances no matter whether sūdān or bīẓān are concerned. Ḫedmān (slave women; sing. ḫādem) and ḥarṭāniyyāt therefore are likely to have subjugated themselves more often to sarriye, ğāriyye and other similar inherently risky relations with bīẓān than the bīẓāniyyāt, the free women, who had much more to lose than to win from such alliances (cf. Tauzin 1989b: 89).

Status and Split Origin

All legitimate children of a bīẓān men follow his status irrespective of the mother's. This patrilineal structure of parenthood is the precondition for such institutions as concubinage, and on a larger scale, the incorporation of dependent and slave women into the free and noble strata of society. While formally there is nothing to distinguish siblings with the same father but different mothers, in practice the knowledge of both paternal and maternal descent was a latent issue in any discourse on nobility, and hence remained preserved.[33] This becomes most evident in situations where descendants of mothers of different status but with one and the same father enter into competition. A competition frequent among brothers of different mothers, especially within the ḥassān tribes, and their emiral lineage (cf. Interview with Bullah Mint Zenvūr in: Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 671).[34] A prominent case of this type of factionalism is the rise of the last ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. He is famous for having been totally black and born of a slave woman, made ḥarṭāniyya on the occasion of her marriage.[35] Following the death of his father, Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, in a battle against French invaders, rivalry broke out between the different aspirants to the office of ʿamīr of the IdawʿĪš Abakak tribal confederation, and lasted for

more than a decade. The situation might have been complicated by the more than fifty sons Bakkar had during the ninety to one hundred years of his life (sons were listed to me each with his full name!). Finally, the strife crystallised around some main competitors with Abderrahmane and a few supporters on the one side and several of his brethren of noble origin united on the other.[36] Numerous are the narratives displaying the force and intelligence Abderrahmane was endowed with, and which made him resist and lastly defeat his treacherous rivals:

> In those days Abderrahmane [Ould Bakkar] was pursued by his brothers. These aimed to kill him because they wanted to take his place, they wanted to hinder him from becoming mightier than themselves, or perhaps they did it because of his inferior origin.
>
> One day they called upon him to come and see them. Abderrahmane at that moment was somewhere in the bush, together with his wife. When he heard of his brothers calling him for a visit, he knew they were calling him because they wanted to kill him on that occasion. His wife told him he would be killed by his brothers if he went to see them as they wanted. Abderrahmane didn't know what to do. He was unable not to go, for it were his brothers who called him, and going there was impossible because it meant being killed. Finally Abderrahmane went to the place indicated by his brothers. On his way he saw a she-camel whose young camel had managed to tear off the bag covering his mother's udder, and was suckling. Abderrahmane set out completely calmly to fix the bag back in its correct position, and hinder the young camel from further suckling and hence wasting his mother's milk. During this operation he had been observed by his brothers, who were already waiting for him. Abderrahmane's conduct raised a dispute between them. When Dey [Ould Bakkar] saw Abderrahmane, who was fully conscious of being under the acute threat of being killed within the next few minutes, take his time to care for a stranger's she-camel, he told his brothers that Abderrahmane was a good fellow, and therefore they could not kill him on that occasion. Finally he convinced all his brothers of his opinion, even Ely [Ould Bakkar], who was most opposed to Abderrahmane (Interview Mohamed Ould Mbarek, ḥarṭāni, by Khalifa Ould Kebab 17.1.1996).

There are many legendary narratives like this one, telling of the brave ʿamīr managing again and again to escape the assaults led by his hostile brothers. Many aspects of the story seem symptomatic of the battle the young Abderrahmane striving for his father's office had to fight. As a ḥassān, a warrior, he had to prove his courage to assert his status (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 368), but this was not enough. An ʿamīr had to behave honourably, even if this might lead to his peril. Facing the dilemma his brothers had put him in, he therefore chose the combination of honour and death over life in the dishonour of not having responded to the call of his noble brothers. What makes him finally defeat his enemies is his deep commitment to a lifestyle different from his brothers'. To accept or not the date set by his brothers was carefully consid-

ered by Abderrahmane, who took into consideration his wife's opinion. Naturally he opted for the obligations of honourable behaviour. Later, already facing his death, his action develops without hesitation or uncertainty. Caring for a stranger's animal, and daily ration of milk, is depicted as being self-evident for Abderrahmane. Confronting his brothers with this peculiar type of honour puts them in disarray. They had agreed on killing their brother in an ambush, on unequal grounds but in a fight between warriors. Now facing a most cool-minded warrior, selflessly attending to a herd-animal's problem in a moment of extreme personal danger, the setting changes. They not only have to kill a simple warrior, but one displaying the virtues of a true leader, one who cares for other people's goods and shows his selfless bravery in a moment of severe danger. Though controversy over the issue arises among the noble brothers, Dey Ould Bakkar is successful, and manages to postpone the assassination, overruling Ely Ould Bakkar,[37] who, neglecting the honour angle, simply wants to get rid of the rival.

While the noble brothers engage in treachery and risk sliding into dishonourable behaviour, Abderrahmane gives proof of his cool mind, and above all of his abilities. Quite unusually for a person of high office and the most noble descent,[38] he is uniformly presented by bīẓān and ḥarāṭīn as the greatest worker possible. There is no job he is not reported to have managed to the highest perfection. He could cultivate, hoe the fields, milk, handle all kinds of animals, etc. He was the fastest runner, the best rider, the best shot, the best hunter, able to feed a whole camp with game etc. Obviously not all these stories about the labour qualifications were invention, for Abderrahmane once had herded sheep and goats for a bīẓān called Haime. Later he often made a joke of it when meeting the noble, but now poor, Haime by asking him for his shepherd's payment (Interview Khattar, zwāya, 12.10.1995). Last but not least Abderrahmane is presented as being highly intelligent. By this virtue he was able to outwit his many enemies numerous times. One story presents Abderrahmane, together with his wife and small baby, again in an ambush, first noticed by the wife. Abderrahmane invents a ruse to get out of the mess: he tells his wife to take his gun in his place, and give him the baby. With the child in his arms and without a weapon he then approaches the ambush where his hostile brothers again postpone the assassination. They cannot shoot at him while he is not carrying his weapon, and they risk killing not only him, but the baby too (Interview Mohamed Ould Mbarek, ḥarṭāni, by Khalifa Ould Kebab 17.1.1996). The double blood-price to pay and the feud hence risked, meant much too much trouble to allow the situation to be exploited. Behaving completely unconventionally, and offending the rules of bīẓān emotional management, once more saved Abderrahmane from death. A father, whether sūdān or bīẓān, should never show affection for his children, neither by taking them in his arms, nor by other means.

The mythical accounts of the ʿamīr's life and struggle portray a person outclassing everybody by his unique combination of physical and intellectual skills, which is believed to result from the blending of bīẓān and sūdān

virtues. Children of a bīẓān father and a sūdān mother (who will be a ḥarṭāniyya, if she is legally married), are thought to gain in physical strength over their siblings of pure bīẓān origin. "Normally he [the son of a ḥarṭāniyya and a bīẓān] will be solid, his eye is red, every time he looks at something, he looks right at it, just like one has to look, without hesitation. He will be harder then the other who has a ḥassān father and mother." (Interview Khaite Mint Mohamed, ḥassān, 21.10.1995) A ḥarṭāni of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed had an even more dramatic characterisation: "Such a son will never be among the mediocre, he will always tend to the extremes. Either he is of the best people you can imagine, or he is one of the worst. Both are possible." (Interview Ely Ould El Abd, ḥarṭāni, 5.2.1996)[39] Despite these advantages, the union of bīẓān and sūdān has its risks, for it will be the father who is responsible for teaching the children to meet the exigencies of their parental status. The ḥarṭāniyya mother is considered to be too weak to be able to lead her children, especially to control her sons in the way her noble husband is able to do. While primary education of boys and girls is a uniquely female affair in bīẓān society, the slave woman who has ascended to nobility obviously still is recognised and blamed for her lack of sociability.

The life-stories of Tourad and Youba, two bīẓān with a ḥarṭāniyya mother, reveal many of the cleavages that have to be bridged in order to transform inherited status from the father into living a noble's life.[40] Tourad had a considerable amount of success. To a large extent he has made his life on his own. From his childhood on, he was committed to modernity, for apart from being born in the camp of his mother, he never lived under a tent. Only recently has he started to go to the bush, not to engage in pastoralism or cultivation, but to find relief from life in town. His well-known and highly reputed zwāya father does not appear to have lent him a hand in his career. Though Tourad obviously never lacked the material means to pursue his school studies, there is no situation in which his father is reported to have intervened in his career. As such this is not an exceptional constellation. Among prominent clerics it was an obligation to leave the family and take up studies with prominent religious teachers. This lifestyle reflects the devotion of the student to his studies, but also the problems he faces in trying to study effectively when constantly interrupted by his own family's multiple needs. Besides, the father was quite old. He died as early as 1971, and therefore could hardly intervene during the most turbulent years of his son's biography. What raises some doubts about this being the single reason for Tourad keeping rather mute on the subject of his father, is his emotional outbreak at the end of his narrative. He does not want to speak of the former times, i.e. those times he lived with his father, his animals and his slaves. For Tourad all this has gone, the father's property had vanished, the father is dead, all this past is remote and of no significance to him and his life. This turn in his narrative also raises further doubts about the causes of the mysterious disappearance of his father's large inheritance, and Tourad's proclaimed pride about this chance to lead a more humble and ascetic life. There are plenty of

accounts of quarrels about inheritance. In most cases sons still young at the death of their father are cheated by their paternal uncles. Analogous patterns of conflict over inheritance might have arisen between brothers having different mothers, much like the case of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane. Being young and of less noble origin (and far away for studies) in the case of Tourad might have been a major reason for being unable to take part in the game of pre-inheritance and inheritance.

Today, though a school-teacher, involved in local politics, and a highly respected person, Tourad lives somewhat apart, at the very margin of the town, together with his mother and her ḥarṭāni husband. Their relations are at best ambiguous, and the distinction Tourad draws between himself and his mother is marked. Portraying his seasonal, leisurely migration to the bush in order to drink fresh sheep milk during the rainy season, he refers to living under a tent as the way of life of the pastoralists. To him at first sight, there are no other people out there under tents, and there is no legitimate reason for there to be so. It is the objection by the research assistant, Khalifa Ould Kebab, a ḥarṭāni, that many people leave the cities and villages to live under a tent near their remote fields, that brings Tourad back to the realities of present day life, and the recognition that this is a the lifestyle of most rural sūdān, among them his own mother. The distinction made between "us" and "them" is manifest. When Tourad and his family leave for the bush to enjoy life in the vicinity of well-fed, lactating animals[41], there are just others working in the fields: "we have other people . . . parents who care for the fields . . . we go off to the bush and leave the question of the fields to our family. It's my mother". The ambiguity of performing a bīẓān master's and a family-member's discourse in parallel when speaking of his closest relatives is striking. Behind the progressive attitude (naturally Tourad insists on always including the number of sūdān tents in the total amount of tents in his former camp) surfaces a struggle for personal identity based on the notion of a cleavage between sūdān and bīẓān. As such, the mother becomes somebody "other", a special and distinct branch of the family. This rationalisation of family relations into master-slave or patron-client relations is manifest in the arrangement held between son and mother with regard to the joint exploitation of the fields. Tourad stresses that he is the proprietor of the land, and in effect his own mother, together with her new husband, appear to be working almost as his sharecroppers. If there is a surplus, both give Tourad a part of the harvest. These conditions are just the same as those practised among the local bīẓān landowners and sharecropping sūdān. Although Tourad, by living together with his mother, shows his responsibility for her, and hence is far from obscuring his maternal origin, he is at pains to demonstrate that he is of another kind than her, and has developed into a full-blooded bīẓān.

Youba's actual situation and his career are of quite another kind. He lives in an almost exclusively sūdān village. There are no material signs to distinguish him from his ḥarāṭīn neighbours. His house, though one of the better off, is much like those around it; there are no signs of any luxury, or at least

affluence within the household.[42] His biography reads much like a ḥarāṭīn one. After some basic school education, Youba leaves for the big city to enter the wage labour market. Finally, tired of this life, he returns to the hinterland, builds a house and starts to cultivate. Nevertheless Youba is no ḥarṭāni; after all, going to school and passing the CFD-exam was a rarity in his times. The problem here is that Youba did not attend school of his own free will, but was the one of his fathers' sons who had to go when the ʿamīr came to recruit children for the French school. While he, as the eldest son of his mother, went to this kind of boarding school, his elder, more noble brothers continued their leisurely life filled out with camel riding and little Qurʾān education.[43] After school, and still in the prosperous years before the big drought, there seems to have been no good place for Youba beneath his father's tent. Rather than staying, he prefers to leave and start some unpaid practical training at the national radio station, an opportunity mediated by his mother, who had married an influential journalist there. Some months later, having given up hope of the job being paid, he prefers to enlist with the army as a simple soldier. Later, after leaving the armed services, he profits from his schooling when looking for jobs. He is able to work as a checker and hence can avoid the most menial tasks, which are above all performed by sūdān. Despite this small success, the city does not provide him with more than a modest living. Youba decides to go back and start cultivating. In building his house among ḥarāṭīn belonging to his father's tribe,[44] he decides to affiliate neither with his bīẓān parents by the father, nor is there any tie left with his mother, who now lives far away with a new husband.

Among the ḥarāṭīn Youba stands out for two reasons. He still has one of his father's former slaves with him. And despite all his efforts to appear a good cultivator, Youba can hardly hide the fact that Laghlave, the slave sitting besides him, is the backbone of his personal agricultural commitment. Unlike any ḥarāṭīn, Youba – as an heir of his father's belongings – has a share in the rights to many fertile plots behind dams his father once registered with the colonial administration, and which now form part of the collective property of the ḫaima (ḥassāniyya: tent), i.e. the emiral family. Therefore Youba is among those deciding about the distribution of plots, but has no individual ownership rights that would allow him e.g. to sell a plot.

Though representing contrasting life-stories rather than similar ones, Youba and Tourad have much in common. Both lack social ties, i.e. ancestry through their mother. The case of the "successful" Tourad with his "unsuccessful" mother, and Youba with quite the opposite constellation of winning and losing, shows mothers and sons living a life detached from each other. Tourad's mother becomes a ḥarṭāniyya and enters client-like relations with her son (who nevertheless acts like one and consequently supports her). Youba's mother, devoted to and successful in her life as a highly esteemed spouse, is much too involved in her new affiliation to give her son any more significant support after the aborted attempt at the national radio. Both mothers live a life determined by the status of their present husbands.[45] For

their sons, who inherited a noble status from their fathers, they are unable to provide uncles and aunts corresponding to status so they remain segregated from the father's family.[46] Divorce, as can be concluded in the case of Badeyn, the slave without knowing it, had most serious consequences for support that depended on the affection of one woman (in this case the adoptive mother). Slave women who ascend to the status of ḥarṭāniyyāt through being married by a bīẓān, and later choose to return to their natal milieu, endanger rather than help their sons in the struggle to fill out the status inherited from the father. Such mothers, when entering a subsequent new marriage with another freeborn man, are very likely to have to leave behind the past of their former marriage, including their sons. These in turn, if they want to assert their bīẓān status, have to keep a distance from their mother, for their alliances too are in the present, and are self-attained. This constellation might throw a light on the prominent place the wife of Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar takes in the two narratives presented. In the settings described, she is the only person whom he can entirely trust and rely on.

Chapter 4
The Demography of Western Saharan Slavery

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

Africa and the Slave Trades

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saharans in the Senegal River Valley

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Origins and Numbers of Western Saharan Slaves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Assessing the Trade in Slaves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NUMBERING SŪDĀN

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

The Colonial Records

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contemporary Rural Population

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

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

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

Table 4: Frequency of Status Group Members in Different Villages

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

a: iggāwen, maʿalimīn and kwār

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Demography of Rural Sūdān Women

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sex, Gender and Servile Demography

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

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

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

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

a: iggāwen, maʿalimīn, kwār

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

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

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

Chapter 5
Gender and Status in the Topography of Work

Gendered Labour

Work is most prominent in the narratives of Zeyneb, a ḥarṭāniyya of slave origin, and M'Barke, still bound to slave estate (cf. p. 62-69). The sūdān women work in the master's household, and they work on the fields. They do all kinds of work: work which is "not normal" for women, because conceived as being – according to bīẓān categories – men's work, and typical female work. They herded goats, watered animals, cultivated and pounded millet, prepared food, collected wild plants, breast-fed the mistress' children, and much more. All this work M'Barke claims to have done "in one day", i.e. to have worked without interruption. Very much the same image is transmitted by a number of bīẓān oral traditions on slavery. These stories tell the fate of slave women, almost crushed by the load of work their masters oblige them to do (cf. Tauzin 1993: 71ff., 1989b). What goes almost unrecognised is the gender bias of these stories: there are none presented at any rate telling of male slaves working under conditions similar to those of female slaves.[1] These observations hint at another domain of gender-specific conditions of slavery. The question is: to what extent did gender and status differentiation shape the topography of work?

Broaching the topic with the broad intention of tracing gender distinctions within bīẓān slavery, one has to be aware of several limitations any such attempt necessarily faces. The historical depth of available empirical data is limited. Besides the life-stories at the core of this study, there are only a few sources speaking of slaves and slave occupations in former times. Women's work, either free or slave women's, in these sources (as in many others) very often remains neglected, if not obscured. Nevertheless some statements and accounts give a general idea of the primary occupations and the (work-) places of slave women and slave men in historical times. Wherever appropriate to illustrate contrasts, those activities which were predominantly assigned to slaves are compared to those of free people, hence illuminating the division of male and female labour and spaces, as well as the social connotations of distinct kinds of work.

The question whether there were practices of a gender division of labour not only among free members of bīẓān society, but among slaves too, is

crucial for an understanding of the relations of domination, and therefore will be analysed in detail throughout the present chapter. Slaves by their estate had their sociality negated and as virtual non-members of society had no right to be treated in accordance with the gendered patterns in use among the free.[2] As a consequence, the practice of a strict gender division of labour not only for the free, but for the slaves too, would open up for the latter a social field – gendered patterns of work – on which to act as social beings like the free. Conversely, the denial of respect for the gender attributes of particular tasks is a means by which masters could force slaves to enact their own de-gendering, or else de-socialisation, and thus highlight and reproduce the fundamental difference between masters and slaves. One might now argue that the practice of slavery, especially in a household context like in bīẓān society, never succeeded in being a total institution, and that therefore the exclusion of slaves from society remained largely part of the masters' legal fiction of this institution. I share this point of view (which can equally well be held with regard to plantation slavery), but would like to reframe it. Slaves were well aware of the de-socialisation they experienced when performing tasks not complying with the patterns of the gender division of labour in use among the free (cf. the bitterness M'Barke expresses when telling she had to herd animals, i.e. to do typical male work; cf. p. 68). The location of slave work in the right gender domain thus becomes an open ground for dispute defining the master-slave power relation, and the slave's ascension to a condition more respectful of his sociality. The thesis explored here moves beyond stating the development of a distinct kind of gender division of labour among slaves. The argument put forward instead is that the master-slave relations slave women and men experienced through their work were structured differently. Slave women and men, for a number of reasons, were effectively assigned different spheres of (sometimes overlapping) duties. These distinct experiences, and the resulting different social relations with their masters, meant that slave women and men resided not only in different locations of the social and symbolic world, but also assigned them different locations on the territorial topography of the slaveholding society.[3]

Discerning the gender characteristics of work, and especially of slave work, is crucial to an understanding of slavery not only in bīẓān society. The much greater demand for slave women as opposed to slave men observed in West African and Arab Muslim societies, and the primarily female slave population witnessed among the bīẓān (cf. chapter four), raises the question whether these gendered patterns of slavery had any distinct impact on the work performed by slaves in bīẓān society as well. It goes without saying that the import of slaves, i.e. of slave labour, transforms the social organisation of work in the enslaving society. Masters and mistresses may withdraw from manual work, and shift to other occupations, or have more leisure.[4] Introducing slavery, ending slavery, ups and downs in slave supply and the size of slave populations, as well as other economic factors affect the distribution of work among members of different social strata and gender attributes of

work. Patterns of slave labour, as well as those of the free members of society, are not fixed categories, but are dynamic and change over time. Response to new conditions, as will be shown, was often quick. Enslaving societies in this respect were not static. The bīẓān, as well as other Sahelian slave holders, knew very well how to profit from their slaves, and increase their number for this end. However they also managed to face the decline in slave supply that was inflicted on them by the French colonisation of the Mauritanian territory at the beginning of the 20th century.[5]

The following paragraphs examine labour within bīẓān society from two different angles. First the major lines structuring the gender division of labour among both bīẓān and slaves are developed. In a second step this analysis is detailed by sector-oriented studies of work, elucidating where slaves and other dependent strata were put to productive work in bīẓān society, and how other social strata were related to these tasks.[6] Although this section of the present chapter will focus mainly on the "visible" work beyond the household, which is generally represented as male work, women – above all slave women – appear working in these sectors too. They make up an important part of the workers in the agricultural and pastoral sector. Finally the interpenetration of different ideologies, of a gender division of labour, and of labour segregation by social hierarchy is analysed.

Slave Women's and Free Women's Labour

Elucidating female slave work is a difficult task, for much of it remains in the obscurity of the many duties of household-labour.[7] Historical eye-witness accounts, little interested in any kind of women's work, at best neglected to pay much attention to the issue. And, until recently, the social sciences took much the same attitude.[8] Contemporary interviews face the problem that verbalising the supposedly self-evident, but in fact manifold and complex tasks daily household labour consists of, is difficult both for the interviewee and the still unknowing interviewer. Therefore only limited means exist to explore past work. An ethnographic approach to labour first of all relies on (participant) observation, and thus refers to the present (cf. Beck 1988: 23f). In the context of dismantling slave work in the household, which – although remnants persist – by and large is an outdated phenomenon in Mauritania, further restrictions arise from the slave interviewees' interest in limiting the representation of their recently surmounted humiliation as regards work, as well as the master interviewees' interest in downplaying their personal involvement in practices of slavery. Besides remaining silent on the topic, two major distortions appear in the narratives, idealisation and denunciation of past master-slave relations. Despite these limitations some major female slave tasks can be traced.

Probably the first account providing some details on the life of slaves in bīẓān society comes from Saugnier, a Frenchman shipwrecked on the western Saharan coast in January 1784. He noticed free women had to serve their husbands, but in effect rarely did so, as most had a black slave woman

relieving them of this duty. The slaves' condition was far from good. While working in the household, the slave women were constantly ordered around by their mistresses (cf. Saugnier [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 88, 94f.).

René Caillié (1830), who made his five month long trip to the Brakna bīẓān in 1824, started in Podor, a French trade post ("escale") on the northern bank of the river Senegal. He headed north-east for several days, until he met a camp of slaves of the ʿamīr of Brakna. These slaves, living together in families, cultivated millet and were headed and supervised by an old zwāya. To honour his host, this chief commanded that Caillié be given some "sanglé", a porridge prepared from pounded millet and water called ʿaiš in ḥassāniyya. Who prepared the dish is not mentioned by Caillié, but probably it was done by a sūdān woman. However, it was another circumstance that attracted the attention of the young Frenchman: the whole slave camp lacked the milk that among freeborn had to accompany ʿaiš.[9] One of the slaves Caillié met at this occasion was a woman of Wolof origin. She told him in her native language – which Caillié spoke well – that the rich bīẓān sent slaves each year to sow and cultivate millet.[10] Once the harvest was finished, they would return to the camps of their masters. Visiting the fields, Caillié saw the slaves weeding with hoes, a technique he supposed to be one of bad cultivators, for it only turned the ground superficially (cf. Caillié 1830 53f.). While Caillié failed to detail whether specific tasks were carried out by men or women, the account is important, for it proves that already in the first half of the 19th century slaves were living as couples in seasonal adwaba, and jointly cultivated millet on plots flooded by the rain. The presence of a slave woman aware of her Wolof origin suggests that these slaves perpetuated, or at least profited from their ancestral customs of cultivation (cf. Caillié 1830: 58, 85f., 95ff.).[11]

The measures necessary to fatten the young bīẓāniyyāt to make them conform to the bīẓān model of female beauty was often conveyed to slave women. Being charged with the task of fattening these girls meant the slaves were, exceptionally, put in a position of considerable authority, and they forced the young bīẓān girls to drink enormous amounts of milk and other foodstuffs using all means at their disposal. They pinched their victims until they bled, beat them and worse. Less unusual, and hence less noteworthy was the slave women's contribution to work in the household, e.g. the churning of butter in a goat-skin (cf. Caillié 1830: 99ff.; Meyer 1959: 53; Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995). It was the slave women's duty too to fetch water for their masters' requirements, as well as for the animals remaining for various reasons in the camp. This often collectively performed walk to a well or pool of rainwater had a light-hearted quality, encouraging the unwatched slave women to enjoy their temporary liberty by singing and dancing together (cf. Caillié 1830: 168).

Most of the tasks described in the historic accounts reappear in the contemporary life-stories of women of slave origin I gathered in the region of Achram-Diouk. Their primary occupation – at least for a period of life – was

with the masters' household. As best portrayed by M'Barke, the focus of the slave women's duty was to relieve the mistresses of all menial and repetitive tasks. Therefore slave women had to pound millet and prepare meals, fetch water, care for young and sick animals remaining within the camp, spin and weave wool, and so forth. The amount of work entailed in many of these tasks varied throughout the seasons. Consumption of millet was drastically reduced, if not stopped completely during the various animals' main lactation period (cf. Caillié 1830: 100f., Oxby 1978: 153). While the amount of millet pounded diminished, the processing of milk increased, e.g. zebde (butter), or šnīn (sour milk mixed with water) had to be prepared. The hardship of fetching water too was determined by the season's being dry or wet. How much time had to be spent collecting firewood also depended on a variety of factors. The more arid the region the masters' camp was in, the more difficult it was to get hold of the necessary amount of wood suited to being burnt near the tents and for cooking. Different cooking habits, too, influenced the distribution of tasks within the household. While in historic accounts some pastoral nomadic bīẓān living in the north are described as eating only once a day (cf. Saugnier [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 124), this austerity was more easily overcome where climatic conditions were more favourable, and agro-pastoral production and trade more developed (cf. Vincent 1860: 486).

During the 20th century the avenue of newly emerging patterns of pastoral production and consumption led to further change. The rise of rice from a luxury side dish to a major staple food is but one example of this evolution. Rice, in the cities nowadays mainly prepared for lunch, has the advantage of needing no pounding and being much quicker in preparation (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 34ff.; Ruf 1995: 136ff.). While seasonal variation could reduce the amount of slave women's work, the need for female support never stopped, and could always be extended by transferring work formerly done by the mistresses to the slave women. This is why some tasks in different reports are presented either as female or slave tasks (e.g. taking down and setting up the tents; cf. Saugnier [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 83: 143; Bourrel 1861: 529). To meet the mistresses' expectations, and relieve them permanently of all kinds of undesired manual work, the slave women had to keep close to their tents all day long. They left only if in charge of a specific duty outside the camp. The slave women's ability to withdraw from the tent could be diminished by the imposition of specific tasks like nursing and watching the mistress' children, which needed her permanent presence.[12]

Another complex of slave women's work is independent of a direct commitment to the masters, but related to their own physical reproduction. Although it is one of the masters' main duties to feed their slaves (cf. Schacht 1964: 128; Lewis 1990: 6ff.), this obligation in a number of cases was met only partially. René Caillié (1830: 84f.) tells of an old slave woman who procured him porridge in exchange for some of the milk she had from a cow her masters had given her to live off. However, as Caillié does not fail to remark, the masters had taken care to choose a very bad animal. Slave women

regularly collected ʿaz, a wild grain used as a substitute for millet, but consumed regularly only by slaves. The masters preferred millet porridge (cf. Bourrel 1861: 41f.; Caillié 1830: 58, 85).[13] It might have been that the slaves' knowledge of substitute food provided by wild plants and roots was much more developed than the masters'. Saugnier reports that he was only able to cope with his permanent hunger by using a part of his time out in the bush herding to look for this kind of food, and eventually secretly barbecue a sheep he took from his master's herd (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 38). Much later the Dahoméan human rights activist Louis Hunkanrin (sentenced to detention in the 1930s in Tidjikja and other Mauritanian towns) made the failure of the slave masters to feed and clothe their slaves one of the most prominent of his many complaints concerning the persistence of slavery in Mauritania (cf. Hunkanrin 1964: 33, 36).[14]

Slave women leaving their masters' camp to cultivate millet or dates along with slave men, and often together with their children, left the narrow circle of chiefly reproductive work[15] in the household and camp, and became involved in the production of material goods directly benefiting their masters' income. For these reasons the female slaves' contribution to work beyond the ideological boundary of feminine work is discussed alongside the description of agricultural labour in the section on agricultural labour (cf. p. 158-161).

Giving an impression of the free women's occupation, proves difficult because the ideal of noble femininity propagates inactivity. This ideal, however, is a relative measure which can only be defined in terms of a comparison to the range of activities someone is abstaining from, and compared to a sort of social average. A look at the most important female slave tasks reveals, however, that not all tasks arising in the context of household work in like manner have to be omitted for the sake of noble femininity. Tasks like collecting firewood, fetching water, pounding millet etc., are less compatible with a noble's life than e.g. spinning and weaving, often performed in female groups. This becomes apparent in the following accounts:

> When I was young my only work consisted of showing the sūdān to make tents and how to work with the wool. Of course then it was only the sūdān who did this work. There were some bīẓāniyyāt doing this work too, but I never shared this occupation. I only made some mats. (Interview Loughaye Mint Driss, zwāya, 18.9.1995)[16]

> To prepare the food there were slaves; in those times there were a lot of slaves, every family had one, they brought the water and did much other work . . . There was a slave to assist our mother with the upbringing of the children. (Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995)

> In those days I always remained sitting. It's no good for me to work with my hands. I come from a family where this is unusual, therefore it would be no good if I would be the only one to work with the hands. . . . My daughter too does not pound millet. At least as long as I stayed with her.

> Actually I don't know if she works, because she is not here. She lives in the city now. Normally there she must have a maid to do the work. . . . Working on the fields is no good to me, but my husband and sons work there.[17] . . . I don't need to do other work like sewing [leather] pillows or weaving mats. We have money to buy these goods. (Interview Khaite Mint Mohamed, ḥassān, 21.10.1995)

When bīẓāniyyāt, i.e. freeborn women, had to face situations constraining the amount of slave labour at their disposal, the hierarchy inherent to female labour became obvious. One such case is reported from a Rgaybāt household, still living together with its slaves in the 1980s. The tent, residing in the Zemmour region on the northern edge of today's Mauritania in February, consisted of a couple of already somewhat advanced age, one young slave man, two slave women, a slave girl of about eight and a slave baby. The married sons of the family had migrated to the cities, and worked as traders. All the slaves were occupied with herding, although the amount of livestock was modest. The young man left the camp every morning with the 20 camels, the two women herded the 30 sheep divided into two small herds, and the girl took care of the 10 goats. The chief of the family decided every morning where to graze the animals throughout the day. His wife, assisted by a young relative of her husband's, prepared the food – even for the slaves (cf. Caratini 1989: 101). Rather than accept Sophie Caratini's interpretation, stating this configuration of master and slave occupations to reveal the end of slave practices among the Rgaybāt, I suggest the case illuminates how free women manage to sustain difference between themselves and the slave women. The locus of this battle – in fact reflecting much of the changing circumstances master-slave relations are nowadays subjected to – is both the nature and the location of work. The free women stick to the camp and even remain within the tent, while the slave women go to the pasture. Hence they refrain from joining in herding, a practice which the Rgaybāt are denounced for, and which makes them the targets of mockery from other bīẓān (cf. Caratini 1989: 95).

The tent is the domain of the bīẓāniyyāt. It is their possession, and they have the know-how, as well as the responsibility to manufacture and repair it. Localising isolated, female spots distinct from the vast entity of the outside world assigned to the men produces a gendered map of space. Distinguishing the tent's shade from the brightness of the outside world reminds one greatly of the practices producing shifting boundaries of gendered spaces analysed by Pierre Bourdieu (1972: 45-69) in his ethnographic study of the North African Kabyle house. Homologous distinctions are reproduced on different levels. Once the focus is on the house itself, the front is the locality of the men, and the back belongs to the women. In addition many of the house's elements and utensils are either attributed to the women's or the men's world. But the situation is inverted when the focus changes, and the house is set in relation to its environment. During the day, the house becomes the sole

domain of the women. The men have to avoid going in, in order not to give rise to suspicion. This dichotomy is one of private and public life, day and night, fire and water. Through the shifting boundary, the house represents ambivalence, it is both female and hybrid, female-male.

Identifying social spaces and associating them with distinct material localities emerges as an ambivalent project. Stating the tent to be the locality of the women and the outer world to be the men's is both right and wrong. It would be neglecting the nature of social organisation to classify such distinctions as invariable and static. To have the boundary shift between private and public, between the male and the female spaces, is essential to make this distinction work. Both domains are interdependent, and constituted from their opposition to each other. Complete separation, ending the encounter producing difference, would make the distinction senseless. A shifting boundary has also been localised by Sophie Caratini (1989: 111ff.) in her interpretation of the symbolic meanings of the bīẓān tent. The frontier of in and out, male and female, represented by light and darkness, can shift from distinguishing the exterior and the interior of the tent to distinguishing its front and back. This is the case when visitors are received in the daytime, and hence the distinction of outside/inside is incorporated into the tent's small universe. While during daylight privacy is compressed either into the tent or its back, once the night has fallen, it expands to the tent's surroundings.

The darkness of the night is also important in another way. In its shelter the young women and men can gather and have fun without offending the rules of social conduct. The night also is used to resolve dilemmas: when young couples do not constitute their own tent immediately after marriage, the woman continues to live with her parents. As the man by bīẓān customs is advised not to meet his father-in-law, he would hardly ever have an opportunity to meet his spouse. This absurd scenario is circumvented by the woman installing her bed at some distance to her parent's tent. Once the night has come, she will leave the tent and spend the night with her husband, until he leaves at sunrise.[18]

Slaves living in a small tent, and not in the master's, were not unconditionally allowed entrance into the privacy of the master's tent. They are only allowed to enter the tent and step on the mats if the man was outside, and their duty located within the tent (Caratini 1989: 111ff.). Getting into the tent, and even more so being accorded a place within it, was a major step forward in a slave's struggle to be treated like the free – and distinguish themselves from slaves not granted these privileges.[19] Getting into the tent first of all was a slave woman's concern. Its success was bound to the patterns of integration analysed above as slave woman-free woman relations (cf. chapter three). Establishing intimacy and maintaining it among slave women and free women necessitated allowing for close co-residence. Slave women nursing their mistresses' children, and hence establishing milk kinship, had to enter the tent to be able to do so. When replacing the free women's reproductive labour, the slave women had to follow a time schedule largely independ-

ent of their master's will. Slave women thus were not only able to obtain the free women's confidence, and to learn much about what it meant to behave like a noblewoman, but achieved rights to locate themselves within the core locality of femininity.[20]

Facing the subversive side-effects of entrusting slave women with a wide range of female tasks, and having them reside most closely, the bīẓāniyyāt had to rely on other means to produce difference between themselves and the slave women. As revealed by the case of the Rgaybāt family above, attributing different kinds of work also serves to establish difference between slaves and masters. Just like the shifting boundary of male and female spaces, distinguishing slave from noble work is the outcome of a relational undertaking. A noblewoman who has all her slave women go out and herd, will not be compromised by herself working in the household. A different case is that of a noblewoman like Loughaye Mint Driss (cf. above, p. 144), who abstained almost completely from working herself, but reproduced her supremacy by her knowledge of the tasks enabling her to instruct and supervise the slaves.

Besides these relational modes of defining noble and slave work, some fixed patterns of honourable or dishonouring work evolved. Pounding millet is the most prominent task incompatible with living a noblewoman's life. Consequently avoiding pounding plays a major role in today's struggles for status enhancement. The narrative of Valha (cf. p. 69-72), a woman of znāga status, is intriguing on this point. While the znāga women, who in this case lived without support from slave women, did everything considered to be women's work, from cooking to fetching water, they later managed at least to delegate the tiring pounding and fetching water. During the dry season the camp was joined by some ḥarāṭīn families. The women of these engaged in pounding the znāga families' millet for payment. As pounding was a female task, but the payment of the ḥarṭāniyyāt had to be effected in cash generated by the men's trade in livestock, introducing this new division of labour manifested a new definition of gender relations among free men and women. Pounding millet is today even more a symbol of inferior status as contracts applying to household maids make obvious. These are paid fairly poorly on a monthly basis (about 2-4,000 UM in the region of Achram-Diouk), and get food and accommodation. Despite comprising all other work in the household throughout the whole day, the contracts generally exclude the pounding of millet. If it is to be included, another 2,000 UM have to be paid (Interview Khaite Mint Mohamed, ḥassān, 21.10.1995). However, money seems not to be the sole objective in this arrangement, as many maids refuse to pound at all.[21] Facing these problems, and with the modern, motor-driven mills proving to be cheaper than rarely available manual pounding,[22] most people nowadays eat ground millet – despite the many negative features attributed to it.[23]

Slave Men's and Free Men's Labour

Slave men, as already revealed in the life-stories, had a variety of jobs. Most prominent were cultivation of millet, date-palms, and herding. As the different bīẓān groupings' commitment to these distinct branches of production varied, the major duties of slave men differed too.[24] With the bīẓān being either pastoralists or agro-pastoralists, or even traders, the slave men's occupations could vary between herding, a seasonal combination of herding and cultivation, just cultivation, work in the caravan trade, and other jobs. The following paragraphs explore the slave men's work and elucidate how these correspond to their respective social, ecological and economic context.

The accounts of the involuntary shipwrecked 18th and 19th century visitors to the western Sahara provide a concurring image of male slave labour. Therefore, male slaves' most important occupation in the northern region of bīẓān territory was herding. Without any delay and almost without apprenticeship they had to leave the camp with either sheep and goats, or else camels, lead them to pasture, guard them throughout the day, and get back to the camp by sunset. Poor bīẓān possessing no slaves sent their own children with the herds. One difference was made between the free and the slaves: while the former got breakfast, the latter had to leave the camp with an empty belly. However, also adult free men would herd, as Saugnier recounts in an earlier passage of his narrative (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 34, 37, 89). Sometimes the bīẓān took precautions with regard to their newly acquired and inexperienced slave herders. Alexander Scott, shipwrecked in 1810 and held in captivity for six years, had to herd sheep and goats. On the job he was accompanied, advised and supervised by one of his masters' three daughters (cf. Scott [1821] in Barbier 1985: 81f.). Follie, after having been sold and resold several times, entered service of a rich man, who started treating him much better than his predecessors and led him to his small village in what is now south Morocco, north of the Oued Drâa. While Follie described his job as herding camels, his account seems rather to be of someone guarding some newly sown plots from being invaded by the surrounding camels. These, untypically for grazing camels which are at their happiest roaming over vast pastures, were hobbled and thus unable to move far (cf. Follie [1785] in Barbier 1984: 76ff.). Besides herding, however, the slave men also had to join in a number of domestic tasks. The number of duties and the lack of relief from endless work, combined with poor feeding made Brisson complain to his master about his misery: "I make faggots, I churn butter, I tend the flocks, I pull up roots, I prepare camel's hair for your wife to spin, I till the earth, I do everything in a word that you require of me." (Brisson [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 437)

A different impression of male slave duties is given by René Caillié (1830: 98ff.). Among the Brakna he saw camels primarily herded by ḥarāṭīn or znāga, and only rarely entrusted to slaves. The latter were rather responsible for leading the cattle to pasture, and for driving them back to the camp in the evening. Late at night, around 10 p.m., they had to milk them under the

supervision of the bīẓān. Children, either free or slave, are not mentioned as working. Agricultural labour, according to Caillié, absorbed a considerable number of male slaves. This is largely due to the location of his stay. Unlike the shipwrecked men, Caillié's trip led him to places within the šemāma, the southern Mauritanian area with major agricultural potential on the border of the Senegal river. To the north-east of his starting point Podor, he visited places like Aleg, where the cultivation of millet was common on the large plots inundated by rain (e.g. seasonal lake of Aleg). Additionally, he travelled during the cultivation period, and thus experienced the season with the fewest demands on herding labour, but the largest exigencies upon agriculture. Besides cultivation, the collection of gum arabic was a slave task too. Beginning in mid December, slaves were sent to form a small camp near the gum-trees and start the harvest. Again supervised by some zwāya, the slaves had to work all day and were equipped only with a leather bag containing some water, and a second one to receive the gum. Getting back at sunset, they had the milk of one cow provided by their masters for food; the supervising zwāya had the milk of two cows and some millet. The supervisor was paid by having the right to the yield of every sixth day of harvest. Sometimes impoverished znāga joined the work. These had to pay half of their harvest in order to get the concession to collect gum (cf. Caillié 1830: 133ff.).[25]

Even more pronounced is the report of Aḥmad al-Amīn aš-Šinqītī (whose name was transcribed as Ahmed Lamine Ech Chenguiti by his translator). In the late nineteenth century Trarza, gum was harvested by slaves, sent out for this purpose by their masters who had come to the regions with dense stands of gum-trees. Should a slave fail to deliver the amount of gum desired by his master, he risked getting a sound thrashing. The collection of gum was not restricted to the Trarza region, but took place in all southerly regions from the east to the west (Ech Chenguiti 1953: 116f.). Much the same was observed by the midshipman Bourrel (1861: 522f.) who travelled from Podor to the Tagant in 1860, hence revisiting some of the places already described by Caillié. He noticed the zwāya sent their slaves to collect gum arabic, and later exchange it at the "escale" for guinée cloth and even millet. From this trade, as well as their numerous herds and the cultivation of millet, he assumed the zwāya had developed a level of affluence unknown to their ḥassān fellows. In the zwāya camps millet never lacked, and milk was drunk more than once a day. This industry was possible due to large numbers of badly treated slaves. Among the ḥassān on the contrary, slaves could achieve some respect from their masters and even rise to be considered as counsellors.[26]

Another important, above all male slave occupation was the cultivation of date palm groves, numerous in the Adrar and Tagant. With the objective of expanding this activity, slaves were imported in large numbers.[27] Most of these slaves brought to the capital of the Tagant, Tidjikja, were renowned for being of Bambara origin (cf. Ech Chenguiti 1953: 138).

Domains of Work

Herding Labour

Given that many noble bīẓān withdrew themselves from any direct implication in the daily obligations of herding, and many of their slaves had an important share of their work-time assigned to tasks other than herding, the question arises how and by whom the pastoral sector was run. One report from the early 1950s is highly instructive on the social organisation of pastoral labour in bīẓān society. Abdallahi Ould Cheikh Sidiya, the successor of the great marabout Cheikh Sidiya (Šayḫ Sidyya), at that time owned 500 camels, 500 cattle, 2,000 sheep, some donkeys and a few horses. These animals represented about one third of all his tribe's animals. The camels, divided into eight herds (two constituted of lactating she-camels, the remaining six designated for stockbreeding), were guarded by families of specialised herders, who had passed on their skills from father to son. They were paid by the right to use one she-camel out of every ten guarded, one young male camel and two pieces of guinée cloth, paid every year, and some use-right in milk. The camel herders, though to some degree autonomous, were supervised by a chief herder, responsible for the general management, veterinary care, castration, the general orientation of pasture allocation and many other related concerns. Most of the camels were herded far from the camp of Abdallahi, who had to remain immobile due to his many political and religious obligations. The cattle, divided into ten herds, were guarded by black shepherds, either slave and ḥarāṭīn. The cattle were normally watered at the same well as the camp of Abdallahi, or another one nearby. These herders too were supervised by a chief herder, but were remunerated only by the right to use a third of the cows' milk. While selling milk is dishonourable to noble bīẓān, the herders were allowed to produce and sell butter to raise their profit. This was considered legitimate, because the profit was meant to arise from the labour-input and not from the milk. The sheep and goats were guarded by bīẓān who originated from the šayḫ's tribal confederation and were his tlāmīḍ (religious disciples). These shepherds, again supervised by a chief, but unlike the camel shepherds revocable, were remunerated with half of the milking sheep designated to meet the main camp's needs,[28] half of the wool, butter and hides produced. These goods – often subject to dispute – were distributed by the marabout himself to avoid quarrelling. The ʿamīr of Trarza, Ahmed Ould Deid, living in much more modest material conditions, hence following the precepts of ḥassān morality, owned 100 camels, 50 cattle and two herds, i.e. about 400 sheep and goats. These animals were guarded by shepherds subject to about the same conditions as those of šayḫ Abdallahi. In contrast to the famous zwāya, the ʿamīr received numerous lactating animals as mniḥa, i.e. loans of use-rights (cf. Dubié 1953: 138ff., 173).

This pattern of a limited contribution of slave labour to pastoral production, is contrasted by the presence of men from other dependent strata in this sector (cf. Bonte 1998a: 3f.). This division of labour appeared to be predomi-

nant in the Tagant region too. During the 1950s and 1960s Weddou Ould Jiddou (Interview zwāya 17.4.1995) managed several huge herds, and was heavily engaged in the region's trade in animals to the Senegalese markets of Louga and Dakar. Nowadays he still manages the region's largest herd of cattle, consisting mainly not of his own, but of animals he took into his care for payment. Weddou Ould Jiddou stated he had had only one slave herder during the better times, but six paid ones for his sheep and goats, and another two paid herders for the cattle. A fact he much regretted, because as he said, with a twinkle in his eyes, the slave was more profitable than the paid herders, but unfortunately slaves had already been much too expensive to buy.[29]

On various occasions the marked social differentiation among bīẓān pastoralists has been stressed. Variation is such that estimates relating to average pastoral households and their economic assets contain no evidence (cf. Ould Cheikh 1990: 71). My own findings confirm the statement that there hardly ever was anything like a "standard" type of pastoral household and herd. Rather there were large disparities in wealth within each camp, met by a number of redistributive practices, and involving relations of dependency and clientage. Some approximate estimation of a securely self-sustaining pastoral household derived from the interview information might advance a number of 10-40 cows and one herd of small stock, i.e. 100-200 animals.[30]

In his narrative, Youba reported his father to have been the biggest animal-owner in his camp. Before the big drought he had two herds of sheep and goats, approximating to about 400 animals, 120 cattle, 6 male horses and 4 or 5 male camels. Of the approximately overall thirteen ḥassān tents in the camp, five were reported to have been extremely poor and another five to have had only modest possessions, i.e. about two or three cows and between 30 and 40 goats and sheep. The remaining three families, among them Youba's father's, were the better off. This uneven distribution of possession was reflected in the number of slaves possessed as well. Only a few ḥassān in the camp owned slaves, or at least had them live within the camp. It was again Youba's father who owned the largest number of slaves: three slave tents, i.e. slave families belonged to him (cf. p. 76). The emphasis Youba put on the issue of the slaves constituting tents, i.e. true families, besides proving his sensitivity on the matter can also be interpreted as a hint at a distinct slave condition in this mainly pastoral context. Male slaves, given major jobs which like herding involved a high personal responsibility, were often treated differently from those held closest to the slave estate. A master wanting his male slave to be pleased and grateful e.g. could buy him a slave woman to marry (cf. Brhane 1997b: 26; Oxby 1978: 196). In doing this, he could secure himself both the slave's gratitude, and his offspring.[31] Once confidence was established between the master and his slave, the latter could be entrusted with a major part of the care for the animals with much less risk than an unruly slave renowned for his voracity for meat.[32]

Trust is a major factor in the organisation of pastoral labour. This is true if

herding is organised within the nuclear family, and is even more important if work is executed by slaves or hired herders. One major means to secure the herder's devotion to the herd owner's interest is to have him participate in the gain acquired through herd growth. While members of the family as co-owners and potential heirs more or less naturally fall into this category, a similar commitment can be obtained from strange herders. Regular payment and irregular incentives in animals help the herder constitute his own herd – among his master's or contractor's herd. Herding both together is a fairly certain way to have the herder do his work properly. Trust however cannot persist without continuous confirmation (cf. Beck 1988: 390ff.; Spittler 1983: 67). This applies to all herders, either relatives and strangers. Herding is a complex task involving much decision-making, and therefore easily becomes the object of divergent opinions and quarrelling. Furthermore, different animal species require a different intensity of guarding and care, and hence have different requirements in terms of ad-hoc decision-making and personal qualifications of the herders. Finally, the herd-owner can practice a large variety of controls, ranging from delegating as few strategic decisions as possible, to leaving the herder almost a free hand.[33] All these distinct levels of differentiation are revealed in the large bīẓān herd-owners' practices in organising herd labour.

Cattle

In the case of Abdallahi, cited above, only the cattle were assigned for herding to either slaves or ḥarāṭīn. Herding cattle among the bīẓān – as unanimously stated by all my informants – except in very few cases never implied any other work than watering and milking.[34] The cattle are supposed to leave in the morning for the pasture, graze, and come back at dusk. Cattle have a definite sense of orientation and easily locate appropriate grazing grounds. Milking takes place late, about two hours after sunset. Only calves were known to have been herded in order to accustom them to pasture and protect them from wild animals (Interview Messaoud Ould Soueide, ʿabd, 17.12.1995). The guarding of full-grown cattle only happened in the case of danger from wild animals, or severe drought and the cattle being very weak (Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995).[35] They then were at high risk of getting stuck and dying in the clayey mud that develops with the first rains of the rainy season. Responsibility and decision-making by the herders within this type of herding is almost null. The most prominent and hardest work – watering and milking – is easy for the master to control and hence can be given to any slave no matter what his motivation. Watering, except in the cold season (January-February) is needed every day, and requires about 27 litres per day per animal during the dry season in the Tagant region (cf. Toupet 1977: 236). If open water sources were lacking, it was the herders' duty to dig the well needed to water the cattle (cf. Ould Hamidoun 1952: 57). This most menial work however, with the increasing scarcity of slave labour due to flight, liberation and migration, could be

passed on to a specialised labourer, paid per watered animal on a monthly basis (Interview Laghlave Ould Mahmoud, ḥarṭāni, 13.4.1995). Pastoral management in these constellations remained solely the masters' or the owners' responsibility, but the decisions these made with regard to pastoral nomadic movements were framed by the more or less limited mobility of the watering labour.

Whatever the relative ease of cattle rearing, circumstances could entail the division of cattle herds and the use of herders far away from the owner's camp. While in former times this seems to have rarely been the case and only been used by people poor in cattle or labour power,[36] sedentarised life nowadays produces the urgent need to send cattle to distant pastures, and keep only some lactating cows within the vicinity of the village. This job is nowadays done for a number of the bigger herd owners who originate from the traditional nobility by some of their former slaves living in adwaba on the Tagant. Payment is due in cash in the case of a herder caring for a large number of cattle, probably composed of animals from various owners.[37] In the case of cows sent for care to former slaves now living in adwaba, payment is more likely to be embedded in the various, more or less reciprocal exchanges taking place between former masters and slaves.[38]

Camels

Caring for camels bears characteristics almost the opposite of those of cattle rearing. Camels are extremely mobile. Rather than following a lead animal, and exhibiting a distinct sense of customary attachment to their habitat, as cattle do, camels behave much more like wild animals, and display a highly individualistic spirit. Being both a browsing and grazing species, camels nevertheless tend to favour fodder from shrubs and bushes, which they are able to browse on despite their many thorns. In order to browse on these plants, highly dispersed in the Saharan and Sahelo-Saharian zone, the camels scatter around the pastureland, and do not keep together in a herd. These animal preferences put the camel-herder into the dilemma of either allowing optimum grazing conditions for the herd, at the risk of losing animals, or on the contrary applying a strategy of maximum security against loss, but reducing the quantity and quality of the grazing.[39] Camel herders thus have to strike a balance between the divergent interests – and regularly set out to trace lost animals (cf. Beck 1988: 223; Spittler 1983: 51ff.).

A major qualification of a herder able to maintain and increase a camel herd, besides knowledge of the condition of often remote pastures, wells etc., is his ability to read tracks and get back the lost animals.[40] Once the owner does not move around with the herd himself, the herder far away for weeks or months is in a position of high responsibility. His decisions amount to a strategy which in turn is decisive to the fate of the herd. The pastoral management system developed by Abdallahi (cf. above) is revealing of this constellation. All his camel herders are employed on an irrevocable basis and inherit this occupation, hence their familiarity with all aspects of camel care

from childhood on is assumed; and since trust is not enough to ensure that the system works, having a chief supervisor replaces control by the owner. The degree of involvement in camel-herding here becomes a major factor determining the organisation of herding. If only a few camels are owned, these are likely to be herded for remuneration by specialised herders. Only when camel-breeding becomes the major activity, does the development and appropriation of the knowledge needed become a real concern. Once the exigencies of labour input exceed the potential provided within the family, strange, but qualified herders have to be acquired rapidly.[41] These differences explain the overall limited contribution of slaves to camel herding, as well as the few cases where they did engage in this activity. Slave men among the camel-holding branches of the Rgaybāt were rarely sent to herd camels far distant from the camp; they much more often had to herd the animals which were kept in the vicinity of the camp and returned there every night. If ever, only second generation slaves, enjoying a high level of trust from their masters, and having given proof of their knowledge, were employed to go off on their own with a camel herd. This occupation represented the peak of a slave man's career, putting him ahead of those slaves only allowed to leave the camp within the distance of a day's walk.[42] Once performing such a responsible task, otherwise performed by a dependent, but free herder, e.g. a znāga or ruined ḥassān, a slave became difficult to replace (cf. Caratini 1989: 120). The case throws light on the fact that ascension of slave men to sensitive tasks was possible, but on the whole remained limited. Slave men in this configuration had to compete with other qualified herders, more suited to entering into a trustful, patron-client relationship with the herd owner (Borricand 1948: 89f.). As a temporary help, or to guard animals near the camp slaves, as the most universal workers, could be employed without difficulties. Then even slave women could be assigned to herd camels (cf. Basset 1913: 656).

In regions such as the southern Tagant and Aftout cattle, as well as sheep and goats, constituted the most important stock due to the region's infestation with flies transmitting tabūrit (*Trypanosomiasis*), a disease similar to the sleeping sickness affecting camels (cf. Ech Chenguiti: 1953: 131; Toupet 1958: 81, Interview Mahmoud Ould Mnih, znāga, 4.2.1996). Here slave men too could achieve the position of a highly recognised and trusted herder, but the nature of cattle and small ruminant herd labour made them less indispensable than among camel pastoralists. Pastoral specialisation constrained both masters and slaves. One small, in those times still exclusively pastoral grouping of the Awlād ʿAlī Ntūnva ḥassān specialised mainly in cattle rearing, started diversification of its livestock in camels in the 1950s. This new strategy however did not alter the group's organisation of pastoral labour. This mainly was performed by a few strongly attached slave families and some znāga clients, while provision with millet was the duty of slaves living in the tribe's adabay. Rather than taking any risk by starting to herd themselves, the ḥassān entrusted the newly acquired camels to some specialised

herders of an alien tribal group (Interview Maʿarouf Ould Eleyatt, ḥassān, 26.3.1995). Other bīẓān pastoralists organised diversification according to the same pattern. A znāga grouping of the Kunta Awlād Sīdi al-Wāvi, rich in sheep bred for sale on the meat markets of Senegal before the big drought, had the large number of camels in their possession[43] herded by a small specialised group of five to six families of the same tribal confederation, called Ahel Lbil (people of the camels). The possessors claimed to hardly ever have seen their animals. The remuneration for herding consisted of one young camel per year (normally a two year old male) and of course the use of the camels' milk (Interview Mohamed Ould Abass, znāga, 5.12.1995).

Today camel husbandry, both within the region of Achram-Diouk and by local owners, is of minor importance. Most big herds are owned by rich traders or other successful participants in the market economy, some of whom are ḥarāṭīn.[44] These herds represent capital investments and are led by paid herders. As these are the only ones to move around with the animals, and sometimes there is support from a four wheel drive car, the herds are highly mobile. They move around all of Mauritania, but are concentrated to a large extent in the country's south. If there is a lack of pasture, they also easily cross the national borders, hence pursuing strategies at the core of nomadic pastoralism since time immemorial, but now professionalised and in contrast to the shrinking range of mobility the few remaining pastoral nomadic households are able to maintain (cf. RIM 1986: 9f.). While in former times payment for herds larger than 30 animals in most cases was due in form of the traditional young male camel, nowadays monetary remuneration is prevalent.[45] This capital investment type of herding needs to employ already highly qualified herders, and hence opens up a specific labour market. In my personal experience, most of these herders are of znāga origin, but there are pauperised ḥassān and zwāya too (cf. Bonte 1998a: 3f.), as well as ḥarāṭīn or not formally manumitted slaves, now working to their own benefit.[46] The case of close-range camel herding, as practised by a few bīẓān within the region of Achram-Diouk, is different. Here even complete novices to camel herding are employed, and therefore are submitted to an apprenticeship led by the experienced owner and chief herder. While the routine work in this constellation is done by the paid herders, exceptional tasks, like looking for animals lost for a longer time and transferring animals to distant pastures in times of drought still are executed under the direct guidance of a skilled family member (Interview Mohamed Sid'Ahmed, zwāya, 12.9.1995).

Sheep and Goats

Sheep and goats are considered in bīẓān society to be much the same, an attitude revealed by the use of the generic term "lġnem" (best translated as small ruminants, or else small stock; cf. Pierret 1948: 118) subsuming any composition of the two species in one herd. Although sheep and goats have different characteristics – goats are browsing and sheep grazing animals – they often are kept together and led to pasture in one and the same herd.[47] In

the past, however, many pastoralists specialised in either black or white sheep (nʿāj), while goats were less frequently kept. The white, or white and black spotted "fulani" sheep is a good meat producer and primarily was bred for sale to the meat markets of Senegal. The black, long-haired sheep provided the raw material for the traditional woollen tents, and was a better milk-producer. Goats (lmāʿiz), most of which are of "Sahelian" race, are lighter than sheep (cf. Ould Cheikh 1990: 70). With the ongoing drought the emphasis on sheep was reduced, and the breeding of goats was intensified.[48] Goats are more robust and less susceptible than sheep, and especially cope better with the heavy impact droughts have on grazing pasture. Their range of activity is larger than that of sheep (ability to climb up shrubs), they browse on even the woody parts of plants, and they manage to digest a much larger variety of vegetation residues, up to artificial cellulose products like cardboard.[49] Goats also need less attention, for if the worst happens they manage to get back at dawn on their own. In a nutshell, goats are considered more intelligent than sheep.

Herding small stock needs constant attention and surveillance. The herds, consisting of up to 200 animals, are large, and a single sheep or goat is easily lost. Jackals are a considerable threat; they might track lost animals, or approach the herd without being noticed and kill one or several animals. Another danger comes from bad water, which a good herder should be able to spot (cf. note 52, this chapter), and herbs and plants harmful or poisonous to the animals.[50] Sometimes the negative effects depend on the season, e.g. tigengilit (*Indigofera Senegalensis*), if grazed on when in blossom, provokes severe and frequently deadly inflation to the small ruminants' digestive organs.[51] Animal prosperity too depends on some curative practices. Several times a year sheep and goats have to be provided with salt. In the region of Achram-Diouk several natural salt deposits are within reach of a one or two days' march. Salt cures were most often applied once at the end of the rainy season and another time at the end of the dry cold season, before temperatures rose. A third, facultative salt cure could be applied at the beginning of the rainy season when animals were not watered from wells but surface water of minor quality. The treatment is supposed to minimise the risk of infection by diseases (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 12.4.1995).

Despite the considerable responsibilities a herder has to bear, herding small ruminants is considered above all children's work. Almost any member of bīẓān society, either bīẓān or sūdān, is able to claim to once have herded sheep and goats in his youth. This episode in life ends with the engagement in a more specialised activity. Ḥarāṭīn and slaves most commonly shifted to cultivation after having participated for the first time in the Ramadan, the religious month of daytime fasting, while the bīẓān ended their most often temporally limited careers in herding by taking up one or several professional occupations. Herding small ruminants is well suited to child labourers, because it is separated from the more heavy work of watering.[52] This duty is delegated to some adult, then often responsible for the watering of several

herds of sheep and goats and perhaps some cattle or camels (cf. the narrative of Brahim, p. 59-66), as well as for their milking (cf. Ould Hamidoun 1952: 58). Herding small ruminants however was not limited to children. As the case of Abdallahi shows (cf. p. 150), free adult people too could engage in this activity (and sometimes make use of either child or slave labour). Like all livestock, small stock required professional care to develop to their best. This could be provided by either skilled free or slave adults, qualification being not necessarily related to status. The big drought in 1969 decimated the over 20 large herds of small stock in the possession of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane. Having to secure and later reconstitute his animal belongings, he put two of his most professional herders, a bīẓān and a slave man, in charge to set out with the remaining animals on an emergency migration to the Assaba. There they stayed until the next rainy season started (Interview Mbarek Ould Koueriye, ʿabd, 21.12.1995).

Free people herding were generally rewarded for their services. Confiding a herd to a poor member of the tribe or other affiliates was a means to let these people earn a part of their living, and enabled owners of large herds – besides other strategies such as loans of use-rights – to accumulate animal capital beyond the limits set by their own labour resources. Different arrangements were made with regard to the different animal species. While herding cattle, according to the accounts gathered in the area of Achram-Diouk, rarely was a concern to the local pastoralists, and hence did not raise the question of defining remuneration, the watering of cattle demanded a good deal of labour during the dry season. With the rapid expansion of a wage labour sector in the cities after the Second World War, attracting many men of servile origin, this task became increasingly remunerated. Some more or less fixed tariffs applied to the herding of sheep and goats. In the minimum case the herder of a complete herd (between 100 and 200 head, rarely more) received one young, most often male animal every two months and ten days. If herding was done by an adult, the payment could be raised up to a ewe with a lamb and an additional piece of guinée cloth. Occasionally gifts were given as incentive to good herders. Milk, as reported in the region of Achram-Diouk, was free to the herder, while in other circumstances different arrangements were possible (cf. p. 150, the case of Abdallahi's herds). Slaves, although remaining unpaid for their work, in some cases profited from gifts in animals, provided by their masters as a sort of encouragement to work (Interview Laghlave Ould Mahmoud, ḥarṭāni, 13.4.1995).

Sedentarisation in villages and small rural towns has brought about a considerable change in herding practices. As individuals nowadays rarely own enough animals to make up a herd, most animals are sent out with some village herder, paid 20 UM a month per goat or sheep. As the job is full-time, and the earnings low (with a herd of 100 animals about US$12.50 per month), the herders are often children or teenagers. Almost anybody obliged to confide his few, but consequently the more precious animals to these herders

only has complaints about this arrangement. The herders are accused of not caring about the animals, which get lost and frequently eat harmful plants.

Cultivation

The perhaps earliest, but still one of the best descriptions of the cultivation of millet in the southern part of the western Sahara is given by René Caillié (1830: 117ff.). On his trip from Podor to the area around Aleg, he observed slaves and znāga set out in November to start sowing. Cultivation took place on plots formerly flooded either by rain or the river Senegal. Slaves originating from one camp also kept together in one community while cultivating. All fields were clearly demarcated, and the harvests kept apart. Cultivating techniques were simple, and apply in much the same manner today. A large, sharpened wooden picket is used to dig holes of about 12-15 cm depth. These are filled with a few grains of millet, before the hole is again covered with sand or earth. Once the seedling emerges, the surroundings of the plants are weeded by the hoe, to facilitate the growth of the millet plants. However, this often is the only supplemental activity, and frequently weeds continue to grow between the rows. Once the millet spikes are out, the most wearying period in the cultivation cycle begins. From dawn till dusk cultivators stay in the fields to shoo away a myriad of birds by shouting, clapping and throwing stones and pieces of dry clay with a sling.[53] During the night watching continues to save the plants from the ravages of wild animals and livestock. Harvest finally takes place in May.[54] The men cut off the spikes and throw them onto the ground, from where they are collected and sorted according to maturity onto different heaps. After some days of drying the men thresh the spikes with a wooden stick, and the grains are winnowed. For this the grain is sprinkled onto the swept ground, so that the wind can blow away the light residual debris. Grain is stored either by putting it into leather sacks, taking it along with the camp and selling the surplus as described by Caillié, or by building a granary of dried clay bricks, or by storing it underground. In the latter case a hole was dug in the ground, the millet put in, and everything covered with earth. This method of storage was best suited to hide cereals away from enemies and animals.[55]

While the major cultivation techniques remain almost unchanged until today, the practice of agriculture has expanded considerably during this century, and especially after the big drought. René Caillié (1830: 118) reported that the cultivating slaves he met on the formerly submerged banks of the river Senegal, favoured "poor" soils, bare of primary vegetation, because this saved them from initially clearing the land (an observation leading him to accuse the natives of laziness). Nowadays most fields not totally submerged by flooding first have to be cleared and prepared for cultivation with the hoe.[56] Sowing is prepared by the picket, and in sandy soils the hoe is used to dig small holes for the seeds. Besides weeding, hoeing in between the rows of millet plants also serves to break up the surface of the clay soil, and thus minimises evaporation. Once the seed-bearing spikes are

out, cultivators move to their field (or one of them if they cultivate several fields). These are often distant from the villages (up to 5-15 km, sometimes even more), but temporarily living in a tent or hut near the fields greatly facilitates guarding plants from nightly destruction by livestock, and the chasing of birds.[57] Finally, the spikes are cut with a knife and threshed with a simple wooden stick.

What has changed in the course of the century have been improvements in the use of rainfall. The construction of large dams (French: *barrages*) across some of the slightly inclined seasonal watercourses made possible the artificial flooding of large areas of cultivable land.[58] After at least two weeks of flooding following the last rainfall (usually in October or November), the dams are opened, either by digging a hole in them, or – with modern type dams – opening a concrete outflow. Sowing and the subsequent tasks follow the pattern described by Caillié. The large dams enhance the security of local crop production, because their large areas of influx minimise some of the risk induced by the highly uneven territorial distribution of rainfall in the northern Sahel (cf. Wüst 1989: 87). Later this century, after the big drought, this technique of flooding was complemented by the construction of small dams (French: *diguettes*). These constructions, known throughout the Sahel as a medium to increase water retention of agricultural soils and reduce water run-off erosion (cf. Rochette 1989), represent an improvement of rainfed agriculture. They are constructed and owned individually, whereas the majority of large dams are constructed, maintained, and owned collectively by up to hundreds of participants. The agricultural cycle behind the small dams begins earlier than behind the large dams. Once the inundated surface starts to dry up, sowing begins. This can be as early as in July. For the crop to grow well, further rain is needed. While the harvesting of fields behind large dams takes place at the end of January and February, millet grown behind small dams in rainfed farming can already be harvested in December. Another technique of sowing in rainfed farming, now only rarely applied in the Aftout and Tagant region, but more common in the more humid south of Mauritania (e.g. around Kaédi), is to sow already before the first rains. This technique depends crucially on the soil being sandy, and above all on the right amount and timing of rain, for an inundation of more than 24 hours will kill the young shoot. Subsequent longer periods without new rain have the same effect (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 12.4.1995).

A recent change transforming farming practices is the increasing number of cultivators. While in former times only slaves, ḥarāṭīn and some znāga were reported to have cultivated, nowadays many bīẓān cultivate too. This is a major consequence of their impoverishment, manifested by their loss of animal capital during the big drought in 1969 (cf. chapter six). What persists, despite economically induced compulsion to have similar living conditions and work, is the different degree of identification with agricultural labour. Sūdān identify themselves foremost as cultivators, while bīẓān – although nowadays presenting themselves as cultivators too – often stress the limits of

their engagement in agricultural labour in a quest to redraw cultural boundaries maintaining the difference between sūdān and bīẓān (cf. chapter eight). For this reason, the description of agricultural work presented here is derived from its ideal-type as presented by the sūdān.

Cultivation nowadays is both men's and women's work, and children of course make an important contribution too. Nevertheless, subtle distinctions aim to maintain gendered domains of work. Ideally, digging holes for the seeds is done by a man followed by his wife, sowing two or three grains[59] into each hole before closing it with a kick of her heel. Some tasks, especially the construction of large dams and small dams, harvesting and threshing, and less often weeding, are presented as male tasks (cf. Toupet 1977: 265f.). In daily practice, however, this proves to be something of a patriarchal, male ideology. Almost all tasks nowadays are performed by women too. Often there are only women working on the fields, a situation clearly brought about by the impact of male migration. Only tasks requiring a considerable labour power, like the construction of large dams, weeding, and especially harvesting and threshing, are performed principally by men. Friends or else paid labourers undertake to do the work in one or a few days, thus profiting from their joint forces. Women in these circumstances are responsible for preparing meals and tea. If a woman is the head of a household, e.g. because her husband has migrated or died, a son of hers or a brother most probably organises this work, while the woman herself is responsible for organising and most of the continuous work.[60] Menial work, requiring less quick and concerted action, such as e.g. the initial clearing of the fields, is done by men and women together.[61] It becomes evident that the gender division of agricultural labour, as primarily performed by the sūdān, is much less driven by the alleged heaviness of the work, than social conceptions governing the availability and organisation of work. Women work alongside their husband and family on the fields, but do not join in the event-driven, collective work-sessions that remain a male domain (the case of course is different for exclusively female productive associations and gatherings, and nowadays female co-operatives).

The main staple cultivated is millet in its variant species. While azraʿa is the generic term applying to all varieties of millet, a large range of varieties is distinguished according to the appreciation of taste and maturation time. Millet with small grains (mutri; *Pennisetum typhoideum*) is mainly cultivated in the Senegal river area and the southern regions, but rarely in the Tagant region. The most appreciated variety of sorghum (azraʿa), to be distinguished by its larger grains, is called taqalīt (*Sorghum gambicum*). It has a maturation period of five months and needs the least amount of water or inundation of all varieties. Other, faster growing varieties with about three months until maturity are bišna (*Sorghum cernuum*), and a species of "white" taqalīt, called ašweyṭra taqalīt. Other crops cultivated are several varieties of melons, called vundi in ḥassāniyya (distinguished according to colour and the edibility of the grains), which are fast-growing and do not demand as much

labour input as millet and sorghum. Apart from these there is a variety of beans (adlagān; *Vigna siniensis*) best known under the French name "niébé" throughout West Africa (cf. Toupet 1977: 259).[62]

Pheniculture

Pheniculture in Mauritania on its present scale has largely been shaped by recent evolution. Despite the vast majority of the country being located in a Saharan climate, only a limited number of oases are older than a century. The cradle and nucleus of bīẓān pheniculture is without doubt the Adrar region in the north of today's Mauritania. Here wild palm trees, or more probably palm trees which had not been cultivated, antedate the formation of traditional bīẓān society, which started in the 11th century and took a decisive turn in the 15th century (cf. McDougall 1985a: 16ff.; Oßwald 1986: 251ff.; Ruf 1995: 102ff.). Some outlines of the history of the Adrar emirate, drawn up by Pierre Bonte (1985a,b),[63] suggest that in this area a mainly agriculturist group with only limited involvement in pastoralism and now called Bafūr subsisted and used to collect fruits from the wild palm trees. The major region of these activities seems to have been in the south and south-west of the Adrar mountains – those regions nowadays having the biggest date-palm oases. Independent of these centres of agri- and pheniculture there were several much smaller oases specialising in the trans-Saharan caravan trade. The oldest and most famous one is Awdaghust, conquered by the Almoravid movement in 1054-55, but abandoned for the first time already during the 15th century (most probably for reasons of insufficient water supply; McDougall 1985a: 10ff.).[64] Old oases in the Adrar are Abwer, founded during the 8th century but now abandoned, Ouadâne (12th century) and Chinguetti (13th century), both of which nowadays are in a steep decline. From the 15th century on the patterns of Adrar settlement changed. The formerly independent Bafūr came under the hegemony of expanding local zwāya and ḥassān tribes, of which the zwāya acquired the property rights in land, and hence established their dominance. Cultivation and pheniculture expanded from that time on, and became integrated with caravaning activities and pastoralism into a local, diversified economy during the 17th century. However, a significant increase in production was only achieved as late as from the middle of the 19th century onwards, a period by which large numbers of slaves had been imported in order to plant and maintain the vast majority of date-palm groves the Adrar still is famous for (cf. Ech Chenguiti 1953: 119, 138).

Unlike the Adrar, date-palm cultivation in the Tagant seems to have been from the beginning closely associated with the formation of trade-towns. Tradition says the first Tagant date-palm grove was established at Talmeust (Talmust) as early as about 1450, or according to other traditions in the first half of the 16th century by the Kunta (Du Puigaudeau 1993: 76). This tribal confederation acquired control of the desert salt mine at Ijil in 1766/67 and subsequently developed a huge trade network including several towns on the Tagant.[65] Among these is Rachid. Situated some 40 km north-west of Tid-

jikja, the town is located on the slopes of an imposing valley densely planted with palm trees. Its foundation may have taken place as early as 1564 (cf. Dubié 1953: 198), but is more likely to have taken place either in 1722/23 or 1765. Kasr el Barka, another Kunta settlement and date-palm grove, was founded even earlier in 1689/90, hence marking the influence the Kunta tribe had during this period on the development of Tagant urbanism and trade, as well as their commitment to date-palm plantation and agriculture. Tidjikja, today capital of the Tagant district, was founded in 1660 or 1667. It is populated by members of the Idawʿ Alī whose ancestors had emigrated from Chinguetti in the Adrar after some inner-tribal conflict. Palm shoots they had taken along their journey formed the nucleus of the important palm groves of the wād Tidjikja (cf. Amilhat 1937: 63, 116; McDougall 1987: 47ff., 1990: 249ff.; Ould Khalifa 1991: 393; Webb 1995: 51).

Tîchît might date from the 8th century as well, but more probable is the year 1153-54 presented in the Tîchît chronicle (cf. Jacques-Meunié 1961: 58). The town, although lying some 200 km to the east of Tidjikja, and hence on the northern edge of the Aouker, is commonly subsumed among the Tagant oases. Being a major market in the trans-Saharan trade, its date-palm groves always remained secondary, due to environmental restraints. Nowadays shrinking water resources are leading to an increasing salinisation of groundwater (cf. McDougall 1990: 250; Du Puigaudeau 1993: 204).[66] Other pre-colonial attempts to spread date-palm cultivation from the Adrar, such as e.g. the attempt to introduce date palms in the Trarza, failed (cf. Vincent 1860: 450; Webb 1984: 144). A new era of date palm cultivation began under French colonial rule. From the 1920s on strong incentives were given to create new plantations. The following decades consequently witnessed the rapid expansion of date-palm cultivation in the Adrar and Tagant, as well as its introduction to the Assaba (cf. Tables 7 and 8). However successful in quantitative terms this policy was, it was hardly able to induce sustainable growth to the taste of the administrators for two reasons: first despite some material incentives, many plantations resulted from direct coercion by the colonial administrators (cf. Féral 1983: 121; Ould Khalifa 1991: 706ff.), a fact which probably goes far to explain the often mitigated interest many bīẓān had in the maintenance of these date-palm groves. Second, creating new plantations meant increasing the demand for manual labour – by and large provided by the dependent strata. These, however, were hardly willing to endure an ever increasing load of work while at the same time recognising new opportunities of emancipation (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 778ff.).

Associating date-palm cultivation with the cultivation of millet is possible, and most fascinating because both are counter-seasonal activities. While the main millet cultivation activities in rainfed farming take place from July until late February, caring for the date-palms, with the exception of producing and planting new shoots, happens between March and July (cf. Du Puigaudeau 1993: 80f.; Toupet 1962). However, as much as this association might represent an ideal use of the scarce agricultural resources at the desert-edge,

the hardship this agricultural cycle bears for the labourers is obvious. Adding further obligations to their duties was hardly possible. The extent of agricultural diversification by gardening and the cultivation of wheat and rye in the shade of the date-palms, common in other intensive-use oases, remained rather restricted in the Tagant oases.[67] While competition for labour resources among the different sectors of agriculture was minor, intensive date-palm cultivation indeed conflicted with the needs of pastoral production. A bīẓān proverb from the Tamourt en-Naaj puts the case as follows: a good ḥarṭāni can care for either 50 palm-trees, or 50 camels (cf. Grosser/Ibra Bra 1979: 37). The crucial point here is that the water needs of both animals and palm-trees are highest at the same time. Pastoral production and pheniculture therefore complement each other on the basis of specialisation into different branches of production rather than integration into a single mode of exploitation of the natural resources at the desert's edge. However, an association of date-palm cultivation with pastoral production was possible on the premise of minimising labour input. The necessity of watering date-palm trees, which surely is the most constant, time-consuming and tiring work in the context of pheniculture, is much disputed. In the Tamourt en-Naaj, the most fertile valley on the Tagant, all the sūdān I asked stated with confidence that they never watered the date-palms except in the very first year – and thus contradicted the above-mentioned saying provided by a bīẓān from the local notability. Research on date-palm productivity under irrigation by a motor pump, carried out by a SO.NA.DE.R employee in the early 1980s, however, proved a considerable increase in date output as well as enhanced quality (Interview Abdallahi Ould Briké, zwāya, 9.4.1995).[68] With what intensity date-palms are put to use therefore is likely to have always depended on their owners' main economic interest. Ḥarāṭīn and slaves associated with or belonging to highly nomadic masters, who only owned a handful of trees, might have kept their presence in the date-palm groves to a strict minimum. Rich bīẓān, owning both palm trees and animals, as well as having a large amount of dependent labour, could engage in both sectors. Their sūdān specialised either in a combination of pheniculture, farming and gardening, or else herding or a combination of herding and millet farming.[69] Those sūdān involved in the oasis sector and living almost permanently in the towns could establish much more stable communities than their fellows associated with bīẓān following a nomadic lifestyle.[70] Like the sūdān regularly cultivating millet, those in the oases were able to develop and maintain a thorough knowledge of cultivation techniques. This location of agricultural know-how among the sūdān is universally agreed upon by observers in the first half of the century (cf. Féral 1983: 271ff.; Du Puigaudeau 1993: 81ff.).

Little is known about the living conditions of the slave population in the western Saharan oases. However, the events reported from 19th century Tidjikja, Atar and Oujeft, where the local notability wavered between killing their slaves for supposed witchcraft, and the need to sustain the labour force crucial to maintaining and running the already expanding oasis system, reveal

that bīẓān dominance was contested (cf. Ech Chenguiti 1953: 138). The reason why witchcraft was not similarly detected and prosecuted in pastoral nomadic groupings seems to be that bīẓān action in the oases was concerted, and focused on the goal of getting rid of the threat by the magical forces supposed to be located within the slave population. This polarisation effectively led the bīẓān to perceive their slaves as a social entity.[71] The problem seems to have been precisely that danger from slaves became more difficult to identify with individual slaves once these formed large communities. Looking for deviant behaviour likely to be an indicator of possession was much easier in the small pastoral groupings with intense master-slave relationships.[72] The emergence of the nucleus of group formation where bīẓān no longer cared about dominating their individual slaves, but about maintaining the community's domination is reflected by the collective action the zwāya of Tidjikja undertook to get rid of the problem. Rather than relying on their own spiritual forces, a remedy which should have been at hand for the Idawʿalī, renowned for their spiritual authority, the bīẓān residents of Tidjikja preferred to undertake an attempt at cross-cultural mediation. Counter-magic, performed by a Sudanese magician, was supposed to outweigh bīẓān Islamic spiritual authority among a group of slaves hard to assimilate. A second glimpse of evidence is the occurrence of distinct social groups associated with date-palm work. The ʿaġzāzīr or ḥumriyīn are date-palm cultivators in Tidjikja.[73]

> La catégorie des haratin de Tijigja n'est pas homogène. Les Idaw ʿAli y distinguent en effet les houmriyin (terme qui signifie rouge, à mi-chemin entre le blanc et le noir) intégrés au clan, à la fraction et à la tribu depuis Abwayr et Tabelbalet, donc avant la fondation de Shinqiti.[74] Ces clients ont de ce fait une considération légèrement supérieure aux haratin, sans que rien d'autre de particulier ne les en distingue vraiment. Il reste vrai qu'ils ont le teint légèrement cuivré et moins foncé que les abid ("esclaves") et les haratin ("affranchis") qui ont, eux, le teint franchement noir. (Ould Khalifa 1991: 281)

The difference in resemblance in the relation between ḥumriyīn and ḥarāṭīn, subtly constructed by Abdallahi Ould Khalifa for the ḥumriyīn of his natal town Tidjikja, is much the same Odette Du Puigaudeau (1993) enunciates in her description of the ʿaġzāzīr she observed in the same oasis during the late 1930s. The ḥumriyīn are like the ḥarāṭīn, for they experience similar relations of dependence and perform much the same occupations, but nevertheless enjoy higher esteem. This is expressed by their closer, though not unlimited integration into the tribal structures dating back some 800 years. Finally the ideological reconstruction of social hierarchy is confirmed by reference to immobile ethnic categories. The ḥumriyīn are of "reddish" phenotype, a characterisation placing them right in the middle of the scale of nobility, ranging from black to white.[75] Leaving aside for the moment the ideological implications of this interweaving of status and origin, the case of the

ḥumriyīn and of the ʿaġzāzīr provides evidence of a group of date-palm cultivators whose origin is no longer traced back directly to slave ancestry. A considerable share of the wealth a number of bīẓān obtained from their date-palm groves therefore did not rely on slave labour, but was mediated through tributary, or else patron-client relationships with partially autonomous cultivators (cf. Moussa/Ould Maouloud 1997).[76] These labourers, although always remaining highly dependent upon a bīẓān aristocracy, which for a long time was able to safeguard its exclusive ownership in land,[77] were probably the first to develop a mainly sedentary, agricultural lifestyle and communities of their own. Once colonial administration had started to slightly shift the balance of power among bīẓān and sūdān, many of the slaves and ḥarāṭīn chose to move to villages they had constructed in the vicinity of the date-palm groves (cf. Dubost 1924: 464).

Caravan Trade

From the very first documents describing the western Sahara, trade is reported to be a major activity in the region. The famous Muslim traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on his journey from February 1352 until December 1353 visited the desert salt mine at Taġāzā, apparently a most miserable place with no trees, a mosque built of rock-salt slabs and roofs made of camel skins. There slaves of the Masūfa dug for the salt, two slabs of which were loaded on each camel and transported to Oualâta. Already at Taġāzā salt could be exchanged for gold, but the exchange rate was much more advantageous at Mālī, another 24 days' march for an energetic traveller (cf. Levtzion/Hopkins 1981: 282ff.). Centuries later, probably in the course of the 18th century, a new trade pattern supplanted this barter of salt for gold. Instead of north-African traders residing on both shores of the Sahara and constituting distinct "white" communities, Saharans themselves engaged in trade and exchanged Saharan salt for grain from the Sudan. Historian James Webb (1995: 52ff.) argues that this shift results from ecological degradation within the western Sahara, the southward movement of which he named the "desert frontier", confronting the Saharans with an increasing demand for grain. Consequently the volume of Saharan salt export to the Sudan increased, and the emphasis of trade shifted from salt for gold to salt for grain.[78] While an increase in the exchanges of salt for grain is probable in this era, it would be misleading to ignore the pastoralists' involvement in such exchanges from the very beginning of their occupational specialisation. Dependence on trade and other means of exchange is a common pattern found among pastoral nomadic societies, who are all obliged to complement their high-protein, milk-based diet with carbohydrates. Hence besides the trade of salt for gold, which the North African Arab sources were most interested in, there were probably various relations of exchange including salt among desert pastoralists and sub-Saharan agriculturalists (cf. Bollig/Casimir 1993: 543.; McDougall 1983; Ruf 1995: 64f.).

While the barter of salt for grain fell rapidly into decline in the western

Sahara after colonisation early this century,[79] up to the present day within the central Sahara, some Tuareg groups rely on organising caravans, exchanging mainly salt for grain in the south (cf. Ritter 1986; Spittler 1989a, 1989b). Organising caravans for long-distance trade with large amounts of heavy-weight freight commodities, such as slabs of desert rock-salt and millet from the western Sudan, depends crucially on access to means of transportation. Within the Sahara, and even far into the Sahel, the camel is the first choice among local animals of burden.[80] Work related to caravan trade thus is devoted to two distinct sectors. First the breeding and maintaining of a large number of transport camels, and second all tasks related to forming and maintaining the caravan itself. On the trans-Saharan tracks sometimes not only watering-points but grazing were lacking as well. Consequently, the caravaners had to cut the fodder needed throughout the journey in advance.[81] Once on the way, the animals had to be packed and unpacked every morning and evening, while during the day they had to be led. The number of workers needed for these tasks depended on the difficulty of the terrain. Estimates for the 19th century advance a number of four or five camels per man. As the camels moved around during the night while grazing, they had to be looked for, and driven together each morning. Occasional watering, too, was a task requiring much labour. Further, firewood had to be collected, and meals to be prepared. During the 19th century all this was slave work (cf. McDougall 1985b: 102, 108; 1992: 73f.).

Travelling in a caravan did not necessarily mean riding on camels. Slaves accompanied the caravan on foot, and only in a situation of extreme difficulty were they allowed to mount (cf. Panet 1968: 104ff.). But enduring the hardship of walking from sunrise till sunset is not restricted to people of low social status. Riding camels are precious. Taking them along on a caravan journey already means exposing them to great fatigue and risk. In order to preserve their precious animals' condition, many caravaners used to walk the entire day, or to restrict riding to a part of the day or else to special purposes such as scouting (indeed these patterns of caravan travel still are applied by the few caravaners remaining; cf. Asher 1993). Women – except slave women naturally – who used to travel with caravans only as passengers of a kind, were rarely forced to walk (cf. Panet 1968: 104ff.).

The management of the caravan trade was highly diversified. The large caravans, often consisting of several hundred camels, travelling between the salt mines and the trade-towns, were composed of a multitude of individual caravaners. Members of a whole variety of tribes as well as major traders and poor nomads with no more than two camels walked side by side. While participation in the trade generally was open to a wide range of Saharans, continuous engagement on a large scale necessitated control of various resources: camels, pastoralists, caravaners, and trade managers. The latter became crucially important when many merchants became sedentary in the course of economic expansion in the 19th century. The Haidara family was famous for its big trade business run by several brothers and having its

pivotal point in Tîchît. These had their slaves not only do all work related to camel breeding, oasis cultivation, loading and unloading, but also assigned some of the most experienced in the business the responsibility of trade agents. These slaves were entrusted with the management of salt transport and trade, both in the Sahara and the Sahel. With their business developing well, the family settled a number of slaves in Banamba, where they had to farm and look after their master's business the whole year round (cf. McDougall 1985b: 111 and 1992: 75).[82]

Participation in the caravan trade increased the slaves' chances of enhancing their status and condition. By travelling and working with the pack camels the slaves could acquire a lot of skills, training them to eventually undertake caravaning without supervision. With providing transportation services, i.e. pack camels and caravan workers, becoming a distinct business among the bīẓān, a supply of reliable and trained labourers was crucial for the system to run. Once travelling by camel caravan, slaves frequently got opportunities to do some small scale business to their own profit.[83] Much like the qualified herders, and other, similar workers, the slave caravaners seem to have been rewarded for their services by manumission. Possible arrangements were contracts allowing the slaves to buy their freedom, manumission as a reward for special services, or contracted as linked to the death of the master (cf. McDougall 1985b: 108ff.; Coquery-Vidrovitch/Lovejoy 1985: 17f.). The latter case was observed by Mungo Park ([1799] 1969: 179). On his travels at the end of the 18th century he met a Bambara who had been the slave of a bīẓān. Having travelled along much of the central Saharan trade routes on behalf of his master, he converted to Islam and became manumitted upon the death of the latter at Djenné. He then successfully established himself as a trader of salt and guinée cloth.

The present description proves the caravan trade, and especially the trade of salt for grain, and later of salt for slaves, to have been a complex economic activity, dynamically tying together a whole variety of economic sectors: pastoral pack-animal production and salt-mining in the Saharan zone, agricultural grain production in the Sahelian zone, and the maintenance of an inter-regional network of traders.[84] Acquiring labour was crucial for the traders to run the system and expand (cf. McDougall 1992: 72). In pre-colonial Saharan society the only labour-force meeting these needs was dependent labour. It remained the only means to exploit and control labour dispersed among, and moving in between so many locations from a single place. These conditions of work, in turn, shaped a specific variety of dependence, one implying much reciprocity. With the dependent workers often living or being far away from their masters, direct and brutal coercion could not work as a means of control. More subtle strategies had to be used. Slaves managing and supervising trade activities at their masters' place were both a means to cope with the need to be present at different places at the same time, and to install a hierarchy among slaves. Nothing is known about the relations of first rank slaves and those at the bottom of the scale, but the attraction of

ascension is very likely to have sustained the masters' hegemony. Those slaves residing far from their masters' control, as well as from his means to secure them, had to be granted some autonomy, and an economic means to subsist, or even the opportunity to accumulate wealth. This tendency of at least a considerable part of slave use within the Saharan trade to resemble patron-client ties more than master-slave relations is confirmed by another, specific socio-economic structure of production evolving in the western Sahara. Influential religious personalities attracted disciples, the tlāmīḍ. These people, to a large part of modest, or dependent status, most often engaged in productive activities profiting the šayḫ, who in turn provided protection and assistance in case of need. Associating oneself with the šayḫ meant being associated with his baraka, the divine benediction, and thus elevated one's own social standing. In the central Sahara, the use of tlāmīḍ to conduct caravan trade is already reported from the late 17th century of a Kunta merchant family.[85] By the 19th century this practice became widespread along the southern Saharan border. No longer only trade, but pastoral production and agriculture, too, came to be subsumed under these – like slavery – "supra-tribal" relations of social and economic dependency (cf. McDougall 1985b: 106f.; Stewart 1973: 112ff.).[86]

Slaves of the Court

Just as slave men could ascend to highly responsible tasks, and later gain manumission within the caravan trade, a few slaves became the trustees of the ḥassān elite, or at least held positions of considerable esteem.[87] Among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, an old slave woman of the family of the former ʿamīr of Tagant keeps and plays the ṭbal up to the present day.[88] This big drum once was beaten to lead the warriors in battle and to organise life in the camp, as well as on important occasions and festivities. Playing this highly important instrument was not restricted to slaves and ḥarāṭīn. The iggāwen, the musicians within bīẓān society, used to play it in their performances too, and it was up to them to accompany and encourage the warriors in battle with music (cf. Guignard 1975: 172ff.). However, slave women from the main camp of the deceased ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, the ḥella, vividly remember themselves playing the ṭbal, and accompanying it with solo and group singing on many occasions like marriages or the reception of visitors. These women played the big drum in a peculiar mode only a few were capable of (Interview Doueige Mint Dvih, ʿabd 21.12.1995).[89]

Ḥarāṭīn, and on some occasions slave men too, could become the trustees of ḥassān chiefs, or even an ʿamīr. One very prominent case is that of Abdi Ould Embarek. This former slave of a subtribe of the Idawʿalī of Tidjikja was a close associate of the ʿamīr of Tagant, Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed. As his "right arm", or in other terms his factotum, he was responsible for collecting the coutumes the French paid for the trade in gum arabic on the Senegal river, the tributes of various dependent tribes in the Gorgol, Brakna and Tagant, as well the tributes his own tribe, the Idawʿalī of Tidjikja, had to

pay to the ʿamīr (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 581, Frèrejean 1995: 314). Having represented the enemy and oppressor within his own tribe, Abdi Ould Embarek changed sides once the French started their invasion of the Tagant. Now associating his fate with that of the French, his aim became to weaken and defeat the ʿamīr Bakkar, and to gain an influential position in IdawʿAlī politics. Several years later he succeeded in this attempt, and the French, who had rewarded him with one fifth of the former IdawʿĪš date palm grove in Tidjikja, named him general chief of the various local tribal fractions of the IdawʿAlī. For a long time Abdi remained vital to French local policy and economy. He provided knowledge of the conflicts and contradictions raging among the IdawʿAlī, helped the French exploit these, and was able to supply many of the vital goods they needed to maintain their staff (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 581, 648ff.).

French documents on Abdi and events related to him are almost mute on the issue of his status. Only Commandant Frèrejean (1995: 285, 314), who together with Xavier Coppolani led the invasion of the Tagant and who became one of the first to cooperate with Abdi, gives a few sketchy remarks. According to his view, which was probably strongly influenced by his other bīẓān counsellors, Abdi Ould Embarek was "l'affranchi de Bakar", i.e. Bakkar's manumitted slave. However, it remains unclear whether Abdi had formally gained ḥarāṭīn status prior to his services to the ʿamīr of Tagant, or had been manumitted by the latter. The colonial documents I was able to consult provide no direct evidence on the issue. Wherever they refer to Abdi Ould Embarek as a "haratine" or "affranchi" this is as likely to be the common euphemism the French administrators used to employ for slave as to reflect Abdi's true status.[90] Nevertheless, the background leading to Abdi's association with the former ʿamīr of Tagant hints at him already being a ḥarṭāni. Apparently his brother had been murdered by alien tribesmen, thus forcing Abdi to seek protection from the ʿamīr (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 595) – a step hardly conceivable for a slave.

The issue of a dependent of slave origin gaining so much power indeed entered into the discourse of those factions predominantly originating from the tribe's notability opposing Abdi in his office. In a letter from a council of IdawʿAlī notables held in 1938, concerning the opposition the signatories express towards Youba Ould Abdi, the son of Abdi Ould Embarek who then held the office of general chief,[91] one major argument is the inappropriate origin of the latter. Besides being accused of collecting illicit dues, he is considered to be the son of a former slave (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 693). This statement, rather than being taken as a reliable assessment of Abi Ould Embarek's status, is highly instructive of how the idea of a more or less distant slave ancestry underlying the concept of ḥarāṭīn can be exploited by bīẓān as a means to secure their symbolic supremacy.

Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, the last official ʿamīr of Tagant, who died on the 19 September 1982, was renowned for having several ḥarāṭīn entrusted with responsible tasks in his vicinity, and also for having ḥarāṭīn among his

counsellors (cf. Toupet 1977: 179). These people were feared, for they were free to do almost anything they liked without risking punishment or losing protection from the ʿamīr. Other members of ḥassān tribes used to have a ḥarāṭīn entourage too. Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma (Interview 31.10.1995, ḥassān), of a prominent lineage of the Lʿaweysyāt, passed most of his time before entering the colonial army in the company of three ḥarāṭīn renowned for being good shots and hunters. Abdel Wedoud Ould Mama described these ḥarāṭīn as having a special status. Ḥarāṭīn, he explained to me, was just their name, they were not the ḥarāṭīn of somebody or the ḥarāṭīn of a tribe, but a group living like the Lʿaweysyāt throughout the year in the Aftout close to the Tagant plateau.

GENDER, STATUS AND THE LOCUS OF WORK

Male slave labour in the various accounts emerges as being significantly different from female slave labour. Slave women were compelled primarily to work in the household. Besides a variety of tasks they had to fulfil under the direct auspices of their mistress or master, they frequently had to work outside the camp as well. Slave men – although they could also be given any task – were habitually entrusted with distinct, and often multiple, specialised tasks, some of which relied upon the slave's ability to act responsibly and take decisions in the master's place. Contrary to what might be assumed of a pastoral society, the slave men were not solely, and in many areas not even primarily put to work in the pastoral sector and to relieve their masters of work as herders. Many were employed as cultivators of millet fields and date-palm groves, as well diggers, collectors of gum arabic, and in many other capacities. A few slave men even rose to become assistants in the caravan trade or advisors to ḥassān chiefs.

There are many differences slave women and men experienced in the domain of work. These result from a complex interpenetration and interaction between two distinct and contradicting ideologies: the gender division of labour applying to bīẓān society, and the use of de-socialised and hence de-sexualised slave labour within this society. As has been revealed in the preceding paragraphs, and is summarised in Illustration 1, labour is a major field where gender relations between bīẓān women and men articulate. Both genders are associated with distinct tasks, which in turn are located in specific localities. While women's work is related to the tent, or at least the camp, men's work leads to areas beyond these boundaries. Many of the tasks fit neatly into this scheme of "in" and "out": women process milk, they spin and weave within the tent, while trading and herding often require the men to leave the tent and camp for long trips.[92] Albeit that the production of difference is most obvious in the occupation of distinct locations, it is not restricted to this field, but applies to the modes of interaction between the

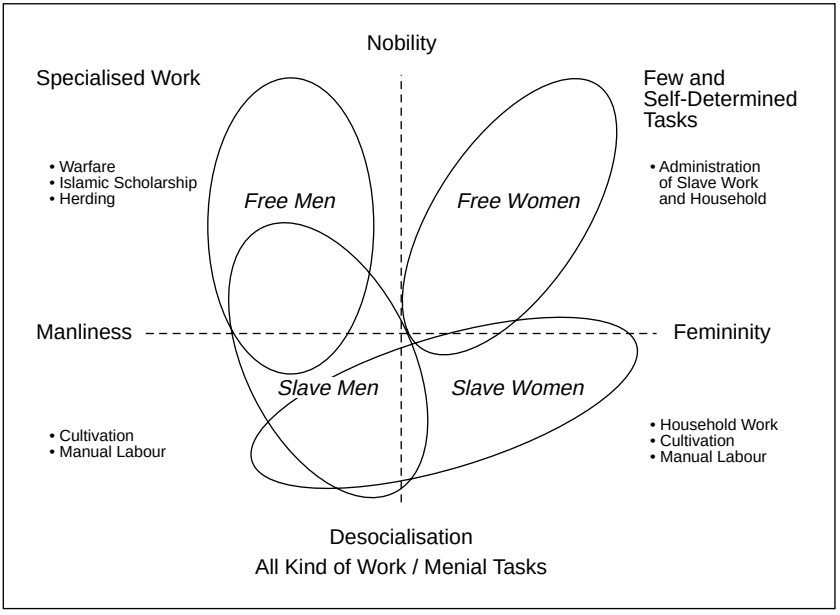
sexes too. This is the more important, as several male occupations evolving in bīẓān society have less clear-cut characteristics, and simply are not located entirely in the exterior. Qur'ān masters used to live and teach, i.e. to work within the camp (though sometimes they had a separate tent). The male ḥassān elite, having a much less steady pattern of life and work, besides hunting, coercing tributes and waging war, passed a considerable amount of time within the camp as well. Different occupations closely connected to the individual's rank within the social hierarchy thus demanded different modes of articulating gender relations. Much like the articulations of a bourgeoisie (cf. Bourdieu 1979), or as in the process of feudalisation,[93] the symbolic world of gender differentiation among the bīẓān nobility was directed towards the enhancement and refinement of its signifiers (cf. Elias 1988, 1990).

Women struggled to develop their femininity in patterns of a complex mix, involving ideals of inactivity and obesity, and the practice of a few, most often collectively performed tasks requiring only minimal physical input (cf. p. 144f.). While the top ranks concurred in the most refined expression of their standing, quite a few women failed to meet these standards. Having to share in more or less numerous tasks conflicting with the ideal-type of femininity out of economic need, they had to re-shape and adapt their modes of producing and expressing femininity. Women of modest origin or wealth, who like Valha (cf. p. 69-72) had to pound millet, care for animals, and much more, were women largely lacking feminine appeal, according to dominant categories. Consequently they found it hard to acquire many of those highly prized female qualities, such as e.g. seductiveness, which – again noblewomen – considered to develop from the ideals of feminine beauty. Far from representing female submission to male dominance, women's discourses portray these qualities as essential to the maintenance of female influence and control over men (cf. Tauzin 1984b: 100ff.; Simard 1996: 113). Femininity itself by these mechanisms becomes directly linked to affluence on two distinct levels: access to food and servile female labour. Women able to transform these goods into symbols of femininity demonstrated their power in gender relations beyond the field of symbolic representation. Physically embodying a considerable amount of the group's capital, these women demonstrated their ability to maintain control of and access to these resources.

Slave women in this social configuration became a crucial element, not only because they purveyed the basis on which an inactive and obese ideal of noble femininity could develop, but because the control over slave women became a substantial element in the struggle over the shape of bīẓān gender relations. This interference of female slavery with social relations among bīẓān, and hence the symbolic reproduction of society, is a major clue to understanding both the importance of female slavery in the past, and the issues of today's gender relations.[94]

Slave men did not interfere with gender relations among bīẓān as slave

Illustration 1: Gender and Status Implications of Work



women did. One reason for this is the different structuration of what might be called manliness in bīẓān society with regard to the bīẓān ideal of femininity.[95] Looking at male ḥassān, zwāya, znāga, ḥarāṭīn, and ʿabīd, their difference is marked first of all by segregated professional characteristics that do not correspond to a rank of manliness, or male attributes. Rather than unfolding a unifying ideal portraying what virtues make for a real bīẓān man, these stereotypes remain moulded into the framework of distinct status group identities closely linked to professional specialisation. Behaving in a "manly" way therefore comes to mean distinct things to ḥassān, zwāya and znāga. Ḥassān ideals of manliness are distinct from zwāya manliness, and again are distinct from znāga manliness.[96] Although some general consensus about basic male virtues exists, e.g. male cowardice is ridiculed,[97] and a man of a "great tent", i.e. of a good family, should be generous rather than stingy, the pivotal point of reference for men is less manliness than honour, symbolised by status, and success in meeting the exigencies of good conduct inherent to statutory affiliation. Therefore either small and big ḥassān or zwāya or else good and bad herders were distinguished (cf. Marchesin 1992: 36), but not more or less manly ones. Hence, a ḥassān beaten, and therefore forced to resign from his status and to become zwāya was affected in the first place by the devaluation of his ḥassān ideals of conduct, disregarded in the zwāya host community he then had to adapt to.[98] Slave men in this configuration were in a rather ambivalent position. With regard to work, the quality

of their masculinity was not, or only slightly affected. Unlike slave women, slave men experienced no systematic devaluation of their gender identity.[99] Although they could, and sometimes effectively were assigned tasks contradicting their gender identity (cf. Klein/Robertson 1983: 10; Brisson [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 437), the greater part of male slave labour fitted into the segregated scheme of male occupations, and therefore slave men could refer to their work as a means of producing and reproducing their male identity.[100]

The patterns of everyday interaction among men of various statuses supported this process too. Men of all strata, whenever eating together, share and used to share the same dish, which is separate from the women's.[101] Although social hierarchy enters this field of cross-hierarchical interaction whenever service is needed, e.g. meat has to be cut, hands rinsed with water for washing and the like, its relational character permits the maintenance of the image of integration. In any situation the one in the group of lowest standing and age has to do the job, regardless of whether he might be a young noble or a slave youngster.

Differences in dress are less marked among men than among women of different social strata as well. Already Bourrel (1861: 23) noticed in the mid 19th century slave women wearing clothes more suited to work than the bīẓāniyyāt's melhava, a large veil consisting of five to six metres of guinée cloth. Among men, the today common darrāʿa then still was a luxury item only a few could afford. Instead a more modest and narrower garment was worn – obviously without significant differentiation between slave and free men. Analogous differences are prevalent until the present day. As any visitor to the country quickly realises, outward appearance and clothing is one of the most misleading indicators of a man's social status and origin. The difference in the significance clothing has in the production of social differentiation between men and women, however, does not result so much in an opposition of diversity and uniformity, although such differences still occur among bīẓān and sūdān women. More important is that women have to wear the melhava (veil) correctly, i.e. it has to cover the hair (but not the face), the whole body, and reach close to the ankles.[102] This, however, is almost impossible while working manually, e.g. in the fields. While work and clothing were important in constituting and representing the difference between noble or slave women in former times, distinct occupations and individual affluence continue to influence distinguishing patterns of dress among women of different status until the present day. An analogous preoccupation with devout dressing cannot be confirmed for men of differing status. Although also not ideal for manual work because of its wide shape, the darrāʿa can be tightened with a belt, or in the company of men even be taken off to save it from damage. Again women working manually found it more difficult to meet the gendered ideals of good conduct than men who additionally profited from working frequently in gender-segregated locations, where much less restrictive clothing customs applied.[103]

This male slave self-confidence, however, faced negation within a distinct field of social interaction. The bīẓān rule of female hypergamy brought about a fundamental difference between slave women and men. While the former could be married by free men, slave men were most definitely excluded from alliances with women other than of their own status. While slave women, consistent with the conception of a patriarchal society, could be assigned certain seductive qualities competing with those of the bīẓāniyyāt by the free men, slave men simply did not enter into any such consideration or competition. While the slave women's struggle for re-socialisation was intertwined with the struggle for reconstitution of their gender identity (a prerequisite to subsequent recognition as concubine, milk-mother etc.; cf. p. 94-105), and hence operated in the field of work as well as the symbolic world of gender identity, the locus of the slave men's struggle to reduce de-socialisation was exclusively focused on work. Indeed, the slave men experienced a deep paradox. While being able to meet the exigencies of gender symbolism much better than slave women, they found themselves excluded to the utmost in the field of practising gender relations. A slave man, properly speaking, could never gain the social rights of paternity. The de-socialising impetus of slave estate, which de facto denied kinship ties to slaves turned the patriarchal conception of descent upside-down, and hence inflicted the most serious blow to the slave men. Slave children were to live with their mother, at least until a certain age, but there was no consideration whatsoever of the slave father. While slave men were deprived of the recognition of fatherhood, slave women were recognised as biological mothers of their children.[104] Social motherhood, in as far as it meant granting them rights in their children, was more or less definitely denied to them, but could be gained in another field: milk-motherhood. Milk-kinship ties transferred the affective relations established through parenthood-analogous practices into a legal framework. Although dismissing the material obligations arising from real parenthood, milk-kinship produced analogous social rules of respect – one major concern of slaves' struggle for recognition as social beings (cf. p. 94-99).[105]

Slave men, to gain social paternity, had not only to be manumitted themselves, but had to marry a free woman, e.g. a ḥarṭāniyya, too. This configuration of master, slave and gender relations is the pivotal point in many ḥarāṭīn and slave narratives. It is manifest in statements like "any ḥarṭāni who marries a slave woman would be a fool, for he never would gain paternity over his children" (Khalifa Ould Kebab), and the grievance expressed by M'Barke (cf. p. 66-69). However constraining these implications of slave ideology were, it would be to depict a rather leaden portrait of bīẓān slavery if reduced to these specific moments. Mobility, and in this case above all spatial mobility, was a means to cope with these adversities. If slave women were unable to separate from their masters, slave men who desired to share their lives had to move – at least temporarily. A proverb from the Tuareg (a pastoral-nomadic group of the central Sahara, sharing quite a lot of characteristics of the bīẓān) is quite instructive on the matter: "whoever has a slave

woman has a slave man" (Oxby 1978: 197).[106] Tuareg masters, too, preferred to give strange slave men who joined their slave women an extra portion of food (for they otherwise would have relied on that of the woman), and have them do some odd jobs in return. Slave men of high esteem, e.g. good herders, experienced different treatment. Rather than let them engage in affairs which might have led them to leave their master and join their slave spouse's master, these valuable slaves were advised to form engagements with slave women by their master. The latter thus could choose an ideal spouse, one highly likely to always live within the same camp as the master – and his slave (cf. Oxby 1978: 193ff.).[107]

Drawing on and highlighting the gender differentials implied in the use of slave labour among the bīẓān provides a clue to a comprehensive understanding of some major social relations tying slaves into society, while nevertheless rejecting their social integration. Different modes of making use of female and male slave labour, resulting from the masters' need not to challenge their own conception of a gender-segregated society, are fundamental to an explanation of different modes of slave control. Slave men, more likely to be far from the camp, could not easily be put to work effectively and closely watched at the same time. Within such a configuration of the master-slave relationship, the use of coercive means, i.e. hurting slaves, tended to be a last resort to restore authority. Slave women on the contrary experienced control most of the day, and there are numerous descriptions of bīẓāniyyāt terrorising their slave women. This polarised image is useful in challenging a much too undifferentiated portrayal of slave conditions, and in opening up a perspective which introduces gender relations and the structuration of space into the study of slavery. Transforming the gendered patterns of slavery revealed so far into a new stereotype, however, would deprive this approach of its very qualities, and would be misleading. Such an attempt would mean neglecting the many in-betweens of master-slave relations highlighted by this analysis of slave work. There were slave men doing women's work and vice-versa (cf. Klein/Robertson 1983: 10; Brisson [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969: 437), and some social institutions, such as milk-kinship provided a means to overcome the restrictions on interaction between non-kin of the opposite sex, such as slave men and mistresses (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 46). Perpetuating a static image, furthermore, means disregarding the dynamics of slavery as relations of dependency evolving within society, as well as transforming it. Besides being present in the demographic evolution of bīẓān slavery these dynamics are also manifest in the evolution of the bīẓān economy, focused on in the following.

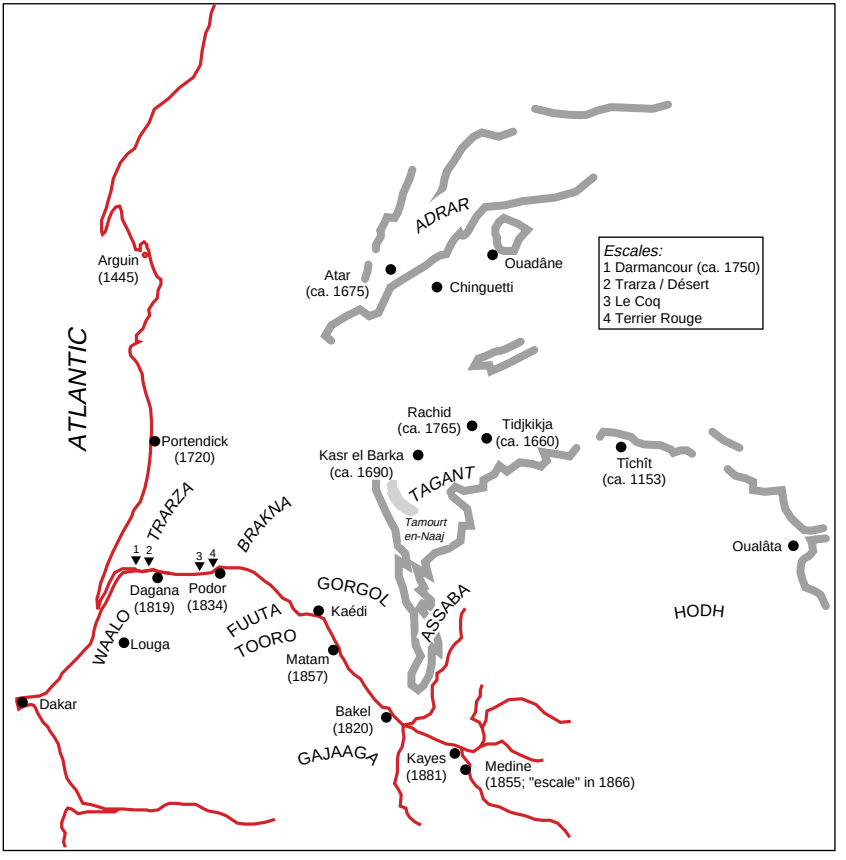
Chapter 6
The Historical Dynamics of Bīẓān Economy

The bīẓān economy has evolved significantly in the course of history, and these changes were decisive to the development of distinct configurations of master-slave relations. Fundamental to much of the economic process in the western Sahara were the trans-Saharan trade and the trade along the desert edge. Based on the exchange of complementary products, these trades established and maintained links between the pastoral and agricultural populations. The configuration of these patterns of exchange and commerce was affected significantly by the arrival of European merchants on the West African coast. First came the Portuguese, who during the 15th century established a trade post at Arguin on the west Saharan coast near today's Nouadhibou. The trade in gum arabic in the Senegal River basin from the 17th century on grew to what was almost a commercial boom. The 19th century finally saw a general increase of marketing and trade throughout the whole western Sudan and the Sahara, and witnessed the evolution of complex interrelations between different trade sectors and trade networks (cf. McDougall 1985). Colonial expansion, which had started in the western Sudan by the middle of the 19th century, and reached the territory of today's Mauritania by the turn of the 20th century, brought about the decline of several branches of trade and production, but also created new opportunities. While social and economic change during the early decades of colonisation was slow, it nevertheless seriously undermined the relations of production that had developed in the course of the 19th century. This evolution was a crucial step towards the quicker and more drastic changes in both economy and social relations that started in the 1950s, and took a decisive turn in the wake of the big drought of the 1970s, which introduced a period of increased aridity lasting until the present.

Gum and Guinée

Throughout the centuries, the economy in the western Sahara underwent many transformations. While it here is of minor importance whether these changes occurred in response to an increasingly arid environment (cf. Webb

Map 2: Western Sahara and Senegal River Valley in the 19th Century



1995), or rather followed a socio-economic rationale (cf. Ruf 1995), it is important to remember the magnitude of these changes, and how deeply they influenced bīẓān society, and consequently bīẓān relations of hierarchy and dependency.

Trade had always played an important role in the economy of the western Sahara, but for many centuries, the pastoral nomadic inhabitants of the area played only a minor role in the most prominent trade in the area, the trans-Saharan trade. During its heyday, described by Arab authors like Ibn Ḥawqal (writing in 378/988), and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (writing in 756/1355), the trade across the Sahara indeed much resembled trade across the sea (cf. Ibn Ḥawqal and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in Levtzion/Hopkins 1981: 43ff.; 279ff.). There were commercial towns lying on each shore, linked by camel caravans coming and going. This metaphorical representation of the Sahara lives on. In Arabic sāḥil has the meaning of "seashore", and the designation Sahel, used today for the arid

stretch of savannah below the Sahara, is derived from this term.[1] In the trade towns south of the Sahara North African traders lived in "white" communities. Together with their counterparts north of the desert they managed a considerable share of the Sudanese kingdoms' trade across the desert. The Saharans in between had no active role in this business, which focused on the exchange of Sudanese gold, slaves and a number of other items for luxury commodities of North African origin and desert salt. The nomadic pastoralists were not the entrepreneurs of the trade, but provided caravan transport facilities, and occasionally profited from raiding.[2] The development of trade in the western Sahara, meeting the demands of the internal markets, and no longer centred on the external markets, took a decisive turn upwards by the mid 15th century.[3] An east-west axis of trade across the western Sahara emerged, linking the Portuguese trade post at Arguin via the Adrar and Tîchît with Oualâta and Timbuktu in the east. Along this route new poles of urbanity, small trade towns bearing the nuclei of Islamic scholarship developed, and more and more the western Saharans themselves became involved in the management of the trade business that before had been the domain of North African migrants (cf. Oßwald 1986: 251ff.).[4]

Why the shift in trade occurred and the North African trade communities disappeared is difficult to ascertain on the basis of the few existing historical records. As regards the western Sahara and the westernmost trans-Saharan trade routes, the evolution is likely to have been a consequence of the competition from the Portuguese. These pursued an offensive strategy to develop their trade at Arguin and to break the monopoly of the North African traders. To achieve this goal, they either bought typical North African goods on the Moroccan shore and transported them to Arguin, or else manufactured and sold substitutes for these commodities.[5] Later, with the expansion of the Portuguese trade system along the West African coast, another factor influencing the nature of the trans-Saharan trade came into play. The establishment of a factory in Sao Jorge da Mina (Guinea) in 1471 laid the basis for diverting a part of the Sudanese gold to the south. Consequently, with the production of gold in the Sudan remaining constant, and with the trade of the new Portuguese establishments expanding rapidly, less and less gold entered the Saharan and trans-Saharan market. Both this competition and the decline of the Sudanese gold supply to the north are likely to have engendered the withdrawal of the North African traders primarily interested in gold. Yet another major event fits neatly into this scheme of interpretation: in 1590 troops of the Saʿdid rulers of Morocco – after several earlier attempts had failed – conquered Timbuktu, the most famous trade town of the western Sudan, and centre of the gold trade. The Saʿdid attempt to develop direct control over the gold trade, and to tap the Sudanese gold resources directly, however, failed. Neither the gold mines, located much further south, could be conquered, nor the decline of the trans-Saharan trade on the western routes be stopped. Rather the conquest of Timbuktu accelerated the process of dilapidation already under way by

destroying the local political structures of the Songai empire. The remnants of the conquerors, soon cut off from their Moroccan homeland, were unable to establish a regional territorial hegemony (cf. Oßwald 1986: 188ff.; Ruf 1995: 98ff.).

A major commodity traded along the desert edge and within the Sahara at these times was cotton cloth. Formed into bundles of varying size, it was a prime currency along the desert edge, and within the Sahara, as well as in the Sudan.[6] Other currencies were rock salt from the desert, and, though less important, cowrie shells, in use throughout West Africa as well. Cloth entered the western Saharan inner market from many directions. One origin was North Africa, another one the European trade posts at the coast, and finally, and for a long time most important, the western Sudan. Many parts of the Sahel were well suited for cotton cultivation. Spinning and weaving are good counter-seasonal activities to agriculture, and are mentioned for the Sudan from the 8th century onwards.[7] Cloth of all these different origins was traded simultaneously in Tîchît, the trade town which for a long time was the pivotal point of the bīẓān salt trade (cf. Hopkins 1973: 48, 68ff.; Oßwald 1986: 379f.).

The home market of the western Sahara got a decisive boost in the second half of the 17th century when gum arabic (after it had first reached the European markets during the 16th century) began to be needed in large quantities by the emerging European textile industry.[8] Exports of this exudate of acacia trees growing wild in the southern parts of the western Sahara were shipped mainly by the French and the British.[9] Their trade registers reveal that exports of gum arabic almost doubled between the early 18th century and the 1780s. They doubled again during the decade of the 1830s, and thus reached an amount of 2,000 tons per year (cf. Webb 1995: 100ff.). The export of gum arabic was directly linked to the import of guinée cloth. The bīẓān rarely bartered their gum with the Europeans for any other commodity than indigo-dyed cloth of Indian origin, called "guinée", usually measuring 1 m in width and 16.5 m in length (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 163). Substitute products from Europe were rejected by the bīẓān traders and consumers, and achieved a significant share in the market only by the end of the 19th century. The marked bīẓān preferences for guinée of Indian origin was a bane to the traders in Saint-Louis. It took one or two years to receive deliveries from India, and orders therefore had to be made on quite uncertain estimates of future gum harvests. As the harvests could fall far below the estimates, or exceed them greatly, the ratio of guinée on the market and the gum available hardly ever matched and made prices vary strongly. These variations increased the risk traders had to cope with in this otherwise profitable trade (cf. Webb 1995: 124).

A proper knowledge of the trade in gum arabic is crucial to an understanding of the economic development of the western Sahara, not only because this product dominated virtually all commercial activities of the French colony at Saint-Louis by the 1830s, but also because this resource was almost com-

pletely under the control of the bīẓān, who had begun to exploit it as a high value export commodity by then. The trade took place at different entrepôts, called "escales", on the river Senegal. There traitants, as the African intermediaries were called, awaited the bīẓān with guinée cloth they had received on commission from the French merchants based in Saint-Louis. Most of the cloth was bartered for gum arabic, and the majority of transactions took place during the time of the "grande traite" lasting from the first of January or February until the end of July (cf. Ould Ahmedou, M.S. 1990: 8ff.; Webb 1995: 119). This trade proved to be quite profitable not only to the European traders and traitants, but to the bīẓān too. In 1718, the value of one metric ton of gum arabic was 2.63 pieces of guinée (equivalent to an index of 100). This ratio moved more or less steadily up until it reached its climax at a rate of 70.61 pieces of guinée per metric ton of gum in 1838 (index 2,397), and then started to decline (cf. Table 6).

As a consequence of this development in the terms of trade, clothing made of guinée became less and less expensive in the western Sahara. There the market responded by an ever-increasing demand: the quantity of guinée imported to Senegambia, of which the largest part (83.1 percent) was destined for the trade with the bīẓān, rose in index numbers from 100 in 1718 to 339 in 1735, and reached 110,373 in 1838, i.e. during the year when the terms of barter were at their climax (cf. Curtin 1975a: 316, 321).[10] This evolution was in no way forced upon the bīẓān; on the contrary, it was their demand for cloth that dominated the market: when in the 1740s the bīẓān gained control over the regional trade in grain with the French at Saint-Louis, they forced the latter to pay with cloth, and nothing else. Whenever foreign traders did not meet the expectations of the bīẓān, the latter demonstrated their power by switching either to other traders, e.g. the English or the Dutch on the coast, or by temporarily withdrawing their gum from the market altogether (cf. Webb 1995: 114). Only later, from the 1830s on, i.e. when gum prices were at their highest, did the bīẓān develop a demand for grain in exchange for their gum. This trend continued for the rest of the 19th century. Demand for grain in the lower Senegal valley rapidly exceeded local production, and grain had to be imported from the upper river (cf. Hanson 1990: 207ff.; Webb 1995: 118f.).[11]

Unlike the desert salt mines, the exploitation of which was localised and easy to put under centralised control, the low-density acacia forests were scattered over a vast belt stretching from the Gebla to the southern areas of the Aftout and Hodh. Ownership of these territories, and hence control over access to pasture and other resources, were held and controlled by the zwāya tribes, whereas the ḥassān only held use-rights as well as rights in tribute and allegiance based on their military and political dominance (cf. p. 201f.). The client groups, who were not necessarily of znāga status, but could have rather diverse origins, also needed access to pastoral resources. Their relations of dependency were often multilateral. They frequently included not only ḥassān overlords but both zwāya and ḥassān superiors (and often several of

Table 6: Estimated Net Barter Terms of Trade, 1718-1849
(Value of One Metric Ton of Gum Arabic Expressed in Pieces of Guinée Cloths)

	Guinées	Index
1718	2.63	100
1723	4.85	184
1739	6.03	229
1745	3.44	131
1776	14.30	544
1783	27.98	1,069
1788	31.88	1,212
1823-27	51.50	1,958
1830	41.12	1,563
1833	63.05	2,397
1839	70.61	2,685
1849	50.25	11,911

Webb (1995: 114)[12]
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them), as well as ties to Fulbe and Wolof leaders on the left bank of the Senegal valley, all of which secured access to land and protection. These multiple relations of dependency, however, did not necessarily weaken the position of the dependents. During the 19th century some of these groups attained a significant size, and accumulated considerable wealth. Aware of their power, they managed to exploit conflict between the different branches of the ḥassān nobility, and notably the different factions within the emiral lineages, in order to strengthen their own position and minimise tributes (cf. Taylor 1996: 149ff.).

Compared to these inherent weaknesses of ḥassān power, the zwāya control of land seems to have been much more solid. René Caillié (1830: 149ff.) reported that znāga who wanted to collect gum on zwāya land had to pay half of their harvest as a tax. Though znāga occasionally made use of this opportunity, their overall commitment to gum harvesting and trade seems to have been limited. Rather than selling gum, they were described as selling milk and other agro-pastoral products at the escales. The organisation of the trade was definitely in the hands of the zwāya; they managed the caravans bringing the gum to the escales, and they negotiated the barter of gum for guinées and other commodities. This monopoly enabled them to channel a large part of the gum sold to the escales through their own hands. Besides the trade in gum at the escales, a small local trade with gum persisted. Not all collectors were able to move to the escales themselves, and hence sold their gum to merchants passing by on their way to the escales, or sent it there with

a trustee. The ḥassān role in the trade was limited to the provision of security during the months of the river trade – an activity for which they demanded and received "coutumes", annually negotiated taxes paid by the European traders. Despite the gum being a widely accessible resource in the Gebla and other southern parts of the western Sahara the gum business became centralised to the profit of the zwāya. Their control over local resources and trade networks enabled them to manage the majority of the trade in gum, and hence (besides the coutumes paid to the ḥassān) to control most of the guinée cloth, as well as of the other import products flowing into the western Sahara.

The influence this development of a zwāya industry had on bīẓān society was first emphasised by Constant Hamès (1979). According to his argument, the rise in gum trade led to the commodification of bīẓān economy, and laid the basis for a new mode of production, the proto-industrial production of gum arabic by slaves. While the number of slaves traded, and entering the western Sahara grew, the profits from trade and taxes in the gum economy facilitated the development and consolidation of the zwāya and ḥassān social dichotomy. Ever since this argument was elaborated, the question whether the increased production of gum arabic was made possible by a growing body of servile labourers remains contested. James Webb (1995: 98) argues on the basis of a calculation of the effective need of labour force for the harvest of gum arabic, that there was virtually no need for further slave workers.[13] Other scholars, however, stress the role the gum economy had for the enlargement of the servile strata among the bīẓān (cf. Hanson 1992: 111; McDougall 1995: 228f.). As far as an increased production of gum depended on the control of a greater number of dependents, acquiring more slaves had an economic rationale for the individual wanting to have a larger share in the gum trade. In turn, profits from the gum trade could be invested in many ways, one of them being the purchase of slaves.

In the second half of the 19th century the volume of the gum trade remained high, and new acacia forests in the east became more easily accessible to the European traders and their representatives when an escale was opened farther upriver at Medine in 1866 (cf. Hanson 1996: 68ff.). This evolution helped compensate for an incipient decline in productivity of the acacia forests located to the north of the lower and middle Senegal valley. This evolution was largely due to over-harvesting in response to the economic incentives raised by the gum boom. The acacia trees were weakened by the many wounds inflicted on them to increase the exudation of gum arabic, and hence became more vulnerable to environmental stress. Increased herd sizes as an outcome of increased wealth, and pastoralists staying longer in the vicinity of the groves, put further strain on the trees. The dying of many acacia trees – which in this perspective is rather the outcome of human agency than of climatic change – reduced the protective cover of the soil, and thus created a vicious circle already leading to desertification during the 19th century (cf. Hanson 1992: 111).[14] In the early 20th century, the gum production in the

western Sahara, as well as the world market prices, quickly fell into a decline. The role of the world's most important supplier of gum arabic was taken over from the western Sahara by the Sudan. There extensive plantations of acacia trees had been put to production (cf. Webb 1985: 150).

THE COLONIAL CHALLENGE TO PASTORAL ECONOMY

Marketing Meat

The start of the 20th century brought major changes to the desert-side economy. While income from the trade in gum decreased rapidly, new requirements developed, and those already established – namely the demand for cloth – persisted.[15] By the end of the 19th century, the importation of green tea from Morocco had started, and seen a splendid success.[16] To complement this drink, which soon became the bīẓān's favourite, lots of sugar had to be imported too.[17] Colonisation brought about another heavy burden for the bīẓān. Colonial taxes were introduced, and had to be paid in cash. In order to adapt its imposition to the local, pastoral-nomadic context in Mauritania, no capitation (the standard colonial tax in the territories of French West Africa) was imposed. Instead the major tax was levied in cash per animal. As tribes and fractions were taxed collectively through the intermediary of their chiefs, and the administrators relied on estimates when calculating the number of animals to be imposed, there was considerable room for manoeuvre to be exploited by both parties. Colonial administrators could reward closely allied tribes and punish more or less dissident ones, while tribal chiefs could try to downplay the numbers of their tribes' livestock, but also profit from their position and tax some people more severe than others. By calling this tax zekat, the French alluded to the Islamic tithe for the poor (zakāt). Agricultural production initially was taxed too, but this levy, called ʿašūr and supposed to make up one tenth of the harvest, was suppressed in 1940 (cf. Toupet 1959: 103; De Chassey 1984: 70f.).[18]

The main question emanating from this obvious gap between income and expenditures is: how was it filled? Besides the declining benefits from the gum trade, the main resource that could either be directly turned into cash or bartered by the Saharans was livestock. A shift in the nature of trade and export from the Sahara took place with the rapid evolution of a meat market in Senegal in the early 20th century, centred around Louga. Mauritanian meat at this time began to feed directly the rapidly growing population of the Senegalese cities and the prospering peanut-basin, where production for the world market had started by 1848.[19] This evolution transformed Senegalese society considerably.[20] Migrants, among whom were many former slaves, were attracted from various regions of West Africa, as well as from the Senegal valley which lost ever more of its former prosperity. The peanut boom caused the locus of the export trade to shift to the south, and the

construction of the Thiès-Kayes railway (1907-23) further reduced what remained of the trade on the Senegal river.

These various factors meant that grain production in the valley became less profitable, and that less grain was marketed locally. The little grain still traded, for the peasants had to pay the capitation too, was now often sold to the south where the Senegalese peanut basin was. Additionally the people of the valley started seasonal and permanent migration into the peanut basin area, thus further weakening the potential of local agricultural production. The consequence was the region's increasing dependency on imported foodstuffs like rice, which was paid for with cash income generated by migration.[21] Within this changing economic framework, which had taken pace by the turn of the 20th century, the pastoralists of the desert edge were better off than the cultivators: the terms of trade involving animals versus grain and import products developed over long periods to the advantage of animal production (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982; Delaunay 1984: 63ff.).[22]

The evolution of these new patterns of production and consumption was not immediate.[23] The transformation of the Senegal valley into a reservoir for a migrant labour force, largely accomplished by the early 1920s, was catalysed by several major events. A famine occurred in 1904-05, and a second one in 1913-14. As the regional agricultural production in the valley was already weakened, the effects of the famine were especially severe. The years from 1905-08 witnessed slaves leaving their masters in various parts of West Africa. The most prominent case is that of the Banamba slave exodus, where an approximated 20,000 slaves left their masters (cf. Roberts 1988: 288ff.). In the central and upper Senegal valley, relations of dependency were less abruptly challenged and few slaves left their masters. The years following the first famine until the famine in 1913-14 did not lead to a recovery, but brought further deterioration of the environmental conditions. The valley experienced a slow, but continuous decline of its population. Migration, both seasonal and permanent, became common for free-born, slaves and ex-slaves. This trend was dramatically strengthened by the famine of 1913-14, which was even more severe than the one of 1904-05.[24] Although many slaves seem to have stayed with their masters, the relations of dependency were drastically challenged. Many masters were no longer able to fulfil the most basic of their obligations, that of feeding the slaves. As a consequence, these received permission to care for themselves, to migrate, or cultivate on their own. When in 1914 the French began recruiting for the First World War, this was another option for slaves to escape famine and dependency. Among those enlisted, men of servile estate made up at least 75 percent.[25] Those who survived the butchery on the European battlegrounds were rarely ready to accept further relations of dependency at home. Often having acquired specific skills, and speaking French, they had good chances of entering the colonial administration. Needless to say, these veterans also brought with them new concepts of society, of liberty, equality, fraternity, challenging both traditional and colonial authority (cf. Clark 1994: 61ff.).[26]

The most immediate repercussions of the evolution in Senegal and the river valley were felt in southern Mauritania, as the French had come to call their new possession by the turn of the 20th century.[27] The Senegal river never had the character of a linear frontier. Populations from both sides had shifted from the left bank to the right bank of the river and vice versa in the course of history (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 129; Schmitz 1996). Difference among the ethnic groups living along the river was constituted in the course of interaction, and through complementary relations of exchange. The interpenetration of the different ethnic groups, as well as the shift of ethnic affiliation some groups performed, reveal that the river valley was (and still is) an arena for the articulation of a complex social entity, and cannot be apprehended through dichotomous categories. This explains why those bīẓān who were most closely integrated into the economy of the valley and its society were more severely affected by the region's decline than the large majority of bīẓān, who mainly lived off their pastoral resources. These groups, which in the course of the 19th century and its heyday of trade had developed an increasing demand for an external grain supply, now had to face the stagnation and later decline of the grain surpluses marketed in the valley.[28] The pacification of the Mauritanian territory by the colonial forces was a crucial prerequisite for the bīẓān pastoralists to respond to this situation. Slaves and ḥarāṭīn were sent in increasing numbers to fertile areas in order to cultivate grain for their masters and patrons (cf. p. 223-225). While in former times warfare and raiding had often rendered such attempts unprofitable, they now were essential to the achievement of two goals: providing supplementary grain, and establishing ownership-rights in fertile land. The latter point became the more important in the south. Fulbe agriculturalists and pastoralists, who had been pushed southwards and across the river by the bīẓān during the 19th century, started from the end of that century on a remigration that lasted until the 1960s.[29] They took advantage of the weakening of the bīẓān influence on the right bank at the end of the 19th century, and especially after the installation of the colony.[30] This remigration led to the revival of ancient territorial claims, conflicting with more recent use-rights of bīẓān, who meanwhile had occupied these areas.[31] These conflicts over land were a matter involving the colonial authorities, who directed their attention, besides inquiring into the historical legitimacy, especially towards signs of effective land-use (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 69ff.; Schmitz 1990a; Santoir 1993).[32]

The pacification of the Mauritanian territory (at least of its southern parts, for resistance in the north continued until the 1930s), also had an impact on the development of new patterns of pastoral production. The increased security from raids helped the bīẓān pastoralists to respond to the growing demand for meat from the Senegalese markets and to produce and export more and more animals. The number of cattle in the bīẓān herds rose, as beef was especially highly valorised in Senegal. However, within Mauritania, cattle rearing is limited to the south of the country, with the southern Tagant constituting the northern boundary of the cattle zone. Changes in the

composition of the herds in response to market incentives thus required a spatial reorganisation of the bīẓān nomadic pastoralists too.

Another element decisive to this development was colonial policy, which introduced the principle of free access to pasture for all herders. Deliberately negating all tribal use-rights, and seeking to minimise the grip some important tribes had on the natural resources, this policy was a means for the colonial administration to demonstrate its power. On the ground, however, this policy never came to be fully effective, for the French wanted to associate tribal authorities with low-level colonial administration, and in many respects relied heavily on these intermediaries.[33] Nevertheless, the proclaimed ideal, and the few steps toward it, gave many herders, and especially those of the dependent strata, greater opportunities to shift their regions of nomadisation. Ever since colonisation Mauritania had witnessed the southward migration of various tribal groups formerly established in the north. Though such migrations had occurred throughout the history of the western Sahara, they now became more generalised, as this evolution was closely intertwined with decisive and long-lasting economical and political changes. With the shift of their area of nomadisation the pastoralists from the north converted step-by-step from camel to cattle rearing, which was better adapted to the wetter climate and the animal diseases in the south.[34] Increased security from raiding enabled the pastoralists to reduce the size of their camps and to build satellite camps. Sending out only a few herders with animals of one species rather than concentrating all livestock species together in one camp gave a greater flexibility to respond to the animals' needs. By this strategy, as well as an overall concentration on less mobile cattle rearing, the main camps' area of nomadisation was considerably contracted (cf. Toupet 1977: 300f.; Bonte 1987b: 204; Borricand 1948: 90ff.).[35]

Much of this new trade in meat and import products remained under the control of some specialised zwāya tribal groups residing in the few bīẓān trade towns. They could profit from their long-established relations of patronage to acquire animals and other commodities from the pastoral production of their dependents at favourable conditions. The expansion of trade, however, did not only strengthen the old commercial elite, but confronted these strata with profound changes in the structure of trade – a challenge which by far not all bīẓān of this group could meet. The changing economic environment weakened old bonds of hierarchy and dependency, and the trading business became accessible to people from lower social strata too. Animals were traded on any scale, and as it was a long way from e.g. the Tagant to Louga, often several intermediaries were involved. The common practice of delayed payment and credit in trade with animals, which by some clever arrangements circumvented the Islamic prohibition of interest and usury, further increased the opportunities individuals of modest personal wealth had to enter the trade. Many started on this basis to assemble a number of animals directly from the pastoralists, and to pay them with the revenues from their trip to the south.[36] The story of Hammodi, a ḥarṭāni

from the Adrar "who made it" is but one case of how some of today's great Mauritanian fortunes were generated in commercial activities, often centred around the marketing of meat, and in close contact with the interests of the colonial administration (cf. D'Hont 1986: 157; McDougall 1988: 369ff.; Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982; Ould Khalifa 1991: 815ff.).[37]

Bīẓān herders had one major objective in marketing their animals. It was a means to acquire grain, and was able to complement the other major export commodities of the western Sahara: salt and gum arabic. But direct bartering of animals for grain was limited by the cultivators' lack of interest in livestock rearing. Direct inter-ethnic exchange between agriculturalists and pastoralists therefore more often centred around the barter of complementary products, such as milk and manure for grain, as the case of Fulbe pastoralists in central Mali shows (cf. De Bruijn/Van Dijk 1995). While such exchange systems were practised by transhumant bīẓān of the Hodh (cf. Roberts 1987: 47), they were less practicable for those bīẓān of the interior whose areas of nomadisation or transhumance were too far from the Senegal valley to allow for longer periods of residence in the south. In this case, as in the traditional caravan trade of salt for grain,[38] the commercial transaction had to take place in a centralised place and within a short space of time. This type of trade was made possible with the stocking of grain (millet) in major trade towns along the valley. All types of traders, French commercial houses, traitants from Saint-Louis, and "Moroccan" Awlād Bū Sba, bought grain directly from the peasants, who in turn thus had a means to acquire import products and cash. Credit was frequently granted by the traders, and enabled them to hold down producer prices and increase profits (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 41). Additionally the traders were able by this means to channel a considerable part of the region's marketable surplus grain into their stocks immediately after the harvest, thus effectively reducing the amount of grain pastoralists could directly barter for with the cultivators.

For the pastoralists the town-based traders had the decisive advantage of providing all the commodities they needed (grain, import products, money) in one place. With the presence of a market for livestock to serve the Senegalese demand, the monetisation of exchange developed quickly. Animals were turned into money, which then was exchanged for millet, cloth, tea, sugar, and other commodities.[39] These exchanges involved different traders, for the meat and the grain business were operated separately, a division eased by the flexibility of monetised commercial transactions. The individual pastoralist, wishing to turn his male animals destined for slaughter into grain and other commodities, thus had to engage in a series of subsequent transactions with different traders (Interview Bettarmo Ould Cheikh, zwāya, 8.2.1996; Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995). Pastoralists well acquainted with the valley also used to buy the grain they needed in cash directly from the peasants, and thus avoided contributing to the profits of the grain traders (Interview Sid Mohamed Ould Efatt, zwāya, 15.2.1996). Direct bartering of pastoralists with cultivators did occur too, but was of minor importance in the Senegal

valley, where the monetisation of commercial transactions expanded rapidly.[40] The dominating position the trade in this area had, together with the practical reasons outlined, relegated barter persisting in the remote areas to minor importance.[41]

Besides this diffuse and small-scale export of animals, which covered only a part of the trajectory to the markets of Senegal, there were well-organised large-scale exports too. Weddou Ould Jiddou, a zwāya (Interview 17.4.1995) of the Tmoddek reported how before 1969 he used to travel twice a year to Louga, an undertaking he started in 1946 (the year of the election of Horma Ould Babana as representative of the Mauritanian colony to the French national assembly). Together with five or six companions Weddou Ould Jiddou led between two and three hundred small ruminants from the Tagant via Kaédi, where they crossed the Senegal river, to Louga. There a bīẓān butcher and trader[42] was ready to buy all the animals. The money gained by the considerable price differential between the Tagant (about 200 to 250 UM per animal) and the Louga market (about 500 to 700 UM per animal)[43] was partly converted into import products, namely clothing and tea, resold at home for further profit.[44] Three camels were necessary to transport these goods back home, where they were stocked under the tent, and quickly sold and exchanged.

The second case highlights the different objectives the marketing of animals had. The long-distance direct trade with Senegal first of all sought to maximise the profits generated by the large price differentials for animals between the Mauritanian interior and the Senegalese markets. This benefit could be further boosted by the import of commodities like tea and cloth, the terms of trade for which were much more favourable near the Senegalese coast than in Mauritania. Specialising in this trading activity meant adapting to the animals' needs on the journey (i.e. keeping them in good condition), as well as returning home quickly, in order to increase the frequency of the transactions. The transport of bulky and heavy commodities, such as millet or sugar, contradicted this major objective. They could be obtained at low prices in the Senegal valley, already half way home from the Senegalese meat market at Louga, and therefore remained excluded from the activities of large scale traders such as Weddou Ould Jiddou.[45] Additionally, transporting these goods necessitated a great many transport animals, which in turn would have further burdened the already difficult transfer of large herds to the Senegalese markets. The pastoralists in turn profited from the traders frequenting their camps by getting a means to procure cash and commodities without having to displace themselves (Interview Sidi Mohamed Ould Dey, ḥassān, 27.8.1995).

Whenever animals had to be exchanged for grain, small, decentralised caravans left the Tagant and northern Aftout to go to the nearby market at Kaédi. These caravans were accompanied by the animals (pack-oxen, camels, and donkeys) necessary to transport the grain back home. They were constituted on an occasional basis, and rarely comprised the same people in

subsequent years. Often just one member of a family, accompanied by a slave, left to get the desired commodities. Modest amounts of tea and cloth, as well as money, could be obtained in Moudjéria or Kiffa[46], as well as the other small towns where meat was needed to feed the colonial staff and the inhabitants of the small towns (Interview Isselmou Ould Sidi, zwāya, 8.4.1995). The lack of grain in these locations, together with the less favourable terms of trade, however, meant this opportunity was not very attractive to the pastoralists.

WAGE LABOUR AND MIGRATION

The Impact of Colonial Rule on Labour and Migration

Colonisation introduced a new kind of labour into bīẓān society, namely wage labour. Within the Mauritanian borders the administrative staff, as elsewhere, needed a large body of people to perform menial tasks. The administration and its members offered jobs for personal servants, washers, cooks, shepherds and many others. While skilled jobs, like interpreting, were more often given to bīẓān, the menial jobs were performed primarily by sūdān men, most of whom were still bound to the slave estate, but many of whom managed to enhance their legal status and became ḥarāṭīn (cf. McDougall 1988: 376, note 26; Ould Khalifa 1991: 284; Moussa/Ould Maouloud 1997). To some extent, colonisation meant job opportunities for sūdān women too, as many tasks involved basic household-work. That sūdān women were less able to profit from these opportunities with respect to increasing their personal autonomy, resulted from the gendered structures of domination in bīẓān society. Sūdān women engaged in paid work were often "hired out" for these purposes by their masters, and the revenue directly benefited the latter without altering the woman's relations of dependency, or allowing her to benefit materially. Besides prostitution, which is reported from the colonial cities,[47] and the occurrence of which increased considerably during periods of drought and economic depression, slave women had another more promising option to enhance their social condition: they could become the wife of a Senegalese tirailleur or even a French administrator. The latter were not allowed to be accompanied by their family during the first decades of the French rule on Mauritanian territory and therefore frequently contracted marriages called "à la mode du pays" for the duration of their stay.[48] Some of these colonial officials, but by far not the majority, did acknowledge the offspring of these relations. The children thus could profit from an allowance paid by the colony. The administrators' former slave spouses in general were manumitted by their temporary husbands' paying an indemnity to the bīẓān slave masters. Often endowed with some property, they were in a strong position when contracting a second marriage (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 803f.; Meyer 1959: 90; Hunkanrin 1964).

The outcome of slave women's liaisons with Senegalese tirailleurs was less evident. Frequently the bīẓān gave proof of their canniness in judicial regulations, and managed not to free their slave women married to a tirailleur. Once the latter were posted to a new location, the bīẓān claimed their slave women back, thus putting the colonial administration, which had guaranteed to maintain the bīẓān property rights towards their slaves, in a delicate situation. Reports from Senegal, whence many of the tirailleurs returned after retiring from service in the army, revealed another threat. Back home, the sūdān women were often treated like slaves by their husbands. Originating from black African ethnic groups to whom slavery was in no way alien, the former tirailleurs saw no rationale to treat the sūdān women better than other strangers of such minor status (cf. McDougall 1988: 370f.).

Migration to the colonial towns made up only a small part of the total migration of sūdān seeking employment. In the administrative centres, some of which were newly established, while others were located in old bīẓān towns such as Tidjikja or Atar, the number of jobs remained limited.[49] Much greater opportunities were offered by the Senegal valley, the Senegalese towns, and parts of southern Mauritania, like the Gorgol region. Already in the first decades of the century, a southward migrational movement of sūdān men, both of seasonal and permanent character, developed in Mauritania. In Dagana, on the left bank of the Senegal, the colonial administrators commented already in 1925 on the influx of numerous sūdān, as a response to their mistreatment by brutal bīẓān masters. The latter, however, were often able to get them back under their control by making an appeal to the colonial law apparatus, claiming fraudulent accusations (cf. Delaunay 1984: 72).

In 1936, when control in the south of the Mauritanian colony had been well established for decades, and came to be achieved in the north as well, Capitaine Gilles, in a report on the Aftout of Kiffa, described how seasonal wage labour migration was a fixed element in the life of many sūdān men. In one case from Barkéol el Abiod, the family of a sūdān man living in an adabay of the Aftout was expected to obtain a harvest of about 800 kg of millet, an amount already representing the maximum for a single cultivator in a year with medium rainfall. The sūdān in the adabay in question owed one half of this harvest, as well as hospitality to their bīẓān patrons, when these resided near the adabay for about one month. As a result of these obligations, the family remained with about 350 kg when the bīẓān left after their yearly visit subsequent to the harvest. From this amount the cultivators had to pay the colonial tax on agricultural production, the ʿašūr. Calculated at one tenth of the harvest, the tax withdrew another 80 kg from the remaining millet. The ḥarāṭīn family thus had to pay the whole amount of the colonial tax, i.e. for their own and for their patron's share, from its own half of the harvest! The 270 kg of millet remaining were just enough to meet the family's needs for about half a year. As these sūdān were largely independent of their bīẓān patrons, and received only sporadic gifts like animals or cloth, the need for a substantial amount of supplemental income is evident. In many other cases,

the conditions were even less favourable for the sūdān. They were threatened in various ways, e.g. by unexpected claims from bīẓān, or unjustified requisitions tribal or fractional chiefs made when collecting taxes and levies either for the colonial administration or for tribal affairs.[50]

The document of Capitaine Gilles reveals how early those sūdān who had remained in the Aftout had become integrated into a new mode of production dominated by a seasonal alternation of agricultural and most often wage labour activities, whereas livestock-rearing was of minor importance. As the sūdān's conditions of life were hardly enviable, many left permanently for the south, leaving behind their feeble use-rights in land, and a colonial administration fearing a deterioration in the net agricultural production. Already in 1921, the counsel of Tagant notables expressed his concern about slaves leaving their masters, and asked the commandant de cercle, Anselme Dubost, to lend support to masters wishing to dispose of their slaves in the same way they had for generations. The answer was somewhat tempered for fear of abolitionist pressure from France, as Dubost declared that the colony did not consider any of its inhabitants slaves. However, to comfort the slave masters, the commandant added that nobody was permitted to leave the region, nor the tribe and fraction, as long as the people concerned were not mistreated.[51]

Another case is documented for the 1940s, when about 100 slaves of the Tarkoz in the district of Moudjéria were reported to have fled to the Gorgol area. The bīẓān masters submitted their problem to the local French administrator, but the latter only promised to inform his counterpart in the Gorgol district on the occasion of a future visit there.[52] Over the years the situation did not change considerably. Still in 1953, the council of the notables of Tagant complained about the lack of labour power, i.e. the continued drain of people towards the south, and sought remedies from the administration. However, times had changed a bit, and the response of the commandant de cercle remained terse. Whilst acknowledging the described fact of labour emigration and the problems emanating from this kind of depopulation, he did not console the bīẓān by promising help. Instead he recommended, that the bīẓān enhance the living conditions of the workers, and claimed himself to have already given a good example and raised wages.[53]

The Dawn of a New Era: from Colonialism to Independence

Interview data illuminates the background and the motivation of both seasonal and permanent migration from about 1950 on. Until independence, almost all commercial activities of Mauritania were focused on the south, namely the Senegal valley and the Senegalese cities, and on a smaller scale Mali in the east. Wage labour employment opportunities on Mauritanian territory had been almost inexistent besides the few jobs found in the small administrative towns. All this changed rapidly when the construction of the country's capital Nouakchott, and of the mining industry at Zouérat, created a large demand for workers in the early 1960s. Until then the sūdān of the

Aftout had continued to migrate in large numbers seasonally into Senegal. As Ahmed Ould Aimar (ḥarāṭīn, Interview 29.3.1995) put it: "When the fields were over, the people here [the sūdān in the Aftout] wanted to go and gain something else. In these times Nouakchott did not yet exist." One typical job in Dakar was to transport and sell water carried around on the head in large canisters of 20 litres. Other frequent jobs performed seasonally by sūdān in Senegal were occupations such as butcher, shop-assistant, or work with a trader of livestock. Often the sūdān relied on bīẓān permanently installed in Senegal, and with whom they shared tribal or fractional affiliation. This was especially the case for the many sūdān who found jobs in the numerous bīẓān shops established in the Senegalese towns until the ethnic conflict involving Senegal and Mauritania in 1989 (cf. p. 283f.).

Today, however, most of the sūdān interviewees are cautious on the topic of assistance they received from bīẓān. Many claim to have found work on their own, and some indicated the fact that they did not work for bīẓān, but for Senegalese.[54] Those sūdān who were a little bit better off, or able to raise loans, could engage in petty trade. While many of those who succeeded stopped going back home to cultivate, and established themselves permanently, some sūdān of the Aftout developed seasonal petty trading. During the dry season they left the area and headed to Kiffa, or further south-east to Mali, in order to buy peanuts, to be resold in small quantities on the way home. The money needed to start this transaction came from the marketing of millet, and the profit was expected to cover the costs of clothing (Interviews Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 25.7.1995; Ahmed Ould Breik, ḥarṭāni, 11.4.1995; Ahmed Ould Aimar, ḥarṭāni, 29.3.1995).

Migration of sūdān women did occur too, but was more limited in frequency and in range then men's. In the interviews I conducted with sūdān, the migration of sūdān women, then working as household maids in the cities, appeared only after the big drought in 1969. Reports from the valley, however, mention that sūdān couples used to migrate there even before. The men helped at the harvest,[55] and the women pounded millet and did handicrafts. The local Haalpulaar population was able to pay for these services thanks to their cash income generated by migrant labour (cf. Schmitz 1993: 611). A quite similar case of rural-rural migration, over relatively short distances, is mentioned in the narrative of Valha, who describes how her family was helped to pound millet and do other tasks by sūdān families, who joined the pastoralists once the harvest was over (cf. the narrative of Valha p. 69-72).

Permanent migration of sūdān had two major reasons. Some seasonal migrants were able to succeed abroad, and decided to stop returning home to cultivate every year, when this was no longer profitable or would have endangered the permanent employment they had found. Others just preferred life in the cities, and therefore did not go back. Often the reason for this decision was the relations of dependency the sūdān had to endure in their area of origin. Moime Mint El Abd (ḫādem, Interview 26.12.1995), had a

(slave) father who was known for being an unruly and violent man, one who did not submit to the will of his masters and was rude to other people as well. Having achieved a considerable degree of liberty himself, he was unable to bear the mistreatment and beatings his wife experienced at the hands of her masters. He ran away when Moime still was a baby. Others ran away when they were adolescents, because – as Yarba Ould Emine (ḥarṭāni, Interview 1.4.1995) told me – they could no longer bear the subservience of their parents and the domination of the bīẓān masters.

The 1960s brought about the rapid expansion of employment opportunities. French policy towards and within the colonies changed considerably after the Second World War, and became oriented towards the development of Mauritanian economy and infrastructure. Additionally, natural resources, like the iron ore deposits at the Kediet ej Jill, were explored, and later mined by international investors.[56] Rosso, situated on the Mauritanian bank of the Senegal valley, was a major transit town for Mauritanians wanting to go to Dakar. When Nouakchott and the mining industry of the north began to emerge, the flow of migrants passing through the small city began to split up into one part heading to the north, and one part to Senegal in the south. Much of the money the seasonal migrants earned was funnelled back into the rural areas. There it was invested in animals, or, as many of the then still young migrants admit, just squandered. These examples incited many other youngsters to go and try their luck too. As they rarely found support for such plans at home, the young men, many of whom were still boys, often left in secret not only their masters, but their parents too.

The Impact of Drought

The heavy drought of 1969 ultimately increased migration, which now more than ever became a crucial necessity. The period of prolonged droughts paralysed the rural and especially the pastoral economy. Bīẓān masters were often no longer able to support their dependents; feeding them was an especial problem. When the drought decimated the herds, work in the pastoral sector became rare. This did not only affect unpaid slave workers. In the course of the increasing migration and successful emancipation of the sūdān, many tasks, like the watering of cattle or the herding of sheep and goats had started to be remunerated. While in the golden times of livestock exports, some of these jobs had been quite well paid,[57] the consequences of the drought put these rural workers, whose emancipation had weakened their ties with their former bīẓān masters and patrons, most immediately into a difficult situation.[58]

While the animals of most bīẓān were already badly affected, and died in large numbers, the situation was even worse among the cultivating sūdān, a large number of whom had invested in animals during the good years of the 1950s and 1960s. The reasons for this difference are multiple. Committed to cultivation and migrant labour, many though not all sūdān were less mobile than most bīẓān.[59] Consequently their livestock, even in years of good

rainfall, experienced more deprivations than the bīẓān's. The sūdān animals were less well tended because labour was scarce, since it was already invested in cultivation, migration, and work for the patrons. When the drought cycle started these already physically more weakened animals became the first and most numerous victims. The effects of the 1969 drought on the livestock on the Tagant and in the Aftout were disastrous. Many pastoralists of these regions used to nomadise only within a quite restricted area of about 50 to 80 km. During the drought, most of these pastoralists just remained at one location, near a well, or in a valley. Of the former pastoralists now sedentarised in the region of Achram-Diouk, amazingly few reported having undertaken emergency trips, e.g. towards the south, to save their animals.[60] Many explained their immobility by the arguments that the drought was omnipresent in Mauritania, and that therefore there had not been any alternative for them. Additionally emigration was described as being risky in itself. Many of the pastoralists who had migrated southwards with their animals, so my informants claimed, lost even more animals than those who remained in one place. A more successful strategy to cope with the drought was only developed by two interviewees, both of whom were resolute, and experienced pastoralists. They migrated with their sheep and goats, as well as camels, far to the north into the Tiris region, where they reached Zouérat and Aoussard in the former Spanish Western Sahara (thus crossing a distance of about 750 km as the crow flies!). This expedition helped them to maintain a large enough part of their herd to continue their pastoralist mode of life when the drought was over.[61]

The consequences of increased aridity and massive sedentarisation after 1969 successively put an end to the region's export of livestock from the Tagant and northern Aftout. Only towards the mining towns of the north, where prices were especially high, and the distance to cross for the Tagant herders was comparatively short, did the marketing of meat persist. Today sheep and goats brought along from the Hodh on the hoof or by truck are even cheaper than those of local production. The overall rapid decline of local pastoral production forced an unprecedented number of bīẓān and sūdān, both in desperate need of money, to migrate towards the cities. The rural area needed cash, and the cities were the only location where it could be obtained. Both young bīẓān and sūdān left to look for assistance from rich and influential affiliates in the city, and opportunities to gain some money. It is from this time on that many bīẓān life histories begin to include periods of migration purely to work in the cities.

> The men, a large part of the men left [in 1969]. They went to Ivory Coast, Senegal, sometimes Nouakchott. They went where they could find work. . . . Sūdān and bīẓān left, the young ones and the old. . . . They engaged in trade, they opened up shops [small retail trade]. This is what they did in all places, nothing but trade. This is what I heard. I do not know what the people really did there, I just heard what they wanted to do there. How-

> ever, people who did not know how to trade had to look for work instead. (Interview Laghlave Ould Mahmoud, ḥarṭāni, 13.4.1995)

In many cases the outcome of "doing business" was quite modest. Only a few succeeded and became part of the large bīẓān trade community spanning all of West Africa, and even parts of central Africa. The overwhelming majority of migrants, however, was employed as badly paid assistants in shops, established a small retail trade on the basis of credit, or engaged in smuggling (especially between the former Spanish Western Sahara and Mauritania). While the number of bīẓān in these non-manual jobs still was higher than that of sūdān, quite a lot of bīẓān (though most often of modest origin), stopped submitting to status obligations forbidding them manual work, and started to work e.g. in construction (Interview Abderrahmane Ould Ali, zwāya, 13.7.1995). New job opportunities arose when the state invested in a national infrastructure, such as the "road of hope", which was built from 1975 on, and now links the capital Nouakchott directly with Néma in the country's east. Though a number of sūdān still relied on patronage from influential bīẓān in order to get jobs, the latter were far from able to help all sūdān, nor could they satisfy the demands of the many bīẓān who were in a comparable situation.

As a result of this flooding of the formal job market, the extraction of shells from the dunes at the coast near Nouakchott became a fixed point in many urban migration careers. This business, which certainly is among the most menial one can imagine, is essential for construction in Nouakchott. As there is no gravel in the capital's sandy environment, it has been replaced by shells. Exploiting the dunes is free to everybody, and serves as transitional occupation until better jobs are found. Interests in the rural sector in the meantime often were (and still are) safeguarded by collective strategies. When several members of a family migrate, one other member (quite often the youngest brother), is put in charge of maintaining all claims over land.[62] While some migrants are accompanied by their families, more frequently the men leave alone. Women, children and elderly people remain in the villages and wait for the migrants' yearly visits and their assistance in cultivation.

Migration Patterns: from Running Away to Getting Back Home

Material need, together with the rapid growth of the urban centres and the emergence of better transport facilities, paved the way for increased migration not only of men but of women too. These no longer migrated only in the company of their husband or of a male member of their family, but also on their own. This certainly was further eased by nearly every family having relatives living in one of the few Mauritanian cities worth migrating to. There new job opportunities for women developed. Besides work as housemaids, the dye of cloth[63] and the preparation of couscous became among others major underclass urban women's occupations (Interview Ghalim Ould El Kheir, ḥarṭāni 17.12.1995). What here remains unspoken, but is nevertheless a

matter of fact documented since colonial times, is an increase of prostitution. Formerly especially marked in times of economic depression and drought,[64] it has now become a widespread phenomenon.

In the course of this evolution, which deeply transformed the modes of life and production in the rural areas, public acts of slave emancipation and slave flight became more and more frequent. In 1974, a slave woman of one of the region's important ḥassān families ran away. One night she took all her belongings, and together with her children, slipped away to the nearby track (the tarred road now passing by had not yet been constructed). She caught a taxi that brought her and her children directly to Nouakchott. The master, after having learnt of the flight, followed his slave in another taxi, and traced her in the city. After negotiating with the woman, he was able to return back home with one son, destined to herd the sheep and goats. However, the agreement did not last for long. Several days after he had been brought back to the master's small village, the slave boy managed to escape, and left for Nouakchott in a taxi as well. Ever after, the relations between the slave family and the master were ruptured. The slave woman continued for some years to live in Nouakchott until she became ill. Seeking medical advice in a hospital, she was told to go back to her natal region, there she was supposed to recover from her ailment. The woman returned, but her stay in the vicinity of her former master did not last. Assisted by some relatives she left her home region once again and went to Nouadhibou, where she finally died (Interview ḥassān, 9.12.1995).

Another slave woman was forced to follow her mistress, a member of a family descended from one of the Tagant ʿamīrs, when the latter married and left with her husband for a town in the east. There she had to serve her mistress, and do the housework. During a visit to the Tagant, the slave woman's brother saw his sister working very hard, and the mistress mistreating and beating her. He persuaded his sister to flee, and together with other sūdān helped her to get to Moudjéria on a donkey. There she took a taxi to Nouakchott, from where she never returned (Interview ḥarṭāni, 19.12.1995).

These two stories of slave women who escaped from their masters might at first sight be anticipated as proofs of the persistence of slavery in Mauritania, and for this reason may be welcomed by modern abolitionists on the one hand, and condemned and doubted by those who deny the relevance of relations of dependency resulting from master-slave relations for contemporary Mauritania's social topography on the other hand. Besides the factual authenticity, which for the basic statements of both stories has to be taken for given, both stories are above all stories about the changing relations of dependency, about slaves physically and symbolically breaking out of their domination by the masters. The stories thus reveal how the end of slavery comes about, and not how slavery persists. As the power of the masters fails to encompass the big cities, but is still present in the rural areas, the slave women have to migrate permanently to enter an environment where they are free of direct, personal domination. The reasons for this migration distinguis-

hes them from the many other (permanent) migrants entering the cities. Though in view of the decline of the rural sector few migrants ever have the chance to return back home,[65] the slaves who have absconded are by and large unable even to dream of returning home, be it only for a temporary visit, for this would mean re-entering the sphere of domination, being forced to re-negotiate the relations of dependency, and locate oneself in a local society where one's personal history is well known. Leaving the rural world, though it has been disrupted in the course of the droughts, increased aridity and desertification, imposes, in addition to all material problems, great mental stress. People, the bīẓān and sūdān alike, get ill from the cities, and the remedy recommended unanimously – by medical professionals and common sense – is a return to one's region of origin. There, for the sūdān the cure for their pains is obtained e.g. by a diet consisting first of all of dishes of millet.[66] Others stress the positive effects of fresh milk, and the green pastures during the rainy season,[67] and thus affirm the conception deeply rooted in bīẓān society that illness results from an unbalanced food-intake (cf. Ould Ahmedou, E.G. 1990: 95ff.).[68]

Besides its profound psychological rationale, there is another bit of truth in the link constructed between food, health and the rural area, as medical observations confirm. Despite the many difficulties of the rural sector, nutrition there is still better, i.e. of higher nutritive value, than the typical underclass urban food. Medical surveys in Mauritania proved child nutrition in the most remote areas to be far better than that of small cities, and especially of the great urban slums, where the rate of severe malnutrition was highest. These results are due to the fact that food is scarce both for poor urban and rural populations, but access to high protein, vitamin etc. foodstuffs like milk, meat and sometimes garden products is much better in the rural areas than in the cities, where hungry children are given French baguettes, and sweets (Guy Rousseau, GTZ Achram, personal communication).[69]

Chapter 7
Small Dams, Large Dams: Bīẓān Land Tenure and Social Stratification

Ruins on the Tagant, as in other mountainous areas of Mauritania, bear witness to a long history of cultivation. The numerous remnants of stone built round houses and extensive terracing designed to enhance cultivation indicate the presence of a former sedentary and agriculturist population, now called Gangara.

The cultivation of millet in precolonial times was not limited to the more humid zones of the south, or the šemāma-region bordering the Senegal river. The Tamourt en-Naaj on the Tagant, and some other important depressions and valleys, together with the oases, were the locus of intensive agricultural production, providing the pastoralists with a crucial complement to their diet. Although the total amount of production in precolonial times cannot be evaluated, the patterns of trade showing a pastoral population bartering desert goods like salt and dates for grain reveal that the local production of millet was too low to meet the needs in the north and centre of the western Sahara.[1] This situation persists until today, although the bīẓān increased their involvement in agriculture several times. During the 19th century, the import of slaves not only freed many bīẓān masters from manual work, and benefited the pastoral sector, but led to the extension of both agriculture and pheniculture. From the turn of this century on, French colonisation confronted the bīẓān with a policy aiming not only to fix (and thus to better be able to control) the nomadic population, but to minimise the bīẓān need for grain imports (cf. p. 221-228). Finally the drought of 1969 transpired to be only the beginning of a period of subsequent droughts and increased aridity, which together with human action caused a severe degradation of natural resources. Facing the changed environment and the loss of most of their animals, bīẓān who did not leave for the cities altogether, began to cultivate millet and sedentarise in villages and small towns. While the evolution during the first two periods matches neither in scale nor in speed the last one, a proper knowledge of these past events is essential for an understanding of today's configurations of land tenure and property. Access to land and rights over land, especially cultivable land in an almost desert environment, is at the very base of social inequality in rural societies.

Slaves and ḥarāṭīn both experience their subordinate position in bīẓān society through discrimination against them in matters of access to land and

land tenure. To grasp this issue comprehensively, the following analysis focuses on two domains. Besides the legal framework of land tenure in traditional bīẓān society, as well as in colonial and independent Mauritania, detailed case studies from the region of Achram-Diouk will throw a light on practices of land tenure and their change. These appear to be full of ambiguities. While much of past domination lives on in today's access to land, new patterns of land tenure have emerged, reconfiguring the spatial representation of social boundaries among sūdān and bīẓān, tribes and fractions, as well as women and men.

LAND TENURE: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Islamic Jurisprudence and Land Tenure in the Western Sahara

Like other legal matters, the basic principles of the constitution and transfer of ownership rights in land in precolonial bīẓān society were laid out by Islamic jurisprudence, and detailed by the māliki school of law. At the core of this legal framework is first the "opening" of land for subsequent appropriation marked by the arrival of Islam in this territory, and second, the "vivification" of land, which establishes and legitimises ownership rights. Only the initial user is able to appropriate, and establish ownership rights in land. These are maintained by sustained use, which is considered to leave its imprints on the land. All other types of property exchange, be it by sale, donation or appropriation through violence come after it (Ould al-Barra/ Ould Cheikh 1996: 158, 164). As clear as this principle seems, its practice reveals many problems. Contemporary or recent claims can be put in question by claims supposed to be more closely linked to the initial appropriation. As factual authenticity can hardly be proved for times lying several centuries back, conflicts over land are likely to arise and are legitimised by the same legal framework.[2]

To further elucidate bīẓān land tenure, it must be noted that the interpretation of Islamic law was concentrated in the hand of the zwāya, for their elite was the only group disposing of the cultural and symbolic capital necessary to legitimise such an undertaking. As they were also the prime agents of the pastoral and trade economy, the zwāya by this role were able to further promote their own position, both symbolically and materially, with regard to the other social strata. Legal judgements (ḥukm) and legal expertise (fatwā and nawāzil[3]), were a major domain for zwāya Islamic scholars struggling to deconstruct the illegitimate nature of ḥassān power and property. This image was one which many zwāya scholars liked to contrast to their own supposed piety (cf. Oßwald 1993: 62ff.). Furthermore, as is the case in most other legal systems, Islamic jurisprudence does not recognise the transient pastoral-nomadic land-use as a basis for direct ownership in land: grazing animals do not "vivify" land, nor do they imprint permanent signs of land-use. With

regard to these prescriptions, the bīẓān nomadic pastoralists therefore are unable to constitute individual or collective ownership of the land they exploit. Such rights, according to an orthodox interpretation of Islamic law, are limited to agricultural use, or other modes of permanent, productive use, such as the construction of wells, or continued farming.

Despite the difficulties of fitting this narrow legal framework, grazing land was subject to forms of appropriation recognised and approved as legitimate by the bīẓān jurists. The basis for this practice was the option provided by Islamic jurisprudence to tolerate under certain conditions local tradition as part of a customary law (ʿurf; cf. Oßwald 1993: 38ff.). Although these regulations could not become a source of legislation, customary law allowed the local bīẓān jurists to legally recognise tribal territorial claims, and to ascertain them in legal terms by linking the ownership of distinct locations with the right to take into possession the pastureland in the vicinity. All these varying levels of territorial control and land ownership were exercised by the collectivity of the tribe, which in this respect assembled a number of pastoral nomads sharing economic and political interests to control and exploit a common territory.

It is the hierarchy both among and within tribal groups which adds further complexity to the practices of land tenure in precolonial bīẓān society. In general it was the zwāya tribes which effectively appropriated pastureland and established ownership rights over both agricultural sites and wells.[4] This ownership, however, did not imply an exclusivity of use-rights. Many zwāya lived under the political domination of ḥassān tribes, and often paid tributes to them (a condition turning them into zwāya "of the shade" in contrast to the independent zwāya "of the sun"; Bonte 1989: 118). Out of this power relation arose a number of customary rights, which gave the ḥassān the right to use the bīẓān land and wells. The ḥassān thus were able to live as pastoralists side by side with the zwāya, although they did not own the pastoral resources they exploited. Analogous is the case of the tributary strata, the znāga and tlāmīḍ. Being free but socially inferior, these did not own land, i.e. they were unable to constitute exclusive use-rights over pastoral resources. The znāga and tlāmīḍ, who sometimes constituted tribal groups, but often just lived side by side with their patrons, therefore had to develop relations with a powerful tribe which would grant them access to pastoral resources in exchange for tributes. In the case of the znāga the major patrons were the ḥassān, while zwāya clients were called tlāmīḍ (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 533ff.; Bonte 1987b).

The tribal partition of land which predominated in pre-colonial western Sahara was not one of clear-cut borders, but resembled more a collage of oscillating, partially connected and overlapping spatial entities,[5] the maintenance of which depended on collective, i.e. tribal action. Despite this eventful history, until today, the legitimation of tribal claims to land follows a most scrupulous interpretation of the principle of initial vivification that rules this section of Islamic jurisprudence: distinct tribal property in land is traced back

to its first appropriation under Islam, the event in history clearly marking the beginning of all legal transactions, and thus the ultimate point of reference on which to construct legitimate claims to property. For this undertaking to succeed, a great many reliable testimonies have to be assembled, thus involving joint action and expression by the tribal body to affirm ownership in land (cf. Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 176).[6] It is this structuration of the constitution of legal claims through a set of continued, collective social practices (cf. Giddens 1992: 67ff.) that forms the basis of the persistence of the tribal fragmentation of land rights until today.

Within the tribal boundaries individual property in land is possible, but is accessible only to members of the corresponding tribe. Exceptions occur rarely,[7] as transfer of land to members of foreign tribes would weaken internal tribal solidarity, and endanger the coherence of the discourse constituting the tribe as a social and spatial entity, demarcating itself from the outside world.[8]

The Transformation of Land Tenure under Colonial Rule

Legislation in colonial Mauritania (as in the other West African colonies) initially introduced the French legal code, and declared all conquered land property of the colony. Recognising that this legal guideline had little to do with the situation the administration had to face on the ground, the colonial legislation from 1904 on became increasingly sensitive to the traditional, collective structures of land tenure and ownership. This tendency culminated in 1955, when the French conceded traditional rights in land supremacy over claims by the colony. According to this law, it was the colony which had to prove that land had been unused for at least ten years, and therefore was free for appropriation, and not vice-versa (nevertheless all land still could be expropriated by the colony in cases of public interest).

The most important change colonial rule introduced to local patterns of land tenure was the establishment of land registers in 1925.[9] These registers were designed to account for rights in land in the different administrative posts. Most often the tribes' chiefs were listed as owners in these registers, but they were meant not to appear as individual owners but as representatives of their collectivities, i.e. their tribes, which for this purpose had to be rigorously classified into tribes and sub-tribes.[10] The distinct, more or less well-defined agricultural sites registered therefore had to be considered as collective, and not as individual property (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 87ff.).

This procedure reveals the wish of the French administration to adapt action to local, i.e. bīẓān customs, and in this respect marked a departure from their policy in most other colonies, such as e.g. in North Africa. Rather than draw tribal territories on a map, they acknowledged – within certain limits – the fluctuating nature of nomadic habitat,[11] together with respect for the significance distinct places had (and continue to have) for the constitution of tribal identity and territoriality. Nevertheless this measure modified the nature of land tenure. Ownership rights were codified, and this definitely

altered the negotiatory and sometimes violent mode of disputing and changing access to land that had prevailed in precolonial bīẓān society. Additionally, the administration, by this new practice, was able to exploit its power and to attribute or withdraw ownership rights in response to cooperation with, or hostility towards the colonial power. This was possible because the French colonial laws defined the coexistence of French civil law and the recognition of traditional land rights (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 87f.). Colonial interests thus could override rights defined by custom, as far as these had not been registered. That this option was rarely applied resulted from the administration's disinclination to increase opposition and conflict with and among the bīẓān tribes. Instead of voluntarily attributing land entitlements, the colonial administration spent much time on assembling claims and proofs of collective land ownership, in order to become a competent arbiter in bīẓān disputes over land.[12] Due to this complex intermingling of bīẓān and colonial interests, the constitution of the colonial land registers became an important issue in local politics, involving the tribal elites in another struggle for influence on the colonial administration, the generation of references, the control of land, and finally the power to attract followers and clients (cf. below, p. 208-247).[13]

Patterns of Bīẓān Land Tenure

The issue of inner-tribal hierarchy affects access to land in various ways. First of all, tribally owned land, such as agricultural sites, is under the collective ownership of the tribe's members. These, however, are constituted only by the free people of common affiliation. Associated members of the tribe, such as znāga and ḥarāṭīn, do not have the necessary genealogy, and thus are excluded from sharing equal rights in land with the full-fledged members. This hierarchical structure of tribal property in land has two major consequences. Areas which have been under tribal control for long time are in the hands of only a small group of families, forming the centre of the tribe. These groups in turn have to maintain this configuration of land property over generations. They achieve this end by keeping the property legally undivided, and thus inalienable, although its exploitation takes place individually. This juridical procedure also has further advantages. It allows them to omit the obligation to share inheritance, as defined by the šarīʿa for individual property, which in the case of its application would entail fragmentation of agricultural plots within the families holding rights in the land. Last but not least, the described patterns of continued, collective ownership exclude women from claiming rights in land which they otherwise would gain through individual inheritance, according them half of their brothers' share (cf. Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 178).[14]

The concentration of direct land ownership in the hands of the bīẓān tribes, nowadays of both zwāya and ḥassān status, is one of the most important means by which relations of hierarchy and dependency among sūdān and bīẓān are perpetuated. Even more often than in the case of pastoral land, the

users and owners of agricultural sites did not coincide. In precolonial times, it was the slaves and the then still small number of ḥarāṭīn who cultivated. Occasionally znāga cultivated too, but the zwāya and ḥassān rarely did.

Breaking the bīẓān's stranglehold on land ownership has proved difficult for the sūdān up to the present. Slaves, due to their legal estate, had no rights to constitute property. All of their work belonged to the masters, who in turn were obliged to feed and clothe their slaves. These legal prescriptions were fundamental to the definition of the slaves' relation to the land they cultivated. Even though many slaves lived in conditions characterised by some autonomy, and e.g. did not give all of their harvest to their masters, but have managed especially since the first decades of this century to give only a fixed part (cf. McDougall 1988: 379), they nevertheless never could challenge their masters' rights over the land they cultivated. The same legal rule applies to those cases in which slaves were involved in acts constituting the appropriation of land, e.g. the clearing of bush, or the construction of dams. All such work done by slaves constituted property only for their masters. The case is different for the ḥarāṭīn. They could become landowners, but in the majority of cases nevertheless failed in this attempt. Legally free, those ḥarāṭīn who had gained this status by manumission, still had no means to sustain themselves. In order to get access to land for cultivation, they had to negotiate with bīẓān land owners, and to associate themselves with a bīẓān tribe. To develop and maintain even a limited access to land these ḥarāṭīn were thus forced to submit themselves to the tribal social hierarchy, discriminating against them as free women and men of secondary rank (cf. Ould al-Barra/ Ould Cheikh 1996: 162).

As regards the cultivation of millet the most frequent arrangement between bīẓān land owners and landless, but cultivating ḥarāṭīn was as follows: the bīẓāni land owner had to provide the seed, and the ḥarṭāni the labour. The harvest was shared equally between both parties. Besides these conditions, many other arrangements were practised. Not all bīẓān provided the seed, nor did all ḥarāṭīn pay half of their harvest. What remained unchanged was the fragile nature of ḥarāṭīn land access. While working as a kind of share-cropper, they were unable to constitute proper ownership rights in the land they cultivated. These remained with the bīẓān, who additionally had the option of withdrawing the ḥarāṭīn's use rights to cultivate from one year to the other. Those ḥarāṭīn who had no other means of sustaining themselves, therefore heavily depended on maintaining good relations with their bīẓān patron. Other more favourable arrangements mediating land-access for non-landowners did exist, but were restricted to dependent strata other than the sūdān, or were granted to poor bīẓān. These arrangements established long-lasting use-rights, paid for with only one tenth of the harvest or even less (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 192).[15]

Despite these unfavourable configurations of land ownership and tenure, ḥarāṭīn effectively could, and did become land owners. This was most frequent in the south, and parts of the Aftout, which largely correspond to

today's Gorgol region. In parts of the Aftout, and notably in the Gorgol plain, the bīẓān tribal grip on land had been comparably weak due to long periods of political instability and conflict, which saw the local ḥassān tribes being defeated several times, and the area come under the political domination of the large and powerful ḥassān confederations of the Tagant and Hodh (notably the Idawʿ Īš Abakak, the Idawʿ Īš Šrātīt, and the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd), which made of the area another locale for their rivalries. The ecology of the Aftout too is responsible for the density of occupation having been persistently low for a long time. The pastures, which are abundant for some months after the rainy season, are considered too "wet", and infested by insects and parasites by the pastoralists. The number of permanent wells is small, for traditional techniques allow only the drilling of seasonal wells in the wāds, the seasonal watercourses in this area. Vast areas therefore remained vacant for permanent occupation by immigrant ḥarāṭīn, and a number of slaves, many of whom had left their former overlords and masters, and sought protection from regional zwāya tribes.[16] In many cases these bīẓān granted the sūdān the right to appropriate land like free men according to the principle of vivification, and thus to act like real ḥarāṭīn. Today their acts of appropriation are viewed as legitimate even by the local bīẓān, who thus acknowledge the ḥarāṭīn to be free men possessing all civic rights (cf. Park 1988: 62, 64; RIM 1986: 57; Schmitz 1987: 6ff.).[17]

Similar cases can be observed in other regions too. In the area of Achram-Diouk several ḥarāṭīn managed to constitute rights in land by clearing and permanently cultivating it. However, as the most productive land was already under bīẓān control, the ḥarāṭīn plots occupy areas of secondary rank. In other cases, ḥarāṭīn were granted land ownership or long term use-rights by members of the bīẓān elite. They could either buy land, e.g. with the money they earned from migrant labour, or they became beneficiary of a ḥubs. This latter state of property was intended to immobilise assets, and render them indivisible and inalienable by establishing it as a sort of pious endowment. Besides ḥubs destined to last forever, there were also contracts limiting the duration of a ḥubs to the lifetime of either the beneficiary or the benefactor. The attribution of land as ḥubs to ḥarāṭīn was especially frequent for date palm plantations in the oases (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 193; Toupet 1977: 275f.).[18]

A most controversial situation prevails in the Tamourt en-Naaj, the most fertile valley of the Tagant plateau. There, as in other areas of intensive agricultural exploitation and pheniculture, the bīẓān took (and still take) great care to prevent ḥarāṭīn from establishing ownership of land. One such means are contracts stipulating the exploitation of bīẓān land by ḥarāṭīn workers, such as the muġarassa, defining rights and obligations arising from a ḥarāṭīn planting date palms for a bīẓān. While the latter in general provides the seedlings, the well and the land, the ḥarṭāni is responsible for planting and watering until the first dates come to maturity (normally this means a delay of five years).[19] Once this is achieved, half of the palm trees (but not the land

on which they are standing!), becomes property of the ḥarṭāni.[20] There are several reasons why this last aspect of the treaty rarely became effective. The time between the conclusion of the contract and the maturity of the date palm trees was long, and many ḥarāṭīn became indebted in the meantime. Once the contract was finally accomplished, its gains were was just enough to pay off the debts. In other cases, dishonest bīẓān took advantage of their juridical knowledge, and developed a number of clever arguments to dispossess the ḥarāṭīn of their reward (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 404; Ould Abde 1989: 39; Grosser/Ibra Bra 1979: 305; Toupet 1977: 276f.; Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi, 24.12.1995).[21]

Despite these many vagaries and the obvious bīẓān hostility towards land ownership by ḥarāṭīn, some of the latter succeeded. Most of them came from families claiming a long ḥarāṭīn genealogy, and appropriated their land by vivification. To do so, these ḥarāṭīn, like those of the Gorgol region, had to be accepted as free men, embracing all the corresponding rights, and hence able to appropriate land individually like the bīẓān.[22]

Colonial policy, which wanted to replace traditional relations of dependence by sharecropping arrangements, did little to alter the sūdān's limited and fragile access to land. In the south their hand was strengthened in their struggle to confirm their control of land when the colonial administration recognised some adwaba as sūdān communities paying their taxes autonomously. In a few cases, such as the adwaba of Mbout, Kow and Djadjibine, the administrators even registered agricultural sites in the name of the adwaba, and thus in the name of the sūdān living there. At the same time, however, the colonial officers recoiled from completely negating bīẓān claims on the land concerned, and registered it twice: once the sūdān plots in a separate register, and once the whole area as tribal territory of the bīẓān, represented by their chief. Until today the land ownership of the sūdān continues to be contested by the bīẓān on the basis of this double registration. Sūdān control of land is stronger in the Gorgol plain. There history provided better conditions for individual appropriation, and the end of individual and collective relations of dependency, as well as of territorial control between bīẓān and sūdān (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 287ff.; see also note 17, this chapter).[23]

The independent Mauritanian state issued a new law on land ownership in 1960, which by and large perpetuated the colonial laws, and the discrepancy between legal ideal and reality on the ground inherent to these. All vacant and unowned land was declared to belong to the state, but again traditional claims to land, either by collectivities or individuals, were recognised. The new state thus secured itself the same options for opportunistic arbitration in matters of access to land as the colonial administration had before (cf. Grayzel 1988: 317f.).

A profound change in the state's policy towards land ownership occurred in 1983, 1984, and again in 1990. A new legislation was introduced, which had the individualisation of land ownership as its major objective.[24] In its

first paragraph this law stated all Mauritanians to have equal rights to be land owners. By placing this statement in the most prominent place, the regime of Ould Haidalla (1980-84) both recognised the difficulty the sūdān and dependents of the black African ethnic groups had faced so far with regard to ownership of land. The new law thus created a crucial complement to the formal abolition of slavery (effected on the 5 July 1980). It provided a legal framework the dependent strata could rely on in their struggle. Besides this rationale the new law was a challenge to the preceding legislation. For the first time, the state recognised private property as the fundamental form of ownership. Consequently traditional patterns of land tenure – which persisted frequently under the guise of sharecropping arrangements – were officially abolished, and vacant land considered to become state property. In the case of controversy over the vacant status of a distinct site, it is again up to the owner to provide proofs for his claims. Public interest also has priority with regard to access to wells. All wells which are not located within individually owned land are declared to be of public interest and free for access. Thus clearly marking a break with former legislation, a number of exceptions were defined which assured the persistence of traditional rights in land in many domains. The new law declared conformity with the šarī'a, and thus respect for all claims to ownership that conform to this legal reference. Further, all lands registered in the name of chiefs and notables were recognised as being in collective, i.e. tribal ownership.[25] Claims to land based on traditional rights were considered sufficient to allow registration as individual property or compensation, if this land had been appropriated by the state. Parallel to the maintenance of these traditional patterns of land tenure, the options for direct state intervention were enlarged. The state, wishing to expand intensive farming of rice along the Senegal river, needed land for the installation of irrigation perimeters. Land owned collectively and not attributed to a legal cooperative thus could be declared domain land by the state, and after a certain delay be concessioned out to private owners. Another decree in 1990 further facilitated the granting of individual concessions. It introduced a procedure permitting the state to mediate land access in three subsequent steps, ranging from revocable use-rights to definitive concession (cf. Crousse 1986: 91; Crousse/Hessling 1994: 91; Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 177f.; Park 1985: 70f.; Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 1040ff.).

The effect of the new legislation on land ownership and tenure is contradictory. Its application was most pronounced in the southern regions of Mauritania, where irrigation schemes were developed. In these cases the focus of the application of the new law lay on the option to declare domain land, and to subsequently concession out individual plots. This led to the expropriation of many and in the majority black African farmers to the benefit of an emerging agro-business, dominated by bīẓān alien to the area under development. A different situation prevails north of the Senegal valley and the irrigation perimeters. In these areas the law effectively enhanced the emanci-

pation of slaves and ḥarāṭīn, who now had a legal reference for their claims on land appropriated by vivification (cf. Baro 1993: 287f.; Bonte 1994c: 85). This objective of the state policy was underlined by a massive campaign aimed at popularising the content of the new law. Not only state officials were trained, but the National Radio developed special broadcasts to popularise knowledge of the new legislation. Although details of the law are likely to have remained unknown to many peasants, the campaign increased the awareness of the changed legal framework among those concerned. While rural bīẓān vehemently rejected the new legislation (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 1056) it marked a leap forward for a great number of sūdān. The predominant position bīẓān had held until then when appealing to the state's justice clearly began to deteriorate as many of their claims had become illegitimate.

Another aspect is that the explicit reference to the šarīʿa, and the accordance of major aspects of the new law on land ownership with its prescriptions (these references were deleted in the 1990 decree; cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 1056), and the emphasis on the principle of vivification, were in a certain sense self-explanatory to all sūdān who had some knowledge of the Qurʾān.

The new law, declaring all Mauritanians to have equal rights with regard to land, matched well the argument raised in the course of the official abolition of slavery, which had declared all Mauritanians to be like brothers.[26] Put in a nutshell, this signified for many sūdān that they were recognised by the head of the state as social beings, and hence legal persons like the bīẓān. Finally the sūdān could hope to have no longer only obligations, but equal rights too. This last aspect, which is related to the evolution of various configurations of sūdān and bīẓān access to land in an area of marginal agricultural potential, will be analysed in the following case studies.

Case Studies

While so far only the legal aspects of land ownership have been described, now the focus will be on the evolution of land tenure in central Mauritania as revealed by historical documents on the southern Tagant and northern Aftout, and case studies in the region of Achram-Diouk. The aim of this undertaking will be to analyse how the collective, i.e. the tribal control and ownership of land developed and responded to changing social and economic configurations in the course of both colonial rule and independent Mauritania. As outlined above, the development of a land register constituting tribal ownership of land that was essential to translate and materialise the social processes of tribal segmentation and factionalism (and later of the social conflict between bīẓān and sūdān) into territorial fragmentation. Today, these territorial representations of past social and political relations are

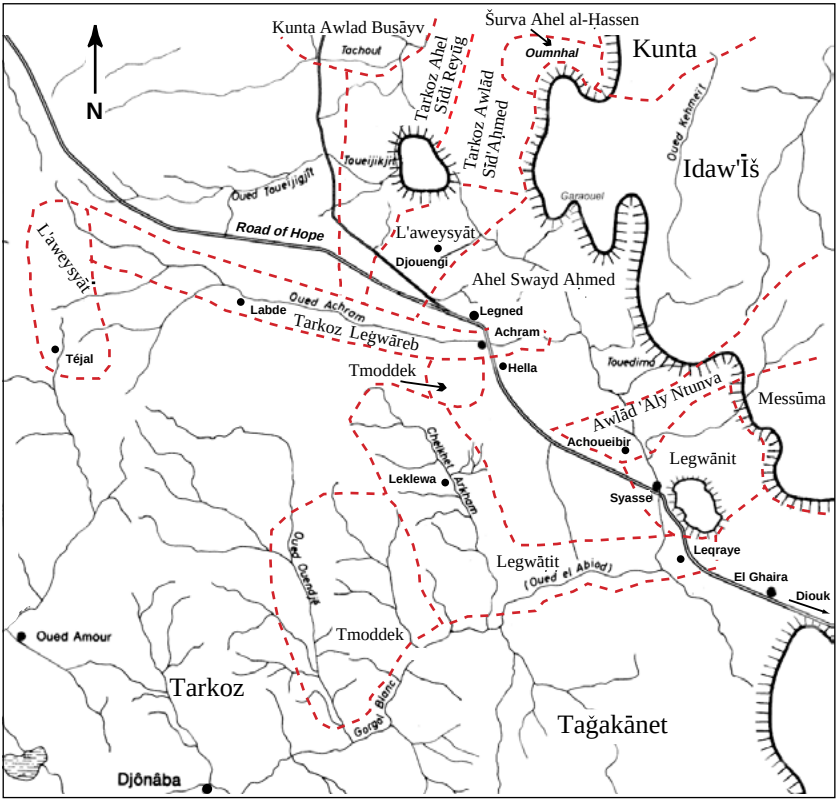
becoming more and more cemented. Land, and not only cultivable land, is becoming scarce due to its extensive appropriation in the course of sedentarisation, and the conversion from pastoralism to agriculture. In order to understand the motives of today's conflicts over land, which are primarily of a socio-economic nature, the past, during which the present shape of tribal land tenure emerged, has to be analysed.

Land for the ʿamīr

The colonisation of the Aftout and Tagant deeply affected the configuration of power among the local bīẓān tribes. In 1903 and 1904 the French brought the Trarza and the Brakna region under their control by cleverly exploiting diverging interests between ḥassān and zwāya, and developing a coalition with leading zwāya. Aware of this threat to their hegemony, many tribes of the centre and the north formed a bīẓān coalition to stop a further expansion of the French colony.[27] Well aware of this hostile potential animated by the IdawʿĪš confederation and the ʿamīr of the Abakak, Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, the French set out in 1905 to invade the Tagant, the heartland of these ḥassān tribes, by military force. Xavier Coppolani,[28] the brains behind and leader of the French expansion to Mauritania, nevertheless was convinced that once he had entered the Tagant, he would be able to pursue his policy of "peaceful penetration". Building on his diplomatic abilities and good relations with numerous zwāya, he thought it possible to once again divide interests between the local zwāya and ḥassān, and thus to be able to install French domination with only minor military exertion, and the consent of the zwāya. This assumption later turned out to be only partially right. In the beginning, however, the conquest of Tagant seemed easy. The French troops advanced quickly and by brutally attacking the livestock of the bīẓān,[29] hit and weakened their enemies considerably. In a series of battles the bīẓān were defeated, and the ʿamīr of the IdawʿĪš Abakak, Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, then almost 100 years old, killed in the battle of Bou Gadoum on the 1 April 1905. Soon after, the whole Tagant appeared to be under French control (cf. Frèrejean 1995: 262ff.).[30]

Troubles began for the French after their occupation of Tidjikja, the economic centre of the Tagant. Initially the local IdawʿAlī zwāya (as well as a number of other tribes, and even some fractions of the IdawʿĪš Abakak) had been willing to cooperate with the French,[31] but hostilities grew rapidly after the French had installed their military post. Xavier Coppolani himself, much praised for his knowledge of Islam by colonial authors, raised fierce opposition among the leading zwāya of the town when he, an unbeliever, entered the mosque and hence desecrated it. Furthermore the French bitterly lacked food to feed their large garrison, and therefore put heavy pressure on the residents of Tidjikja to provide large numbers of livestock. Additionally they wanted fixed daily contingents of labourers, chopped down palm trees, and did much more to seriously annoy the local population, which unlike the pastoral nomads of the Tagant, was unable to flee from these pressures.[32]

Map 3: Tribal Boundaries in the Southern Tagant and Northern Aftout



Finally the people of Tidjikja responded to the French aggression by shifting sides, and supporting the bīẓān coalition against the French.

Although the bīẓān succeeded a little later in killing Xavier Coppolani during a nocturnal ambush,[33] all their efforts to drive the French out of their garrison failed. Greater success was achieved by the subsequent strategy of guerrilla-like attacks and hold-ups. Operating from the north and supported by the northern tribes and the Moroccan sultan, these raids caused the French severe trouble for years. Economic needs, however, soon forced many bīẓān tribes which had fled from the French to the Adrar to return home and to resign themselves to the French rule. Open resistance was thus upheld only by a small number of northern tribes, and lost much of its support among the Tagant tribes, preoccupied with the reconstitution of their herds and the payment of colonial taxes. An important step towards the definite colonisation of the Mauritanian territory was achieved by the conquest of the Adrar ("colonne Gouraud" 1908-09), and the defeat of the

coalition of bīẓān forces led by the zwāya scholar Ma al-Aïnin (dec. 28 October 1910), based in Smara in today's Western Sahara.[34] Nevertheless raiding by northern tribes, among which the Rgaybāt were most prominent, continued until the 1930s, and even beyond the establishment of full military control of the Mauritanian territory in 1934 (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 541ff.; 565ff.; Désiré-Vuillemin 1997: 497ff.).

Besides this perspective, largely based on colonial sources, and thus bearing the imprint of the colonial point of view, an oral tradition of these events persists among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. Fortunately it has not yet been completely eliminated by "modern" knowledge transmitted in school and history books, which by and large paraphrase colonial history, and thus block access to a bīẓān-centred reevaluation of history. Although somewhat breaking the bounds of this contribution, the following narrative, presenting a quite distinct view of what happened during the colonisation of the Tagant, will therefore be presented in detail. Its many subtleties and allusions reveal not only its revisionist ambitions with regard to factual aspects of history, but introduce bīẓān modes of reflecting conflict and history. The following section therefore is dedicated to its author, Mohamed Ould Mbarek, an old ḥarṭāni from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed.

> In those times Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed had forbidden the French to enter the Tagant. He then was very strong, and could face the French directly. With his force he even could oblige them to pay him an annual tribute [the "coutumes" paid at Bakel][35] that was called al-kayyal. After some years Bakkar became old. There was an iggīw [sing. masc. from iggāwen, i.e. griot] of the Šrātīt [the second branch of Idawʿīš, which was the Abakak's fiercest enemy][36] who saw Bakkar, and who went to tell the Šrātīt that Bakkar had become faint. That was how the Šrātīt became able to withdraw the tributes of the French from the Abakak, and went to move from Mbout and Kiffa to Kaédi where the French were. The Abakak then went there too, and installed themselves side by side with the Šrātīt. That was the moment when the quarrels between both began. Before the great war between the Šrātīt and the Abakak started, the Kunta came and helped Bakkar. With this help he defeated the Šrātīt.
>
> Some years later, the French started war with the Abakak. That was at Ras el Ma in the Assaba, the place where Bakkar died.[37] There was his son Houssein Ould Bakkar who saw that after [the death of] Bakkar they could no longer fight against the French. Houssein therefore started to make relations with them. Whenever necessary he made a list of the tents [i.e. families] of the Abakak and took it to the French [to register them]. There was another brother, Ethman Ould Bakkar, who was against the French, and against what Houssein did. He took a part of the Abakak and left to fight them [the French] as Bakkar had done before. Every time the French entered the Tagant, the party of Ethman started to combat them. But Houssein helped the French in battle against Ethman. When finally the party of Ethman was beaten, there remained people from the Tagant.

> Houssein meanwhile had become old too, and said he had no longer the force to pursue these people into the Adrar. If there was anybody among the Abakak who could do so and leave with the French for the Adrar, then this person would become the chief of the Abakak. Everybody stepped back and only Abderrahmane [Ould Bakkar] remained. He said he would be ready to go to the Adrar, and he started to inform all Idawʿ Īš. He managed to convince them that the French wanted to liberate the Adrar, and he even got support from the Šrātīt. They left all together for the Adrar, where Abderrahmane succeeded. The French then gave him the emirate of Tagant. (Interview Mohamed Ould Mbarek, ḥarṭāni, 5.7.1995)

This summarising narrative of the recent history of the Tagant emirate, besides offering insights in the major patterns of tribal factionalism in the area and within the emiral lineage, puts a strong emphasis on how the new ʿamīr, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, gained legitimacy. Unlike his older brothers, Houssein Ould Bakkar and Ethman Ould Bakkar, Abderrahmane was recognised throughout the whole Idaw'Īš confederation, i.e. even by the Šrātīt, by the virtue of his military deeds, even though these had served the colonial expansion. The success of Abderrahmane in combining tradition and colonial modernity in his office in effect was so great, that some in the region of Achram-Diouk now consider him to have been the only real ʿamīr of Tagant, and all of his predecessors only to have been major tribal leaders – a view in sharp contrast to the critical interpretation proposed by Francis De Chassey (1984: 62).

The imposition of French colonial rule on the Tagant indeed sparked off major changes both in the relations among the local bīẓān tribes, and in their control and ownership of land. Before colonisation, the ḥassān tribes had lived off the tributes paid by the zwāya tribes and the znāga living under their protection, but did not own the land they controlled politically and militarily (cf. Bonte 1987b: 203f.). This configuration of different spheres of production, land ownership, and spiritual and political hegemony was profoundly challenged by the French occupation and subsequent demise of ḥassān power. This evolution was especially marked among the IdawʿĪš Abakak. Already prior to the death of the old ʿamīr Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, factionalism among the different branches of his successors had risen considerably, and could no longer be controlled by his two sons Ethman Ould Bakkar and Amar Ould Bakkar, who were responsible for the administration of the office. Various "princes" and their numerous followers threatened tributaries and other dependents by raising voluntarily tributes. After the death of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, the emirate of Tagant underwent a severe crisis. Although Ethman Ould Bakkar nominally became ʿamīr, his power remained limited. Having failed to reunify the IdawʿĪš Abakak and to defeat the French,[38] he seems to have been unable to establish hegemony beyond his own faction. As a consequence of this situation, Houssein Ould Bakkar, who had been among the first IdawʿĪš Abakak leaders to submit to the French, and who took care to never fight against them, became a sort of

intermittent ʿamīr. His authority, however, remained limited too, as he appeared prominent only in negotiations between the French and branches of the IdawʿĪš Abakak, who had ceased their resistance towards the French. Thanks to his ability to perform this role, Houssein became not only the chief intermediary of the French,[39] but was given a prominent role by the IdawʿĪš Abakak too (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 566ff.).[40]

The political topography of the IdawʿĪš Abakak was then seriously challenged by the rise of a new pretender to the office of ʿamīr: Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. Still a young man, this son of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed and a slave woman had participated in, and personally performed several remarkable exploits in the "colonne Gouraud",[41] which had installed French colonial rule in the Adrar by 1909. Having been a most impressive personality,[42] he soon became a favourite of the French, who in 1918 reintroduced the Tagant emirate to his profit.[43] Within the IdawʿĪš Abakak confederation, where he managed to become a major chief and to attract a number of followers, Abderrahmane faced fierce opposition, most pronounced among his brothers of more noble maternal descent (cf. p. 105-108), who travelled in vain to the governor at Saint-Louis to attempt to persuade him to revise his decision.[44] On the Tagant, the official removal of Houssein Ould Bakkar from his functions as a general chief of the IdawʿĪš Abakak in favour of Abderrahmane took place in 1912.[45] The French eased this dismissal for Hussein by granting him the right to lead a tribal fraction of his own, and the registration of a major cultivation zone on the Tagant – Kehmeit – under his name. Houssein thus became the first ḥassān entitled to ownership rights on a Tagant agricultural site.[46] Although these rights depended on the French, the very nature of colonial power nevertheless meant that they became lasting ones. By this evolution the ḥassān of the Tagant were able to transform their vanishing political control of territoriality into direct land ownership. They thus entered a domain which until then had been the monopoly of the zwāya.

At the beginning of his career Abderrahmane certainly was more nominally than really ʿamīr of the IdawʿĪš Abakak. Although he depended on the French colonial power to strengthen his own authority, he managed to exploit it cleverly, and thus to give his rule a proper shape full of the symbolism of ḥassān virtues, crucial to leadership in this social environment.[47] The major asset the French provided to their favourite ally was to withdraw his most vigorous enemies from the scene, or simply to punish them vigorously.[48] Ely Ould Bakkar, and other opponents of Abderrahmane, together with their followers, were released from the framework of the tribal confederation, and allowed to constitute together their own, independent fraction,[49] not subjugated to the authority of the new ʿamīr (this measure applied initially to eight rival brothers, of whom only two were still alive in 1938).[50] Later, tribes that continued to contest Abderrahmane's authority were released from it, and all transferred to other administrative regions (such was the case of the Awlād Talḥa, who after such a solution had been discussed since 1914, were finally registered in Kaédi in 1939[51]).[52]

Besides this deep influence on the inner structure of the Idawʿlš Abakak confederation, at which already lay the nucleus of the territorial materialisation of processes of (inner-)tribal segmentation and conflict, the instauration of the Tagant emirate had a second major outcome: the reorganisation, i.e. the dissolution, of the vast majority of tributes paid to the ʿamīr of Tagant by various dependent tribes or fractions. This large-scale process of renegotiating actually preceded Abderrahmane's coming into office as ʿamīr, and in these respects was unique in colonial history. Other emirates and ḥassān tribes were able to maintain their rights to tributes for much longer, and the French openly acknowledged this differentiation in their policy towards the leading ḥassān.[53] As representative of the Idawʿlš Abakak ḥassān, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar certified the end of obligations to pay tribute, whenever these had been bought up by the former debtors according to terms over which both parties had achieved consent. The tributes bought up in the majority of cases were of two kinds. First came the ḥurma. This obligation normally was paid individually by tributary families to their individual ḥassān overlords, but in many cases these individual rights to tribute had come to profit the ʿamīr directly. The second type of tributes to ḥassān was the ġaver, paid collectively by a tribe or a fraction to manifest the recognition of ḥassān political suzerainty. The colonial administrators showed themselves very satisfied with Abderrahmane's attitude in these delicate affairs. They considered him to have been very generous when negotiating what dependent tribes had to pay to be released from their tributes. By the end of 1914 twenty-two treaties had already been signed and registered in Tidjikja, and Abderrahmane was granted the right to negotiate in the name of smaller ḥassān tribes the conditions by which their rights to tributes were paid off. In 1915 the continuation of the campaign to free people of the Adrar from paying tributes to the ʿamīr and the ḥassān of Tagant was planned (cf. Bonte 1985a: 43f.).[54]

Certainly the abolition of numerous rights to tributes held by the Tagant ḥassān and the ʿamīr did not end all relations of political domination that had existed before colonisation. The practice of inter-tribal relations is a complex matter, and many of its aspects are likely to have remained unnoticed by the colonial administrators, especially in the early decades of their presence on Mauritanian territory. In 1933 Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar obviously felt strong enough to reopen the case of tributes formerly paid by znāga of the Brakna and Gorgol, the abolition of which had been negotiated by some of his brothers at very low prices, and to his detriment.[55] Still in 1942, the ʿamīr did not feel uneasy telling a French administrator that he was on the way to collect some of the ḥurma due to him from people of the Aftout (cf. Féral 1983: 64).

Until today some of these levies, most of which probably were not truly ḥurma, but other types of tribute, are remembered in the region of Achram-Diouk; e.g. the Lāġlāl are known to have paid the ʿamīr one hundred sheep or goats per year during the time of the French, in order to have him take care

of their affairs. The same amount was paid by the Taǧakānet until the death of Abderrahmane in 1982. The Legwāṭiṭ in turn gave the ʿamīr a share of their harvest, and a number of animals too. Some ḥassān tribes like the Awlād ʿAlī Ntūnva paid an annual tribute called gabeẓ.[56] This levy consisted of one cow, or fifteen sheep or goats (i.e. the equivalent of one cow), paid by the chief, and another goat or sheep paid by every family. Other tribes seem to have had no fixed amount of tributes to pay, but to have sent animals and millet to the ʿamīr annually. The ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed too paid tribute consisting of one third of their harvest to the ʿamīr, and slaves and ḥarāṭīn owning animals paid tribute in animals too.[57]

The continuation of tribute-paying by a number of tribes did reflect the continuation of a distinct political model, focusing on the recognition of a major bīẓān authority in the person of ʿamīr of Tagant. To act like an ʿamīr, i.e. to keep alive the complementary relations of exchange linked to this office, was a prerequisite to maintain this political structure parallel to the colonial power, and later the independent Mauritanian state. Among the tribes still paying tributes to the ʿamīr the ḥassān of the IdawʿĪš Abakak confederation were most prominent. These tributes first of all symbolised the cohesion among the constituent tribes through the recognition of a political authority, disregardful of the tribes' possible spatial separation. In economic terms, however, these tributes were only of slight interest. The mudārāt, as they were often called, in this respect were the opposite of the ḥurma and ġaver, which as tributes in return for physical protection had been the basic sources of income for the ḥassān. For this reason they had become the object of abolitionist French colonial policy in the Tagant profiting in the first place the zwāya and znāga.[58]

First the rich and powerful IdawʿAlī zwāya of Tidjikja ceased paying tribute to the IdawʿĪš directly after the arrival of the French on the Tagant.[59] Numerous znāga, who until then had been under the domination of ḥassān tribes, profited from their weakness to change their overlords, and become clients of the zwāya, e.g. the IdawʿAlī. When finally the ḥassān rights to receive tributes were bought up, it were the zwāya who paid in the place of the znāga, thus making them merely change their overlords (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 581, 668).[60] Only a few years later most of the remaining zwāya tribes, and the znāga too, freed themselves from tributes. Different znāga of the Kunta paid 1,626 pieces of guinée to buy up their ḥurma, the Tarkoz zwāya in 1919 paid 1,500 Francs simply to be released from their ġaver. The Idebussāṭ, like the Taǧakānet, had nothing to buy back, as their tributes had occasional character.[61]

Today the retrospective view provided by interview data shows that the result of this policy triggered off more profound changes in bīẓān society than its authors perhaps would have imagined. The promotion of zwāya status, especially of those groups who once had subjugated themselves to the sovereignty of the ḥassān, has borne remarkable fruits. The Tarkoz, which had not only been perceived as "the zwāya of the IdawʿĪš", but had paid them

considerable tributes, in the popular mind today deny ever having done so.[62] For many, the former times were when the Tarkoz scholars still provided free education for the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed (instead of making everybody pay), and thus demonstrated their special attachment with the ʿamīr's tribe. The major challenge the ḥassān of the Tagant had to face as a consequence of the end of tributes that was forced upon them by the colonial power, is well put by a chief of an IdawʿĪš Abakak tribe:

> After the arrival of the French things changed. There were no more [obligatory] tributes [ġaver and maġram], and therefore another solution [for the ḥassān tribes] had to be found. (Interview Hamoud Ould Amar, ḥassān, 4.11.1995)

This alternative was looked for and found by the ḥassān. As they were losing both income and labour resources due to the great number of znāga who shifted from ḥassān to zwāya overlords, they had to appropriate resources for the constitution of a productive base of their own, and again to attract a labour force. Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar seems to have been a highly sensitive and far-sighted politician, who anticipated these future problems, not only to his paramount tribe and confederation, but to his rule too. Knowing that his position as general chief and later ʿamīr initially to a very large extent depended on the sympathy the colonial power had for his person, he was completely aware that developing a solution for the ḥassān problem was only possible within the framework of colonial policy. Already on the occasion of the replacement of Houssein Ould Bakkar by Abderrahmane, the French had shown their readiness to gratify political good conduct with the reward of significant land resources. They thus may have laid the initial basis for the development of a more general pattern according to which the IdawʿĪš Abakak were later able to meet the challenge of vanishing political control of space. Territorial hegemony was now produced by the legal appropriation of a narrow web of agricultural sites. The ḥassān, who until then, and unlike the zwāya, had not been land owners, obviously easily slipped into this role that so long had been alien to them. The registration of land ownership had become a major means by which they were able to maintain their identity as masters of the (local) territory, and to defend it from intrusion by outsiders. This again is expressed by a statement of the ḥassān chief that framed the one cited above:

> In the times we had no land. That was because the IdawʿĪš received tributes. . . . The land was ours [i.e. the IdawʿĪš's], and not the zwāya's. It was us who were the masters of everything, therefore the land belonged to us. (Interview Hamoud Ould Amar, ḥassān, 4.11.1995)

A more analytical statement comes from a prominent member of the emiral family, today owner of one of the most important dams in the region of Achram-Diouk, as well as one other dam, and plots in twelve other sites:

> *SMOD:* Our collectivity [i.e. our tribe, the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed] was not the largest one . . . we contented ourselves with our animals, all sorts of animals, we even were overcharged with them to some degree. But at the same time, we were careful to register agricultural sites.
> *Author:* Register them?
> *SMOD: Register them before using them* in order to avoid that today there is no place to go. For some time, they [the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, i.e. his tribesmen] now have begun to cultivate. And there they are with several dams that are quite profitable.
> *Author:* And this registration, how was it made, and when did it begin?
> *SMOD:* One went to the préfet, or the chief of the subdivision, and told him he should register that and that site in the name of one's collectivity. By this, the collectivities began to use these sites, these reserves of land. They used them when they wanted to start with cultivation.
> *Author:* When did this begin?
> *SMOD:* I don't know. When I was born [age: 54 years] the people already were cultivating here. (Interview Sid Mohamed Ould Dey, ḥassān, 27.8.1995, emphasis added)

Indeed the territory, i.e. the most fertile and cultivable areas of the southern Tagant, and the bordering stretch of the Aftout soon after colonisation became the object of intense interest from the local tribes, and among these most prominent was the ʿamīr's tribe, the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. In 1915 the French approved their wish to move the boundary of the administrative region of Moudjéria about fifteen kilometres southwards, stating that by this measure they wanted to provide the IdawʿĪš Abakak with land they indeed were lacking for cultivation.[63] Until then the boundary had been right at the bottom of the hillside, where the Tagant plateau reaches the plains of the Aftout. This delimitation had cut off the many fertile wāds and depressions located close to the Tagant plateau from the Moudjéria district. There, a stretch of about ten to fifteen kilometres depth constitutes an intermittent zone which is characterised by fertile soils and especially dense vegetation, between the plateau and the almost bare plains of the Aftout.[64] As long as this land had been part of another administrative district, it had been difficult for the Tagant administrators in Tidjikja and Moudjéria to attribute it to the IdawʿĪš Abakak. The original territorial layout of the Moudjéria district had contradicted the aim of bringing into accordance regions of administrative registration destined to represent major areas of residence (and to a lesser degree areas of nomadisation), and administrative boundaries.[65]

According to the land register kept in Moudjéria, the first entitlements in land (apart from the case of Houssein Ould Bakkar), were made as early as 1919 (depression of Aouinet Arr).[66] In 1920 and 1921 a first comprehensive list of agricultural sites and possessions was established. In this period the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, together with the tribes of the IdawʿĪš Abakak confederation which had remained in the vicinity of the new ʿamīr, and a few closely allied zwāya tribes duly registered the great majority of important sites in the

area.[67] Abderrahmane in several cases succeeded in establishing himself as an intermediary between the administration and the less powerful tribes of the Abakak confederation that had remained in his vicinity. The ʿamīr thus again became able to control a part of these tribes' collective resources.[68] In another case, the ʿamīr was able to profit from his political weight.

The dam of Mounhal had been constructed by Tarkoz (zwāya) of the Awlād Tīki fraction. It had been registered and used by their chief, but had remained uncultivated for some years after his death. In 1934 the dam was declared public domain by the administration, and the use-rights given to a šarīv from Kiffa, who lived among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed as a host and close friend of the ʿamīr.[69] Nominally these use-rights were bound to the condition that the land had to be cultivated every year, and hence revocable. This restriction, however, seems never to have been applied. On the contrary, in 1936 the šarīv was exempted from paying the ʿašūr tax, in order to encourage him to clear the land, and some years later (undated), he was reported to have proceeded to the plantation of twenty-two date palm trees, and the construction of a stone-lined well. While the first incident clearly indicates the failure of the šarīv to meet the conditions set by the colonial authorities (there cannot be continuous cultivation without clearing), the second is a remarkable violation of customary law. The construction of a permanent well, and the planting of palm trees by a bīẓān are acts of vivification, and thus establish private ownership of land. This clearly is a most direct offence against the former owners, the Tarkoz Awlād Tīki, who, as long as only use-rights had been attributed to the šarīv, could still nourish hopes to get back the land one day. This original ownership of the site through the Tarkoz fraction is also revealed by the fact that in former times it was sūdān of this tribal affiliation who cultivated there.[70] Unfortunately no entries concerning this case have been made to the register in Moudjéria since 1950, when only the status quo of affairs, and no ongoing quarrels were recorded. Today Oum Nhal, as the location is also called, is definitely in the hands of the family of the šarīv mentioned above. A small village has evolved close to the agricultural site, cultivated mainly by sūdān who joined the šarīv.

In a few cases, this scramble for land had at least temporarily an outcome to the disadvantage of the IdawʿĪš Abakak and the new ʿamīr. The depression of Aouinet Arr was first attributed to the Ideybni, a fraction of the IdawʿĪš Abakak that left the Tagant region in 1924. For this reason, the Ideybni had transferred their rights in this location to the Awlād Talḥa in 1923. When these left the region too, in 1939, the land was left with members of the tribe who remained in situ. Obviously not willing to be associated with any of the other IdawʿĪš Abakak fractions, the Ideybni (ḥassān) families were registered together with the Tarkoz Leġwāreb (zwāya). This status was recorded, uncontested, in 1950. Today, however, things seem to have reversed to their proper order again. Aouinet Arr, now made more productive by a modern dam, is in the hands of the Legwāniṭ (ḥassān), and among these, the chief's

family holds half of the land that now belongs again to a member the Idawʿ Īš Abakak confederation.

The early and clearly marked interest the newly imposed ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, developed for the fertile lands of the northernmost Aftout, raise the question why ownership of cultivable land in these times had became a serious issue. Unlike in the years following the big drought of 1969, it was not bitter need that pushed the bīẓān to cultivate themselves, and to vivify land. Cultivation at the begin of the 20th century still was the almost exclusive occupation of sūdān. In the course of the imposition of colonial rule, and the subsequent weakening of their former dominant position, the ḥassān of the Tagant had not only lost many of their tributaries (who had sought protection from new overlords, supposed to be less exacting, such as e.g. the Kunta or the IdawʿAlī),[71] but had also lost a large part of the resources by which they could attract such followers. The heavy loss of income formerly generated by tributes affected the ḥassān's ability to establish and maintain alliances, which used to be underpinned by generous gifts.[72] Besides the symbolic value of becoming once again the "masters of the land", if not yet the "masters of everything", the appropriation of cultivable land made the ḥassān of the Idawʿ Īš Abakak attractive to sūdān seeking new patrons too. The ḥassān of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed had always integrated numerous sūdān, a considerable number of whom had been able to improve their status and become ḥarāṭīn recognised as members of the tribe. They bore arms, took part in warfare, and lived in relations of dependency that came close to those of znāga (cf. p. 168-170).[73] While today among the sūdān of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed these warrior ḥarāṭīn have slipped from public memory,[74] it is evident that there was a significant in-migration by sūdān, especially from the neighbouring Kunta. The Idawʿ Īš of the Abakak branch thus again became what the literal meaning of their name promises: "come here – you can live with them" that illuminated the way for all those who sought better conditions of life.[75]

Until today, the originally distinct modes of access to land practised by ḥassān and zwāya can be discerned from the shape of their respective territories, an outline of which for the region of Achram-Diouk is displayed on Map 3. It has to be observed that today, the perception of tribal territories among the bīẓān has come close to matching modern two-dimensional representations of space, such as e.g. on maps.[76] The abstract definition of territories by reference to boundaries is a decisive departure from the perception of space prevalent among nomadic peoples such as the bīẓān had had for most of their history. In these societies, and until today with respect to practical use and appropriation of land among the bīẓān too, spatial references are made to distinct localities bearing a relevance for human occupation and use. Such localities are wells, springs, salt deposits, locations of dry- or wet-season pastures, agricultural sites, etc. Out of these places in space, numerous paths and corridors linking the locations create what might be called "territory", but more are reminiscent of a web spun around numer-

ous white patches, than of a comprehensive two-dimensional representation of space (cf. Ingold 1986: 130-164; Schlee 1992).[77]

Nowadays these fragmented (tribal) territories have largely condensed to homogeneous entities, of which only some aspects of the proper delimitation of the periphery may be called into question. This is revealed by the local modernist discourse, which aims to replace the notion of "tribe" by that of collectivities, and which no longer takes genealogy and relations of solidarity as reference for cohesion, but joint occupation of one site:

> We now no longer accept, we no longer want to speak of the tribe, because this is traditional. We now want to speak of collectivities which fix themselves at a location, like e.g. the *collectivities of Achram*. This means those who fix themselves at Achram, who depend on the administration of Achram. You find collectivities that fix themselves just where they are everywhere. Therefore it is named collectivity . . . a collectivity because you can no longer speak of a tribe, because the tribe has settled at several wells, and close to several, distinct dams. Therefore you remain only with collectivities. (Interview Sid Mohamed Ould Dey, ḥassān, 27.8.1995, emphasis added)

What the discourse tries to mask, is that collectivities, according to the proposed definition, have to be of a tribally homogeneous composition. Thus Achram is not presented as one village, or else collectivity, but as several collectivities, thus anticipating the division into several, largely tribally homogeneous quarters (cf. p. 129-133). Further, Sid Mohamed Ould Dey, as a fine politician, omits to make explicit that the collectivities in general are located on their tribe's land,[78] and thus take part in the tribal appropriation and definition of space that is also secured by limiting access to land to members of alien tribes or fractions.

The layout of tribal territories in the northernmost Aftout, among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed and the Tarkoz, is revealing of how the history of both tribal groups shaped present patterns of land tenure. The Tarkoz, although zwāya with a strong affiliation towards the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, were the holders of ownership rights in land. As these were not abstract, territorial claims, they applied to distinct places, such as watercourses. When after colonisation, the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed managed to transform their former political hegemony into land entitlements, they were able to appropriate much of the fertile land of the northernmost Aftout, but had to respect the rights pertaining to distinct localities held by the Tarkoz. Thus today, the watercourse fuelling the big dam of Achram is Tarkoz land, while all land besides this small stretch belongs to the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed (cf. Map 3).

Another case revealing of the relationship between political power and access and ownership of land, is that of the Lʿaweysyāt. They migrated comparatively recently, i.e. within the 19th century, from the Adrar to the Tagant, and became integrated by the Idawʿīš Abakak. Within this ḥassān confederation, the Lʿaweysyāt, who like to emphasise their dedication to

warfare,[79] are considered to be ḥassān of comparatively low regard and prestige.[80] Later, in the colonial period, they failed to become the closest ally of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar,[81] and were internally weakened by heavy factionalism.[82] This, their minor status, is graphically represented in the topography of tribal land that can be discerned from Map 3.

The rather small territory of the Lʿaweysyāt, owned jointly by the two competing small fractions (cf. "Aoueissiat" in Table 3), and causing much dispute over tenure between them, is centred around the depression of Djouengi. This fertile area, which recently was developed by the construction of a dam, is located in the small strip of the northernmost Aftout that today is bounded on either sides by the tarred road, and the slopes of the Tagant. With their quite marginal emplacement at only one depression in between the Tarkoz, the Tāgāṭ, and the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, the Lʿaweysyāt are clearly at the margins of the IdawʿĪš Abakak confederation's territory. Unlike older, and much more prestigious and powerful groups like the Awlād ʿAlī Ntūnva, they do not possess land on the Tagant, considered to be the symbolic "seat", i.e. the homeland of the emirate. Even during nomadisation, the Lʿaweysyāt rarely moved onto the Tagant, but stayed – like the ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed – in the Aftout. Even on the occasion of the annual date cure, the getna, members of the Lʿaweysyāt did not move on the Tagant, but to Guérou, home area of the Taǧakānet zwāya.[83]

The secondary rank of the Lʿaweysyāt within the IdawʿĪš Abakak confederation, and the problematic nature of their access to land is revealed by another tradition, stating that the Lʿaweysyāt had to pay one hundred goats to the ʿamīr of Tagant Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed to obtain the ownership of Djouengi, and later continued to pay between one and two hundred goats per year (Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995).[84] Additionally, their ownership rights were contested by the neighbouring Tarkoz Ahel Sīdi Reyūg, and it was the French administration which had to intervene in 1942 (a year of drought), and to assist in the demarcation of boundaries between both parties at Djouengi.[85]

Growing Dates and Millet

The evolution of a bīẓān interest in agriculture and the appropriation of cultivable land in the wake of colonisation resulted not only from changed configurations of power within bīẓān society, and most notably between ḥassān and zwāya, but was fuelled by a determined policy of agricultural development set up by the French. On the Tagant this policy was introduced and forcefully implemented by Capitaine Anselme Dubost, who became "commandant de cercle" in 1919. The aim was to intensify the use of natural resources, especially where pastoral production was considered to exploit these only partially. The most fertile areas, like depressions and wāds, thus had to be transformed into farmland, and the labour resources necessary were to be pulled out of the pastoral sector. Unlike most other colonial policies in areas predominantly populated by nomadic pastoralists, the

Mauritanian administration did not want to limit or draw back pastoral production. It was acknowledged that these "desert" lands in general had little other productive potential. Sedentarisation of the nomadic population never became an explicit objective of colonial policy either. What the administration wanted, was to increase the self-reliance of the Mauritanian population with regard to agricultural production, and thus to reduce the Mauritanian demand for grain on the markets of the south. More local production could also compensate the nomadic pastoralists for the loss of tributes from cultivators in the šemāma, and thus reduce the potential for conflict. Finally, the colonial administration hoped that increasing their own agricultural production would strengthen the pastoralists' bonds to their soils, and make them more stable. If sedentarisation was acknowledged to be a goal much too ambitious to become an objective of colonial policy, the administration never failed to hope that its action could lead the nomads to stick more closely to their supposed home, i.e. their region of registration (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 766ff., 781f.; Dubost 1924).[86]

The ambitiousness of this colonial policy for agricultural development was in contrast to the limited means available for this purpose. There were only a few colonial posts, and the number of French administrators was low. Frequently one European commanded a whole district. Money was also scarce. The colony was designed to meet the expenses of administration by its own means, but throughout its history, this goal was rarely achieved. Administrators willing to stimulate agricultural development therefore had little to rely on. They could try to convince their subjects – or make use of coercion. While forced labour was commonly used for specific purposes (e.g. construction of administrative posts, tracks, etc.), there were also risks in exerting too much direct pressure. This was likely to create troubles, and troubles with the bīẓān not only continued to escalate into armed (and thus costly) confrontation far into the 1930s, but also could become a nuisance to an administrator's career (cf. De Chassey 1984: 54-60).

Seen in the light of these unfavourable circumstances, the slow, but continued expansion of agriculture under colonial rule appears to a large extent to have developed on the basis of a tacit consent between coloniser and colonised. Most marked was this evolution in the domain of pheniculture. Following colonisation, the number of date palm trees more or less exploded, as numbers from the Moudjéria district in Table 7 demonstrate. Not only did traditional areas of bīẓān pheniculture, like the Adrar and a few oases on the Tagant, witness a boom, but the cultivation of date palms was extended to areas that until then had not been the locus of oases (e.g. the Assaba region; cf. Table 8). For the colonial authorities, the expansion of the oasis sector was also another means to get control of local production as well as of nomadic pastoralists visiting these places. From the perspective of the bīẓān the initial labour-input needed for the planting was low in view of an anticipated self-sustaining nature of the later palm tree, and the hope to benefit one day from the dates. Furthermore the planting of palm trees was an act of

Table 7: Evolution of Date Palm Plantations, Moudjéria District, 1905-1984

Year	Number	Species
1905[a]	300	palm trees
1923	969	palm trees (fully taxed)
1931	9,226	trees and plants in 22 date palm groves
1936	22,452	trees and plants in 43 date palm groves
1984[b]	31,598	palm trees

a: ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "les palmiers du Tagant occidental", 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.
b: FAO (1985: 23).

Table 8: Evolution of Date Palm Plantations, Assaba Region, 1920-1984

Year	Number	Species
1920[a]	150	palm trees
1948	70,000	palm trees
1951[b]	120,000	palm trees
1984[c]	443,036	palm trees

a: Féral (1983: 120f).
b: Villasante-de Beauvais (1992: 47).
c: FAO (1985: 24).

vivification that was easily carried out by individuals, and established rights of ownership on the usually fertile land, even if its exploitation later was only occasional. These characteristics meant that the planting of date palm trees, even when resulting in still well remembered coercion by the administration, which again hit the sedentary population hardest (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 766), did not raise universal resistance among the bīẓān. Rather these developed a stronger interest in the extension of their date palm plantations, which became more profitable due to fewer tributes and raids by enemy tribes.[87]

More complex to evaluate is the question whether millet production expanded during the first decades of colonial rule, a question still controversial among scholars.[88] This is largely owing to the great variability of agricultural production in a sahelo-saharan climate, marked by high inter-annual and local variability of precipitation (about 50 percent interannual variation of rainfall in Tidjikja during the "wet" period from 1931-68; cf. Toupet 1977: 72). The strongest effects of insufficient or badly distributed rainfall are experienced in rainfed farming. Fields under these conditions may not even be sown for years, thus bearing no sign of use, while others nearby may be exploited, thanks to good local rainfall, and others again are ravaged by locusts, plant diseases, or late drought. In these circumstances there is

hardly a linear correspondence between effort invested in cultivation, and benefit derived from it. An increase in cultivated land, and of harvest in one year, thus may already be reversed in the next year.

Better suited to assess raising or diminishing interest in cultivation is the evolution of recession agriculture. This technique is practised either in natural depressions, or in watercourses of low gradient, flooded with the aid of large dams (*barrages*). In both cases, the effects on production caused by inter-annual variation of rainfall are minimised by the large catchment areas. Additionally, once the earth has been submerged sufficiently long (between four and five weeks seems to be the optimum), no further rainfall is needed for successful cultivation. The humidity stored in the soil allows for the full development of the plant. Although deficient rainfall affects the extension of cultivable land behind dams too, it rarely leads to a complete loss of the harvest.[89] While before colonisation, cultivation was largely restricted to natural depressions of significant size, like e.g. the Tamourt en-Naaj, the construction of dams became a major means of increasing the cultivable land from the start of this century on. This latter aspect is responsible for the French as well as the bīẓān interest in promoting this technique. Much like the expansion of date palm groves, the construction and the use of dams were comparatively easy to evaluate, and thus are the most reliable source providing insight into the evolution of bīẓān interest in agriculture in the first decades of the colonial era.[90]

It is remembered among the Legwāṭiṭ, and some neighbouring tribes too, that the construction of the dam Zemmal, which developed a major watercourse for cultivation in the northern Aftout close to the village of Leklewa, dates back to the arrival of the French, i.e. the period between 1905-10.[91] A little later, many other dams were constructed in the area. The dam of Achram, until today one of the most important of the whole region, was constructed around 1915 (Interview Mohammed Yahya, zwāya, 21.9.1995),[92] and the dam Teidouma in 1920 (land register Moudjéria). In quantitative terms, the expansion of agriculture was less impressive, and more limited by physical constraints than that of date palms, but nevertheless was a remarkable exploit. In 1936 a number of 154 agricultural sites, covering a total potential of 3,000 ha (unfortunately confounding all types of plots) were registered alone in the subdivision of Moudjéria. Among these were five dams of more than 200 ha, three of more than 100 ha, six of more than 30 ha, and finally 34 of a size of 2-30 ha. The length of the dams varied between 1,200 metres in the case of Tachott, and about 100 metres.[93] Later the construction of new dams continued. In 1945 a report states that Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar had built three new dams, his brother Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Bakkar had built two smaller ones, and the Legwāniṭ had built a dam of 400 metres in length together with twelve smaller dams. Furthermore quite a lot of older dams were reported as being cultivated.[94]

Even more significant than the early and rapid expansion of dam-driven recession agriculture, is its development parallel to the imposition of colonial

rule. Constructing a dam, like planting date palms or building wells, is an act of sustainable vivification, establishing rights of ownership of the submerged land. In view of the apparently limited range and magnitude of the colonial material incentives for an expansion of agriculture and pheniculture on the Tagant during the first half of this century, these measures are hardly adequate to fully explain the occurrence of major, and in the long run sustainable changes in these two sectors. Although exemptions from agricultural taxes, bonuses and fines are likely to have "convinced" many bīẓān of the necessity to follow the administrator's advice to increase the area under cultivation and to plant palm trees,[95] there needed to be other factors pushing in the same direction to allow for successes of this policy on the Tagant.[96] Far from blindly following the intentions of French administration (and therefore often being accused of disinterest), the bīẓān, by increasing agricultural production, responded to a changed political and economic environment which resulted from imperialist colonial rule, and deeply affected and changed the modes of bīẓān pastoral and agricultural production, as well as patterns of land tenure.[97]

Besides providing a means to obtain, and reproduce political domination, the appropriation of land by vivification had opened to many tribes the avenue to a further diversification of their production.[98] Extending agriculture and thus developing an extra revenue was possible for those bīẓān who either had access to land ownership, or managed to achieve this by the virtue of their dominant political role (e.g. the Idawʿalī, the Kunta, and the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed). Others, however, did not follow this trend, and maintained themselves as highly specialised nomadic pastoralists (e.g. the Tarkoz Ahel Sīdi Reyūg), while again others migrated towards areas where they could escape political and social domination, and establish themselves independently as agro-pastoralists (e.g. the Ahel Swayd and the Awlād Talḥa).

The different interests and options bīẓān tribes had with regard to the appropriation of land reveal that despite an overall increase of agricultural and phenicultural production there was no unidirectional development towards an increase in these sectors involving all bīẓān. Neither was the process of land appropriation and sustained cultivation as closely linked as might be presumed. The confluence of two diverging interests in agricultural land, a political and an economic one, serves to explain bīẓān disinterest in a sustained agricultural use of land, and in investing too much of their own means in its further exploitation. Rather than represent a general disinterest towards agricultural production, these phenomena are significant of a predominance of political and strategic interest in ownership rights in land, which, once they were achieved, needed little further action to be maintained. In addition, the reluctance some bīẓān showed, according to colonial records, when confronted with the demand of building dams, is less revealing of a general disinterest in these innovations, than of the development of tactics aimed at the perception of additional funding and assistance. Besides this, it was the colonial administrators themselves who had to glorify their own

action when reporting on their work, and thus underlined the salutary effects their action produced vis-à-vis a desperately backward indigenous population.[99]

Old Dams, New Dams

More difficult to assess than the expansion of agricultural activities is the real amount of agricultural production that these were able to provide. However high the French interest in the expansion of agricultural production was, the colonisers hardly had the means to evaluate it. Until today production potential and real gross production in the rural hinterland can only be roughly estimated. In 1938, the resident at Moudjéria estimated the district's production of millet to make up 700 tons. This obviously good year was followed by a poor harvest estimated at 340 tons. In the following years, the various residents most often abstained from direct estimations, and were content to describe the conditions as being good or bad, and to detail these descriptions by information on the availability and the prices of millet on the local markets. This preference for rough estimates was continued when in 1953 a local resident reported that the production of millet in the district of Moudjéria could meet the local demand – provided that climatic conditions were favourable. Ever since, the self-sufficiency of local millet production has continued to resurge until the present, where it has become part of the local rural development strategies. Whether or not the agricultural potential of the district of Moudjéria, or the region of Achram-Diouk, exactly meets the needs of the local population, is of minor interest. More important is, that the agricultural potential was until the present estimated to keep up with the local needs, even when these rose due to a rapidly growing local population and in-migration since 1969.[100]

The economic significance of agricultural production on the Tagant can also be discerned from another perspective. As outlined before, over the centuries grain was an important commodity, which bīẓān traders bartered in the south for desert salt and other commodities (cf. p. 165f., 188f.). One major route of this grain trade, linking the Adrar with the Senegal valley, passed through the Tagant. Many Adrar small traders, however, preferred to already buy their millet on the Tagant, and thus to economise on the journey, rather than the price. Tagant agriculturalists in turn were able to barter their millet for products from the north or, as was later the case, sell it for cash. This strategy, which persisted until the begin of the drought cycle in 1969, was not without risk (Interview Bâke Mint El Mokhtar, ḥarṭāniyya, 2.11.1995). In January 1941 people from the Adrar were reported to have bought up almost the whole grain production of the Tagant, bartering it for guinée cloth and sugar, because no millet was available on the markets of the south. When during the rainy season the rainfall was highly unsatisfactory, prices for grain on the Tagant rose quickly. At the same time the administration maintained restrictions on the grain trade forbidding all cultivators in the south to sell their millet to pastoralists from the north. In 1942 rainfall

proved to be even worse than the year before. The situation deteriorated badly and the local harvest failed almost completely. These severe difficulties of the Tagant population were further aggravated by the still persisting administrative regulations, and a general economic crisis hitting the French West African colonies. Almost all commodities crucial to the local trade were out of supply (cloth, sugar, millet). Animals, seriously affected by the drought too, were sold in great numbers to buy grain. The population of Tidjikja alone grew from about 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants, and many sūdān migrated to the south, thus further minimising the local potential for cultivation (Ould Khalifa 1991: 895f.).[101] This both manifest and fragile potential offered by a local agricultural production serving either auto-consumption and barter trade, is but one other reason why bīẓān were interested in growing millet locally, and why their interest persisted even during the heyday of bīẓān pastoral production in the wet decades before the big drought in 1969.

Following the end of the Second World War, in the course of which the French West African colonies (A.O.F.) had sided with the regime at Vichy,[102] a new policy vis-à-vis the French colonies was developed. Besides a territorial reorganisation, which added the two regions of the Hodh (until then administered by the French Sudan) to the Mauritanian colony, the bestowal of more autonomy on the colonies was placed on the agenda.[103] In 1946, Mauritania lost the status of a colony, and became a "territoire d'Outre Mer" (T.O.M.) of the 4th French republic, and thus obtained the right to send its own deputy to the national assembly. These first elections held on Mauritanian ground ended in a fiasco for the French administration. Instead of their candidate, the administrator Yvon Razac, it was a bīẓān of the Idawᶜ Alī who won the elections. Horma Ould Babana had prepared his exploit well by developing strong political ties to the influential Senegalese politicians Lamine Guèye and the deputy Léopold Sedar Senghor. The latter in turn supported the candidacy of Horma Ould Babana among the black African ethnic groups within Mauritania, and enabled him thus to gather support both among black Africans in the south, and among the bīẓān (cf. Marchesin 1992: 86ff.; Féral 1983: 89ff.;[104] Ould Khalifa 1991: 899, 939ff.).

As a consequence of their failure to promote their own candidate, the French decided to prepare better for later elections. For this reason the clientele structures that indirect rule via the tribal chiefs had helped to create were reinforced. The drastically increased funding of the Mauritanian territory, which for the first time enabled the colony to develop its economy and enhance the living conditions of its population, gave the administrators a powerful means to favour those chiefs, i.e. tribes, who sided with the administration (cf. De Chassey 1984: 168ff.; Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, personal communication).

Part of the plans for the economic development of the Mauritanian territory were considerable funds assigned for the construction of wells, and the reconstruction, or improvement of traditional, i.e. hand-built earthen

dams. These in general were to be improved with a concrete outflow, while the dams received some fortification. or profited from the work of caterpillars.[105] On the Tagant, one of the greatest beneficiaries of these measures was the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, known to have been opposed to Horma Ould Babana.[106] He was assigned the improvement of the major dams at Daber and Kehmeit. Further beneficiaries were the Kunta ʿĀskīra at Bourraga, and the Kunta Awlād Busayv at Tachot. The Tarkoz Leġwāreb profited from the reconstruction of their dam at Achram.[107]

The Drought, a Development Project, and New Patterns of Land Tenure

The most decisive transformation of land-use in the region of the northern Aftout, but of vast areas of the Tagant too, took place in the years subsequent to the big drought of 1969, that soon transpired to have only been the starting point of a period of increased aridity lasting until the present, and striking the whole Sahel. Deprived of the vast majority, if not all of their animals, both bīẓān and sūdān settled close to already established agricultural sites, and started to develop new ones. The vicinity of the track linking the capital Nouakchott with the east of the country made of the northernmost Aftout a prime location for sedentarisation. Here access to the food aid delivered by the government in Nouakchott was good, whereas the situation on the Tagant, which was difficult for the large trucks to access was difficult.

The vicinity of motorised transport facilities also eased migration and later communication between the rural dwellers and urban migrants. The transformation of the already existing earthen west-east dust-track into the tarred "road of hope", reaching the region of Achram-Diouk in 1977, further increased the number of rural-rural migrants settling in its vicinity. As a consequence of this growing population, the pressure on land increased. Tribally homogeneous groups constructed new dams and repaired old ones, thus appropriating land collectively. Additionally, many individual small dams (*diguettes*) were built, allowing for an improved rainfed cultivation, and strongly accentuating the movement towards an appropriation of cultivable land encompassing the whole region. Already by the mid 1980s all land suited to cultivation in the area of Achram-Diouk was considered to be in collective or individual ownership, thus leaving no more land for initial vivification to those migrants who continued to settle in the region (cf. Binneweg 1988).

Subsequent to the start of the drought cycle, the living conditions deteriorated in the region of Achram-Diouk – as in many other areas of Mauritania and the Sahel. Most prominent in this respect was the desperate state of the local water supply which caused numerous diseases and was quite inadequate. The concentration of both population and problems in this part of the northern Aftout, which until then had been notorious for its lack of permanent wells, led to the activity of several donors and NGOs, and the installation of an integrated rural development project in 1982.[108] In order to increase and render more sustainable local agricultural production, and thus enhance

the local populations' living conditions, large investments were made to increase the number of dams and to improve their technical design (cf. Seiler 1992; Justen 1991).

Today dams of modern design are considered to allow for cultivation already with only 120–150 mm of rainfall during the rainy season. 29 dams, allowing for the flooding and subsequent cultivation of close to 3,000 ha were constructed or reconstructed between 1987 and 1995 with modern techniques in the region of Achram-Diouk. Additionally a far greater number of smaller dams were strengthened with the support of a caterpillar. This machine, together with qualified staff, could be hired by the local population in order to overcome the labour shortage occurring shortly before the rainy season, when dams damaged by floods or water run-off had to be rebuilt, or new dams were constructed. Support was also given for a time to the construction of small individual dams (*diguettes*), by the subsidisation of construction material. Besides this material support, know-how about cultivation, and in particular plant diseases and remedies, was also disseminated.

The increased pressure on land fuelled the further rigidification of tribal territorial boundaries (cf. p. 219f.), and led to a number of conflicts in the region of Achram-Diouk. Among tribes, these occurred in areas where the marginal state of land had led to only vague definitions of territorial boundaries. Besides these conflicts located at the periphery, the increasing number of dams created another source of conflict involving the heartland of agricultural exploitation. Large watercourses had been exploited, at least since colonial times, not by a single, but by several consecutive dams. These often were in the ownership of different tribes, for tribal territories used to cross-cut the watercourses rectangularly. In order to achieve the maximum potential of the dams lying at the lower end of the watercourse (i.e. to fill them up completely, and allow for the optimum period of flooding), those at the upper end have to be distant enough to allow the lower end dams to have a proper catchment zone. Additionally, upper end dams have to be emptied early enough not to affect the interests of lower end cultivators. Tensions arise whenever new dams are built in such a setting on an "upriver" territory, because they may withhold water from the lower ones. This distribution of natural resources makes inter-tribal cooperation a crucial prerequisite for an effective exploitation of the given resources. Further, it adds another facet to land tenure. The construction of dams not only legitimises the appropriation of the land flooded by this undertaking, but establishes rights to the watercourses feeding it, even if these lie beyond the tribal territory.

Inter-tribal conflict over land and surface water resources has gained prominence in some cases (cf. Ould Al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 171ff.), but contrary to what might be anticipated, it is not the most frequent configuration of such discord. Among fourteen cases of conflict over land that were delegated to the local authorities between 1977 and 1991, all of which involved the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd of the Assaba region, only five cases fell into the category of "inter-tribal" conflicts. The remaining majority of cases

involved members of the same tribe. Either different factions were unable to solve their divergent interpretation of land ownership (five cases), or the conflict arose among bīẓān and sūdān (three cases). Segmentation processes (three cases), familial disputes (one case) and intervention by notables (one case) too led to conflict over land (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 1093).

This rather detailed classification of the nature of conflicts, major aspects of which are still subject to controversy among scholars,[109] is valuable insofar as it is able to shed light on the multitude of levels on which conflict over access to land can develop within the tribe. This is due to the heterogeneous composition of these highly flexible social entities. Sūdān oppose bīẓān, influential bīẓān families conquer for power, as do political factions, to name only a few configurations. Tribal cohesion may thus be articulated on a scale ranging from only one small group, up to large entities encompassing a number of almost autonomous fractions.[110] While the tribes' territorial boundaries in most cases have become quite well-defined during this century, the collective control of the resources thus assembled, and the mode of their exploitation are less consistent. Still-ongoing processes of internal factionalism, splitting up formerly homogeneous authorities and tribal groups,[111] find a major field for articulation in land tenure. The control of the most fertile land is an issue the local elites need to manage and exploit for the sake of their political hegemony.

Inner-tribal configurations of conflict become evident in cases where resources that are owned collectively by various factions have to be subjected to new modes of exploitation. Enhancing agricultural productivity, e.g. by the construction of dams, frequently necessitates a redistribution of land among the contributors to the building. Difficulties arise whenever only a part of the tribe is concerned with the undertaking, or when different factions of the same tribe have to negotiate their respective share of land. These constellations are revelations of the actual balance of power within the tribe. While most frequently bīẓān oppose bīẓān and the authority of a chief becomes contested, recently new patterns of conflict evolved in which sūdān actively take part. This was the case with the dam of Dharagouadir, built by about thirty sūdān and bīẓān subsequent to the droughts of the early 1970s near Leklewa. The chief of the Legwāṭiṭ at the time claimed a sort of primary control over all lands exploited on the tribe's territory, and translated this into a right to get a share in every new dam constructed, without even contributing to the work.[112] The conflict escalated at various stages, and was settled only by a decision from the regional court in Kaédi. The bīẓān and sūdān families got the right to appropriate the land, but had to transfer the new dam farther upriver, and hence more distant to the tribe's most important, rather old dam at Zemmal.[113] This outcome of inner-tribal conflict meant different things to either bīẓān and sūdān. The bīẓān, who had been landless so far, had provoked and experienced the break up of many of their relations with the tribe's elite, who was a source of patronage and security for dependents of all kinds, in order to gain some rights in land instead. The sūdān on

the other hand exchanged precarious use-rights at the tribe's major dam Zemmal, burdened with high contributions to the bīẓān land owners, for real entitlements in land. Besides this most obvious dividing line, the case is spectacular, because it provoked an alliance between parts of deprived bīẓān (they had been by the majority pastoralists, and therefore prior to the drought had no, or very few individual rights to agricultural land) and a group of sūdān largely independent of their former masters.[114] The bīẓān, among whom only four families owned a plot at Zemmal, at the time were split over the issue whether to coalesce with the sūdān or to accept the demands of their chief for the sake of tribal integrity. The conflict was resolved by some bīẓān remaining with the chief's fraction, and another group moving off with the sūdān.

In numerous cases, however, bīẓān factionalism continues to rule patterns of conflict and land tenure. At El Gharga sūdān from two fractions of the Tmoddek had begun to cultivate land in a depression subsequent to the drought, and had hindered sūdān from other tribes from establishing themselves in the area. The sūdān had thus marked not only their own appropriation of the site, but had also made their tribe's and their respective fraction's claims manifest.[115] In order to receive aid from the local development project for the construction of a new dam on this site, the two factions of the Tmoddek present on the spot had to develop a consensus on how to share both the costs and the land behind the dam. This was such a controversial issue among the bīẓān factions (who alone were in the position to arbitrate on the land, for it is they who hold the proofs of legitimate ownership),[116] that compromises that had already been made were called into question several times. The development project, following a policy to intervene only on sites free of conflicting claims in order to avoid taking the role of an arbiter, therefore twice stopped all construction activities. This pressure on both bīẓān parties finally led to the conclusion of a sustainable arrangement, according to which the dam (and its costs) was divided into two equal halves, each of which was shared among the members of the respective factions (Interview Amadou Bâ, project leader SO.NA.DE.R Achram, 30.1.1996; Walid Ould Mbarek, ḥarṭāni, 7.2.1996).

Why consent is difficult to achieve between two, or sometimes even more factions, is illuminated by the opposition of two distinct principles of equality underlying this kind of negotiation of access to land. Either all members of one tribe have equal rights to land regardless of their factional affiliation, or access to land is mediated by the factions, whose leaders want to assert their political role, and thus are unlikely to accept any unfavourable agreement. In the case of El Gharga, the factions, i.e. their elites, were successful in this strategy, and negotiated access to land for their affiliates. The "equality" thus achieved between the two parties, however, caused difference on another level: the 55 members of the first faction contributing to the dam share the same surface as the 93 members of the second one.

Getting Land, Losing Land: Sūdān Land Ownership

Disputes over land such as outlined in the preceding section, could hardly develop without sūdān contribution. Sūdān not only continue to be more intensely involved in agriculture (although many bīẓān now depend strongly on agriculture too), but are directly affected by the recent increase of bīẓān interest in cultivable land. In former times, few bīẓān cultivated themselves. They were the owners of the land, but the majority of the work was done either by their slaves or by ḥarāṭīn. When the pastoral sector was struck by the drought crisis, and agriculture became a low capital activity to fall back on for many bīẓān, pressure on the sūdān grew. Old claims were reactivated, and ḥarāṭīn had to pay increasing shares of their harvest for the right to cultivate bīẓān land (cf. Bonte 1987b: 211; and above p. 203f.).

Confronted with these worsening conditions, many sūdān sought to appropriate their own land by vivification, and thus to escape from the obligation to share their harvests with bīẓān landowners.[117] However, the land still free for appropriation by this time was by and large marginal land. Most fertile land, such as depressions and watercourses, has been under tight bīẓān control for generations. In 1988, a study for the development project for the region of Achram-Diouk calculated that a bīẓān family in the area of Leklewa and Syassa had access to a mean of 1.8 ha of land behind large dams (*barrages*), and 1.0 ha behind small dams (*diguettes*), while a ḥarāṭīn family had access to only 1.2 ha behind large dams, and 3.5 ha behind small dams (cf. Binneweg 1988: 36).[118]

Sūdān difficulties in becoming owners of most fertile land are revealed by the case of the second large dam intersecting the wād Achram. It was constructed in 1977 after local notables had proposed to reinforce the substructure of the "road of hope" and to turn it into a dam equipped with an adjustable outflow. Conflict arose over the issue of how to distribute this land, which none of the zwāya of the Tarkoz Leġwāreb owning the wād had to pay for. While the sūdān wanted to become participants with equal standing to the bīẓān and to get parcels like them, the bīẓān concluded that this land was exclusively to benefit themselves. The sūdān should not be taken into account during the allotment of parcels. Consequently the whole dam came under the ownership of the bīẓān. Whenever they wanted to cultivate on plots behind the new dam, the sūdān had to submit to the well-known sharecropping conditions, obliging them to pay half or one third of their harvest to the bīẓān landowner.[119]

For many sūdān of the Tarkoz Leġwāreb, this major disappointment of their aspirations to be treated as equal members of the tribe marked a turning point in their relations with the bīẓān. Many today report that they boycotted cultivation of the new dam totally, or at least no longer accepted the classical, disadvantageous sharecropping arrangements. Although the land behind the dam remained a most important resource, and is (together with the other dams controlled by the bīẓān) almost the only resort in years of bad rainfall, the strategy of the sūdān, who in the meantime had raised many

individual and a few collective dams in order to become less dependent on the bīẓān land, had some effect. Many parcels belonging to bīẓān who did not want to soften the terms for sharecropping by sūdān remained uncultivated. Landowners who preferred to make a small profit rather than none, therefore began to offer better conditions to the sūdān, leaving them most often with two thirds, and in a few cases with up to 90 percent of the harvest.[120] All of these achievements, however, attenuated but did not profoundly alter existing relations of dependency.

Quite a different principle of access to land was practised at those sites where new dams were constructed with assistance by the local development project. Here all members of a collectivity (the current euphemism for members of a tribe residing in one location), sūdān and bīẓān alike, were considered to be able to become landowners on equal terms. The single condition was that everybody had to participate, i.e. to pay for his share. Large plots thus could be obtained by paying a correspondingly higher share.[121] In order to facilitate payment calculated in cash, this could also be replaced by an equivalent amount of work. The preference of sūdān for work, and of bīẓān for cash, gives another glimpse of the difference between both groups, and also reveals the impact of the development project's policy on the establishment of new patterns of land tenure. Coinciding closely with the impetus of Mauritanian land reform, the project's action effectively underscored the abolitionist impetus inherent to the new legislation. While already before the intervention of the project cooperation between sūdān and bīẓān on an equal footing had begun on some occasions, the intervention of the development project set new standards on how equal rights were to be applied. Besides being a clever policy, this was made possible through the project's outstanding economic resources, which made it renowned in the capital Nouakchott 450 km away as the true master of the region, outclassing the region's state officials and tribal elites (Meskerem Brhane, personal communication). Drawing on these resources, both the interests of the poorest and of the local elite could be met. This balance, although favouring not only the most needy, but to some extent also the old and new notability, however was – as the case of the second dam at Achram had shown – crucial to achieve a sustainable use of the local resources and hence to promote local development.

Getting Social Hierarchy Back In

Besides equality, the need for consent as a prerequisite for development aid also allowed for modes of tenure reintroducing the notion of inequality among different groups of land owners, above all among sūdān and bīẓān. Most prominent in this respect is the dam at Leklewa, built jointly by bīẓān and sūdān of the nearby village of the same name and prominent in that it became something of a model promoting this kind of assistance for development (cf. Wüst 1989; Justen 1991). Obviously unnoticed by the development experts, the bīẓān and sūdān (the vast majority of whom had not been

involved in relations of dependency towards each other), developed a model of how to transform their conflictual relationship into a consensus on land tenure.

Initial quarrelling at Leklewa was about the question whether the sūdān should become owners of the dam like the bīẓān, or if sharecropping arrangements should be pursued, as was the rule on most other dams owned by bīẓān. After the bīẓān had split into two factions over this question it was decided by a part of the bīẓān and a part of the sūdān to divide the dam into two equal halves, one for the bīẓān, and one for the sūdān. As there were fewer contributors for the bīẓān half than for the sūdān half, the bīẓān plots were designed with a width of 25 metres, whereas the sūdān ones attained only 15 metres (all plots have nominally the same length).[122] Although the reason for this arrangement clearly is to be seen in the dissimilar number of bīẓān and sūdān cultivators, a rather different justification was given by one of the sūdān concerned. According to him the sūdān community accepted the arrangement, because the larger bīẓān plots were conceived as "family plots", while the sūdān ones were seen as "individual plots". While among the sūdān, several brothers (even unmarried ones) could, and did, engage independently in the construction of the dam and the appropriation of plots, among the bīẓān this was only supposed to be done by household chiefs. While sūdān were conceived as having to sustain themselves above all, the bīẓān were regarded as responsible for families – and in some regards responsible for dependents.[123] Here again, as in the case of bīẓān factionalism at El Gharga, it was important for both groups to establish themselves as distinct communities with equal rights, even though the sūdān had to accept much smaller parcels of land than the neighbouring bīẓān as a result (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarāṭīn, 27.7.1995).

Elements of traditional hierarchy will be likely to resurge even more strongly after the withdrawal of the development project, which became definite in 1996. Besides the maintenance of the new facilities,[124] the raising of new funds for local development will continue to be on the agenda.[125] Local elites, both old and new ones, will gain in importance whenever they prove to be successful in this domain. This is highlighted by those cases where individual bīẓān have succeeded in developing their sites.[126] A zwāya notable owning a large part of a recently enhanced dam employs a number of sūdān for cultivation and harvest. These, however, do not originate from the owner's tribe, but have migrated into the Aftout, to leave their former masters and relations of dependency behind. Now they have established new relations of clientage free of the burden of a slave past, but also void of the material benefits and the security these relations sometimes continued to provide. Despite this tendency towards the evolution of a rural proletariat, ready to move to wherever there is work (cf. Bonte 1987b: 212), the still most widespread arrangement between bīẓān landowners, both ḥassān and zwāya, and sūdān cultivators in the region of Achram-Diouk continues to be sharecropping – but its conditions become increasingly diverse. Landowners

may receive one half, one third, and sometimes much less of the harvest for granting the use-rights of their land. Sūdān cultivators on the other hand may be found working behind one and the same dam on their own as well as on bīẓān plots.

Honourable Sūdān: the Ḥassān Mode of Land Tenure

Quite a different kind of arrangement is made among sūdān and bīẓān in the ḥassān milieu of the emiral tribe of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed and among other ḥassān tribes of the Idawʿ Īš Abakak confederation. Among these the great individual landowners grant plots without fixing any compensation, and indeed evince deep disdain for the sharecropping arrangements common among the neighbouring zwāya by answering to the question whether they rent land for a share of the harvest as do the neighbouring Tarkoz Leġwāreb zwāya: "We don't do that [like the Tarkoz Leġwāreb], we only give." (cf. the narrative of Youba, p. 72)

Suspicious of what appeared to be too much generosity to be true, I had to await a quite distinct situation to unravel the nature of these ḥassān-sūdān relations. In the meantime the matter proved not easily accessible via interviews, for both parties, ḥassān and sūdān alike, continued to deny giving or demanding any kind of compensation for the right to cultivate. A new light was shed on the case at the end of 1995, when my driver, Nanna Ould El Vaida, asked permission to be freed from work for one day. There was some urgent work awaiting him on his millet field, which I knew he had been granted by one of the great Ahel Swayd Aḥmed landowners. Admittedly I was annoyed by demands from my employees to be freed from work, for these seemed "to make children",[127] rather than that the spare time granted resolved the problems it had been designed for. To make the conversation at least a little bit more productive I decided to turn it into a conversation on the different aspects of millet cultivation. Wanting to increase my knowledge on this topic, I started reasoning about when and where which kind of work had already been done on this field, and why the current business could not be delayed until Sunday. The dilemma of my ḥarṭāni driver soon surfaced. Originally, the work now in question had been scheduled by him for the week before, but then the sūdān cultivating on the plots granted by the ḥassān notable had all decided to work on the site of the latter instead of their own plots. Profiting like all other sūdān from the land of the notable, Nanna Ould El Vaida had to submit to this decision, and postponed work on his own field.

The decision of the sūdān to work the fields of the notable was remarkable for another reason too. The notable was on a journey at this time, and therefore was unable to manage his fields personally. The sūdān therefore – as a matter of honour – released him from this responsibility. Leaving the region without explicitly demanding that sūdān care for his fields, the notable had made proof of his trust towards the reliability of the sūdān and their ability to decide on the right thing to do. The sūdān had got the unspoken

message very well,[128] and done what they were expected to do (it goes without saying that there is an unspoken threat of sanctions too, and notables also ask for distinct services).[129] Rather than further fixing the sūdān's subordinate status, this kind of arrangement enabled them to behave not like dependents, but like free men. It shows how both sides agreed to respect each other, and thus further increase each other's prestige. Finally, the case illustrates quite well how the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed could attract many sūdān by providing not only a homestead and land to work on, but a chance to be treated like a full member of the tribe.[130] Even when ḥassān directly demand assistance from those ḥarāṭīn benefiting from their land, as is also the case, this honourable relation is not destroyed, for asking for help does not mean fixing a direct remuneration, but only underscoring the relations of mutual assistance.[131]

This "ḥassān mode of land tenure" is practised not only by some leading members of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, but to a lesser extent by other ḥassān too.[132] The limits to the extension of this practice result from the strong centralisation of land among only a few people. Dispersed, small-scale individual owners, who indeed lend plots to assist fellows in need, are rarely able to do so on a larger scale involving more than one or two plots without confirming what the revenue might be. Large landowners, granting plots to many individual cultivators, face little risk to their revenue in both symbolic and economic terms, even if some beneficiaries fail to fulfil the exigencies they are submitted to.

The Politics of Ḥarāṭīn Generosity

The centralised control of much land by a few bīẓān, which is closely intertwined with traditional tribal hierarchy, means that use-rights on these sites continue to be revocable even after decades of continued cultivation by distinct groups of sūdān. Several dams on the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed territory are reported to have been constructed by the ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed,[133] or jointly by these and the ʿamīr, and other leading members of the emiral family. Most of these former ḥarāṭīn plots were given up by their supposed possessors, and donated to the ʿamīr when the emiral camp of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, the ḥella, settled near Achram. The aim of this allegedly deliberate action of the ḥarāṭīn was to provide the ʿamīr with land for cultivation which he could distribute (on the same revocable conditions) among the needy population of the former ḥella, now settled in the village of the same name. This miraculous and most unselfish ḥarāṭīn withdrawal took place at several dams they had cultivated for years, but most of which were (and still are) registered at the préfecture in Moudjéria under the name of the former ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, the official representative of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed.[134]

One dam affected by this redistribution of use-rights is Brik. It was constructed as early as 1948 both by a group of ḥassān and of ḥarāṭīn who now say to have lent their land to the ʿamīr in order to help the poor (bīẓān)

people of Hella. Elimba too is an old dam, which originally was entirely exploited by the ḥarāṭīn. All families but eight who used to cultivate there left and donated their land to the ʿamīr.[135] Bla Tamaʿa was left completely by the ḥarāṭīn, and now is occupied by an influential ḥarāṭīn with close ties to the emiral family, the Ahel Sneibe, and six other sūdān families. In other cases, the ḥarāṭīn were able to continue cultivation on plots side by side with those of members of the emiral family, but had to endure the tutelage of the notables. The dam of Legned was reconstructed and enlarged in 1969. The ʿamīr and his seven ḥassān co-owners decided to make their parcels, which were already much larger than those of the fifteen ḥarāṭīn families, even larger on this occasion. Today the ḥassān plots are of 200 metres width, measuring a length of 1,500 metres, while those of the ḥarāṭīn are of only 50 metres width and the same length. According to one ḥarāṭīn informant these dissimilar sizes of the plots resulted from a corresponding, uneven contribution of ḥarāṭīn, and ḥassān notables to the construction of the dam. This view, however, was contested by another ḥarāṭīn informant, who stressed the role of the pressure the ḥarāṭīn were subjected to at the time to make them accept this redistribution. Similar cases of uneven plot sizes, all involving the same ḥassān families found in Legned, occur at the dam of Zmeimil and Amriche El Beidha.

Quite controversial too are the views concerning the important dam at Toueidima. This dam was rebuilt in 1983, directly after the death of the old ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, and the year of the settling of the ḥella, the emiral camp. Seeing the numerous participants, and considering the plots fixed by a preliminary distribution too small to be worth cultivating, the ḥarāṭīn left their share of land for the people of Hella. According to another account, the rebuilding of the dam was effected already in 1977 by using a caterpillar borrowed from the company constructing the tarred "road of hope". The later redistribution of parcels resulted from the old ʿamīr's sons' decision to let Toueidima with only three of them, while the ownership rights on other dams were distributed among the remaining brothers. Ever since there has been a fixed delimitation of the parcels at Toueidima, because the experience of several years is said to have demonstrated that there was no need to calculate plots sizes in relation to the surface flooded.

The fragile character many sūdān claims to land still have, is also revealed by a case of conflicting claims to land among sūdān affiliated to the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed that happened in 1995. The long wād of Achram, which is an affluent to the Gorgol Blanc, is exploited by a series of dams among which are the two dams owned by the Tarkoz Leġwāreb at Achram, and a series of dams owned by two important members of the emiral family. In between these large dams on land of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed are located two smaller ones built and owned by sūdān the Oued Moud, and the Oued Haratin. The history of the ownership of these sites is quite a troubled one, and marked by the succession of different owners: the Oued Moud was constructed by ten

sūdān families who later gave up the site, which in 1986 became reoccupied and reconstructed by the ḥarṭāni Moud and six other families.

More complex is the case of the Oued Haratin. The first construction of a dam on this site was initiated by four sūdān families but finally a total of eleven families contributed to the building of the dam, which later was enhanced by a small concrete outflow funded by the development project.[136] Since then the number of sūdān cultivators has grown to about twenty, because revocable grants, which do not have to be paid for, were made by the initial collectivity of users.[137] Troubles started when a member of the Ahel Sneibe, a ḥarāṭīn family with strong ties to the ʿamīr of Tagant, raised claims on this and surrounding sites prior to the start of the cultivation season 1995. The claimant had found out that once his family owned small dams in the area, and was able to provide three witnesses for his cause, his claim for the ownership of the land was well founded on legal grounds. Alarmed by the threat that their dam might be declared illicit, and hence might have been destroyed, the sūdān asked the (unofficial) ʿamīr Ethman Ould Abderrahmane for assistance. His mediation achieved a compromise: the Ahel Sneibe were given a share of the land, and the dam remained in place (Interview ḥarṭāni, 23.1.1996). Below the surface, the legal issues were far more complicated The land reclaimed had been cultivated for quite a long time by two sūdān families without raising opposition from members of the Ahel Sneibe who had remained in the area. Despite these ambiguities the quarrelsome and scheming brother continued to raise ever more far-reaching claims, almost leading to a violent clash when members of the Ahel Sneibe intended to build a new dam flooding a large area including the dam of Oued Haratin.

According the local qāḍi the strict application of the šarīʿa legitimised all the claims of the Ahel Sneibe, but nevertheless the qāḍi considered this option to do justice neither to the diverging interests leading to the conflict in question, nor to any other conflict over land in the area. He therefore saw his role, like that of other notables, in resolving problems, an aim that was not to achieve by definitive arbitration to either side's advantage, but by introducing an agreement (Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi, 24.12.1995).

This statement of the local jurist is revealing about the relationship between the application of the šarīʿa, and of legal tradition (ʿurf). While elements of the former enter the latter, there is hardly any dogmatic application. The major goal is to develop consent and a kind of legal legitimacy allowing both parties to save their faces. Both parties win in some respects, and on the other hand are able to present what they conceded as a generous offer to their counterpart. This arrangement is thus very reminiscent of the agreements made between conflicting bīẓān parties. However, there is a major difference. While both sūdān parties appealed to bīẓān notables in order to get assistance in their struggle, the latter played a much less decisive role in the case of the two bīẓān parties' struggling over the partition of the dam at El Gharga. Additionally, there the two bīẓān factions were equal to each other and were much less inclined to respect the authority of some notables then the sūdān.

In the case of the Oued Haratine, right from the beginning a moral and juridical authority was involved. The quick settlement, again, was largely due to the intervention of several bīẓān authorities. Further, it seems likely that – although this cannot be proved – the case would not have arisen, if the claims had been made by sūdān other than the Ahel Sneibe. This old ḥarāṭīn family not only has old and close ties of affinity to the emiral family, but had even been attributed ownership rights in land fixed in the colonial register at Moudjéria. Against such a plaintiff, the sūdān cultivating the Oued Haratin had only a limited means to defend their position. Rejecting the arrangement proposed by the notables would have meant for the sūdān to offend among others the (unofficial) ʿamīr of Tagant, a man who still owns quite a considerable amount of land, and like a number of other notables, was recently able to extend his property. Despite his power being challenged by the action of the regional development project and at the beginning of the 1990s by the democratisation process,[138] the ʿamīr of Tagant continues to be a major instance managing access to land among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, as will be shown in the following.

The Power and the Glory[139]

For several years, the region of Achram-Diouk has been the homestead of a small group of Idebussāṭ. In 1987 two of the wealthiest members of this group diversified their economic activities from camel pastoralism, livestock trading and marketing of fresh camel's milk[140] to running a large shop in Achram. Funded with an initial capital of 1.2 million UM, this shop soon became one of the most important in the village. As the revenues from the shop rose ever more, and as many of the pastoralist activities were delegated to hired herders, the wish to settle in a village of their own grew among the Idebussāṭ. An appeal to the (unofficial) ʿamīr of Tagant was made, and was successful. The ʿamīr granted the Idebussāṭ a piece of land on which they were allowed to drill a well and build their own village.[141] For the Idebussāṭ it went without saying that they would meet this emiral generosity with some return service, funded by contributions from all beneficiaries. Their future ḥarāṭīn neighbours too, were destined to profit, but unlike the ʿamīr, their benefit was considered to arise from job opportunities supposed to develop as a consequence of the Idebussāṭ presence (Interview Mohamed Sid'Ahmed, zwāya, 13.9.1995).[142]

The site determined for the installation of the new village was unsuited for cultivation,[143] and thus until then had not been the object of direct appropriation, nor was it likely to ever have become so. Nevertheless the decision to let the Idebussāṭ build a village raised opposition. The site concerned was in direct proximity to the village of Legned amidst the fields of its almost exclusively ḥarāṭīn inhabitants. One immediate concern was the probable devastation, the continuous coming and going of the numerous Idebussāṭ camels, which would be watered at the new well, would create in the ḥarāṭīn millet fields.[144] Another concern was that the settlement of the Idebussāṭ

constituted an intrusion upon the integrity of what might be anticipated as the territory of the ḥarāṭīn of Legned.[145] This is not a justiciable category, neither with regard to traditional, nor to modern land tenure, but rather expresses a sentiment of territorial hegemony and privacy that extends from the village to its vicinity. The dense web of agricultural sites around Legned (which the ḥarāṭīn either own or exploit on the basis of granted use-rights) also marks off this area of joint appropriation that integrates the unused gaps and patches between the spots of direct appropriation. The very existence of this ḥarāṭīn sphere of territorial authority is reflected by the Idebussāṭ attitude, acknowledging the grant of land to result from a generous attitude of the ḥarāṭīn, considered worth being compensated.

Besides this dimension of expropriation, the settling of the Idebussāṭ near Legned is a serious issue because it breaks up the tribal homogeneity which the settlements on land belonging to the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed had until then. Violating this integrity of tribal land was only possible at its periphery, both in territorial and social terms. Only vis-à-vis the ḥarāṭīn was the ʿamīr able to carry this project through without raising direct opposition, or risking further strengthening of bīẓān political factionalism detrimental to his own power base. Nevertheless, in the words of an influential ḥarṭāni from Legned, who is a close ally of the ʿamīr too, everything was fine with the Idebussāṭ settlement, for the ʿamīr made an appeal to the ḥarāṭīn, and these were glad to help their friend solve his problem:

> This site is for a zwāya family, the Ahel Limam from the Idebussāṭ.[146] This is a family that has good relations with the ʿamīr, and they asked him to get land [for the construction of a village]. Consequently the ʿamīr asked the ḥarāṭīn to find a site in their vicinity. We directly declared ourselves ready to do so, and attributed them this site. (Interview ḥarṭāni, 5.2.1996)

The account diplomatically tries to frame the event, and thus to downplay its significance. Harmony determines the fraternal relations of the ḥarāṭīn with the ʿamīr, who are portrayed as able to help their powerful friend from their own resources. Nevertheless ambiguities are expressed as well. The ḥarāṭīn were not asked for advice, but to approve a preconceived solution. The only room for manoeuvre left to the ḥarāṭīn, and allowing them in some respects to keep their face, was to determine the site for the construction. The at best formal character the consultation of ḥarāṭīn by the ʿamīr had, is illuminated by the composition of the delegation from Legned. According to the Legned ḥarāṭīn leader cited above, it was about ten men who visited the ʿamīr and then agreed to his proposition. Asked to enumerate these men the interviewee, who, it should be pointed out, was speaking in the presence of several bīẓān on that occasion, expressed a great uneasiness. In fact only a few ḥarāṭīn renowned for their loyalty to the ʿamīr were convoked by the latter, and then had to inform their compatriots of the decision taken.

> Well, I took part [i.e. in this delegation; pause]. It is difficult to count these people. There was myself, and then [person a, who according to his own words is a follower of the ʿamīr], all the others I just can't recall. This is a problem. I wasn't prepared for this [delegation], [laughing] there was also . . . [person b], as well as . . . [person c], . . . [the brother of person c], and . . . [person d]. Well, I only found a few men to tell that this family [the Idebussāṭ] will live beside us. (Interview ḥarṭāni, 5.2.1996)

Even less room for ambiguities and speculations about a ḥarāṭīn autonomy is left by the account of Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, a leading zwāya at Achram, and thus an external observer of the affair (Interview 5.9.1995). According to him, the Idebussāṭ failed to get the consent of the ḥarāṭīn at Legned for their plans to drill a well and settle in their vicinity. It then probably was the ʿamīr who called the ḥarāṭīn back to order, and arranged consent on the matter, for the land concerned was of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, and the issue thus subject to his authority.[147] While the Idebussāṭ so far had failed to get cultivable land from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, they had already profited from some grants from the neighbouring Tarkoz Leġwāreb.

Poor Sūdān

The ongoing involvement of bīẓān in questions of sūdān access to land, and the persisting dependency the sūdān experience in this regard vis-à-vis the bīẓān, is revealed by another case, that of the Lʿaweysyāt sūdān at Téjal. The occupation and cultivation at this site, however, has a long history, and needs to be detailed for a proper understanding of the present issues. Conflict over land was endemic between the Tarkoz and the Tāgāṭ, and one area thus disputed at least since the 1930s, largely corresponds to the area of Téjal.[148] When the conflict grew in intensity and both parties started attacking each other, the French administration intervened. Because any act of arbitration on the validity of either side's claims would have been followed by the most bitter hostility on the part of the disfavoured party towards the administration, the French simply withdrew from this task – as they did in many major conflicts over land, and as the Mauritanian administration still continues to do.[149] Instead of attributing the land to one party, or drawing a boundary, both tribes were prohibited from cultivating the land, or from undertaking any other act liable to symbolise appropriation. This procedure of suspending all arbitration made it possible to handle the conflict, for no definitive decision on legal ownership was made (thus leaving both parties with some hope for the future), while the ocasion on which conflict developed was suppressed. The whole affair, however, took a new turn, when – probably without the formal consent of the colonial administration – the ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, interfered. Taking advantage of the dismissal of the Tāgāṭ and the Tarkoz, he sent out some of "his ḥarāṭīn" to Téjal (in total about fifty families), to build up a buffer zone with a potential for threat between the conflicting parties, and of course, to cultivate there.[150]

The occupation of the area by sūdān of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed was limited to the cultivation period. The water supply from the distant wells and springs was a great problem, and often the amount of water carried to Téjal by a daily trek of donkeys lasting almost half of the day, did not meet the needs. The thirst thus experienced is still vividly remembered today. In 1969, the year of the great drought, the sūdān of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed therefore left Téjal, and moved back to the northernmost Aftout, an area with much better access to water, and better conditions for cultivation, which became the new centre of their tribe's agricultural activities. Ever since then the area around what is today the small village of Téjal has been occupied and cultivated by a growing number of sūdān of the Lʿaweysyāt, who thus succeeded to the sūdān of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. The legitimacy of Lʿaweysyāt land ownership in Téjal – with the exception of a few sūdān who have been cultivating in the area for a long time[151] – is therefore essentially based on the vivification of land either uncultivated, or left only recently by former users. To underscore their claim the sūdān now stay at Téjal all year round, and no longer leave the place during the hot dry season, as former generations of sūdān did. Nevertheless, these most recent references to ownership of land leave room for contestation, once the focus is turned to the issue of whether the land had been appropriated unjustly, i.e. overriding pre-existing rights. Conflict is continuous, as much of the area is still subject to claims by the neighbouring Tāgāṭ. Sūdān from two conflicting fractions of this tribe continue to cultivate in the area, and only the Tarkoz retreated from the conflict (Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995; Mahmoude Mint Benjik, ḥarṭāniyya, 8.8.1995, Nanna Ould El Vaida, ḥarṭāni, 27.12.1995).

While disputing land ownership with the Tāgāṭ, the sūdān of the Lʿaweysyāt are subject to yet another threat. Settling at Téjal was a means for sūdān to escape the obligations arising in the context of co-residence and heavy dependency on land resources controlled by the bīẓān masters and patrons at Djouengi. These try hard to discourage the sūdān and focus on the lack of legitimacy of a Lʿaweysyāt presence at Téjal:

> *SOL:* There are two tribes thinking this land is theirs. . . . These are the Tāgāṭ, the one is the fraction of the Ideyneb, and the others of the Idewāš. . . . We here are of the Lʿaweysyāt.
> *Author:* Is it the bīẓān or the sūdān who want to get the land here?
> *SOL:* The decision, that comes always from the bīẓān, but they send only the sūdān. . . . The bīẓān of the Lʿaweysyāt told us not to go here, but to remain at Djouengi. But the sūdān didn't accept going back there, and remained here. The bīẓān then said that the Lʿaweysyāt didn't own land here, this was only said by the bīẓān, but the sūdān said that they owned these fields, and therefore they stayed. In Djouengi now remain only bīẓān [Author's note: This is largely exaggerated, since about as many sūdān of the Lʿaweysyāt still live and cultivate in Djouengi, as do in Téjal]. We now want to watch this land here. This is because of the two Tāgāṭ fractions. Each time there is the préfet who comes here, he comes and tells

> each fraction to take its fields, and to stay there. . . . These decisions were made by several people. There was the chef d'arondissement from Djonâba who came here, and the Hakem of Magta'lahjar, and several other men from Aleg too. These made the boundaries here between the three fractions. . . . Now the boundaries are strictly defined. The problems began in 1982, and persisted until this year. Meanwhile that side [boundary] over there has been well defined. But we don't believe in it. There are always people who start talking, and you never know. Three years ago, the Hakem from Djonâba made a written contract concerning the boundaries. But problems continue on that side, with the Ideyneb. They first had agreed to the arrangement, but later they regretted [this decision]. (Interview Salem Ould Laghdaf, ḥarṭāni, 24.10.1995)

State authorities recognise both sides' claims as being of equal value, i.e. equally recent, and only manifested by definitive signs of land-use such as the building of small earthen dams or large dams. Their attempts to define boundaries try to respect both sides' interests by granting both sides land, and thus separating both communities. The authority of these decisions, however, is low. Compromises once found are called into question again soon after, not only in word, but by constructing, or else destroying new dams.

With regard to their opponents from the Tāgāṭ, the Lʿaweysyāt sūdān locate the causes for these ongoing troubles with the bīẓān. The Tāgāṭ sūdān, who effectively operate the aggressions, are considered to be only their willing executors. Indeed there is nothing like a solidarity among these sūdān living in the same place, but only concurrence articulated in terms of defence and expansion of tribal territories.[152] On this issue, only the bīẓān, holding as they do the monopoly of written accounts of the past (cf. Ould al-Barra/ Ould Cheikh 1996: 168; Brhane 1997a: 111), are able to develop those arguments capable of increasing the weight of today's claims. As the Lʿaweysyāt sūdān in this respect can expect little support from their bīẓān patrons, unwilling but also unable to support the sūdān (cf. p. 220f.), they have to rely on their own forces: first of all they rely on the application of the state laws, legitimising their acts of vivification. Additionally they produce an ideology adding historical depth to their presence at Téjal, and try to contract new alliances with bīẓān notables, who although alien to their tribe, might be able to support their ambitions.[153]

Processes of segregation between bīẓān and sūdān of one tribe also occur within the boundaries of the shared tribal territory. In Labde, and earlier in Wassaʿa, sūdān of the Tarkoz settled in independent villages close to their fields. Of these cases the one of Labde, constituted by sūdān from Achram, is most recent and is revealing of a number of particular problems such attempts at reducing sūdān dependence on bīẓān and increasing internal group cohesion have to face.

In the early 1990s a number of sūdān took the initiative of increasing their distance from the bīẓān in Achram by building houses in Labde. As with the

other settlements in the plain of the Aftout, the main problem of establishing a permanent settlement here was to ensure permanent and reliable access to water – a task that, because the groundwater is located at 40 metres depth in stony ground, could only be carried out with assistance from the local development project. Initial difficulties in obtaining this service are attributed by the sūdān to influences of Tarkoz Leġwāreb bīẓān eager to prevent them from getting a well of their own.[154] However, this was by far not the only difficulty to be overcome. All sūdān wishing to benefit later from the well, or to build houses in Labde, were supposed to contribute either financially or by work to the construction of the well – but by no means all did so.[155] Neither did many sūdān move from Achram, where they already had houses and access to many facilities, to Labde. Conflict arose between those sūdān who had moved to Labde and paid for the well and sūdān who had not, when the latter started to install themselves in Labde, and consequently also made permanent use of the well. The quarrel was finally settled by granting everybody access to the water. This decision, however, reflects more the need to attract further settlers and hence the sūdān activists' vulnerability to pressure than it underscores group-solidarity among sūdān. With regard to the next project, the establishment of a school in Labde, the result therefore is likely to be the same despite the sūdān leaders' announcement that this time the benefit of the new investment will be restricted to those who participated in the construction of the schooling facilities.[156]

Does the Past Persist?

Land tenure in the region of Achram-Diouk, on which the focus of the present analysis has been, is not representative of land tenure in Mauritania. Land tenure, though submitted to the same legal traditions in all of the country, takes different shapes in different settings. Partly this differentiation reflects different modes of land-use in different systems of production, such as the predominance of flood recession agriculture and rainfed farming in the Senegal valley, date palm cultivation and gardening in the oases versus the predominance of various forms of pastoralism and agro-pastoralism in the rest of Mauritania. However, as could be established from documents on the early colonial period, i.e. the first decades of this century, the actual patterns of land tenure responded not only to ecological conditions but to political and social change too. Although there was no pressing economic need for land in the first decades of this century (unlike the one that developed as a consequence of the breakdown of the pastoral economy in the early 1970s), the bīẓān elites renegotiated their rights over land in this period. Two major parties were involved in this scramble for land: the formerly politically dominant ḥassān, and the economically dominant zwāya. They struggled for the transfer of their opposing concepts of control over land into one single system of land tenure. The status quo of both inner bīẓān and inter-tribal hierarchies thus achieved became cemented by its transfer into the nucleus of

a new legal framework, provided by the colonial authorities, and based on collective and private ownership.

This reconfiguration of land tenure encompassed all of the bīẓān-dominated territory, and allowed that the prevailing distribution of power and powerlessness was largely maintained (cf. Bonte 1987b; Villasante-de Beauvais 1991, Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996). The only thing that seems to have differed is the time at which this process became effective in the various regions. The order of implementation, from the south-west to the north and the east, however, is strongly reminiscent of the course of colonial expansion.

None of these changes in land tenure was a fundamental challenge to the legal framework prevalent in precolonial times, which was largely based on local legal tradition (ʿurf), with occasional references to the šarīʿa. Rather it brought about a rigidification and a growing uniformity of the formerly highly diverse land tenure patterns (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985b). Nevertheless, most authors so far have attributed little practical significance to the introduction of new legal patterns of land tenure under colonial rule and in independent Mauritania (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1991) or have regarded it as being limited to the few locations of modern intensive agriculture (cf. Leservoisier 1994a).

The present analysis both confirms and questions these statements. The structures of the past seem strong whenever the focus is placed on the tribal fragmentation of land. It is indeed the "tribe" that continues to pervade the territorial organisation of Mauritania. Land in most parts of Mauritania is not the object of market transactions following the liberal paradigm of free trade, the application of which would mean moving beyond the tribal framework.[157] However, it is this very observation that needs critical attention. Witnessing also the dramatic social turmoil of the few last decades, the question has to be raised whether the tribe can properly be equated with the perpetuation of the past, or with regard to the focus of this analysis, with traditional patterns of land tenure.

Both the historical and contemporary lines of analysis presented here argue for a perception of the tribe as a dynamic social entity, able not only to adapt to new economic and political circumstances, but to exploit these and model them to suit its own interests. Both ḥassān and zwāya tribes developed a new, and this time uniform, model of "tribal territory", putting aside former concepts of a political hegemony over territory, and of an appropriation limited to sites and locations. This new mode of tribal territoriality first began to take shape as a consequence of colonial rule. Later these first rudiments proved to have been the basis for a real boost, triggered off by the economic and social crisis resulting from the drought cycle.[158] Tribal units in this context condensed into territorial units. Tribes, fractions and factions developed their own sites and areas, their boundaries became ever more clearly circumscribed in what was a true scramble for land.

Local political elites not only disseminate apologetics, whenever they refuse to speak of tribes, and instead prefer speaking of "collectivities"; the many

villages in the rural world today already have created new tribo-territorial units, and thus have added a new, localised element to the tribal framework. Factionalism, which once could easily articulate itself in the shape of spatial segregation, and on the occasion of sedentarisation by the emergence of numerous homogeneous villages and quarters, now operates within much more limited areas, and on a limited number of scarce resources. Sheer need raises pressure for cooperation on a communal level. Here the tribe comes back in. The individual collectivities are far too small to persist in an environment depending more or less continuously on external resources. Both practical solidarity and political organisation are needed to improve individual and collective welfare. On this field, which needs as much the purveyance of goods and services as it permits to control these resources, both old and new tribal elites are able to regain the scene. They fill the gap left by the nation-state's disengagement from the local arena, a process which is largely due to conditions formulated by the successive structural adjustment programmes (SAP) and reinforced by the process of globalisation (cf. Ould Mey 1996).

This persistence, or else resurgence of "tradition" paradoxically even benefits those who continue to experience social discrimination, notably the sūdān. The tribal grip on land allows for the concentration of land only among members of the tribe. Unlike strangers, the elites profiting from this constellation are bound to a tribal morality. They are obliged to maintain their prestige, they have to help the needy, and they are not able to increase their own benefit without contributing at least a little to the welfare of their tribe and collectivity. Maintaining the tribal control of land thus for a great many means securing relations of exchange for both the sūdān and the bīẓān, and barring the road to an infiltration by market relations void of this social impetus.

These beneficial effects profit only those whose tribes control a satisfactory amount of land. However, this is by far not true for all tribes. Wherever the tribal framework, for whatever reasons, is unable to provide and secure desperately needed resources, it becomes weakened and loses authority vis-à-vis other elites or institutions of the state (e.g. the case of the Lʿaweysyāt; cf. p. 220f., 242f.). It is the future of such underprivileged groups, deliberately placing themselves at the margins of their past affiliation, that will be decisive of a move towards a stronger segregation of the rural world, or the maintenance of strong territorial and political units. Either powerful tribes will be able to integrate new groups and territories, as well as to maintain the status quo, or distinct groups will become able to live a life of their own by appropriating land at the margins, and thus adding new facets to the social and territorial topography.

Both options, however, are constrained by the limited resources of land still available. Powerful tribes, like e.g. the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, are no longer able to assign some of the best cultivable land to strangers they want to support (cf. the case of the dam at Mounhal, p. 218), but at best can offer small pieces

of land worthless in productive terms (cf. the case of the Idebussāṭ, p. 239-241). On the other hand, sūdān struggles for land lead them in some cases to rely more on their own power than wait for assistance from bīẓān overlords (cf. the case of the Lʿaweysyāt sūdān; p. 241-243). Sūdān struggling for increased autonomy may also form the nuclei of a further fragmentation of tribal land, as the case of a number of sūdān of the Tarkoz Leġwāreb, who built their own village on the periphery of their tribe's territory at Labde shows (cf. p. 243f.). While these trends open up different outcomes for the nature of territorial organisation, they have a common outcome too: focusing on the few still existing interstitial zones left over by the web of tribal territories, they are part of the elimination of these remainders of past, more flexible land tenure arrangements.

Land Tenure, Gender and Relations of Domination

The discrimination against the subordinate strata resulting from bīẓān land tenure has been clearly shown by numerous authors (cf. Bonte 1987b; Leservoisier 1994a,b; Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996; Villasante-de Beauvais 1992), and is confirmed by this study as well. Some local conflicts arising from the deprivation of sūdān of access to land have gained significance on a national level (e.g. the famous case of the dam at Magta'lahjar; cf. Bonte 1987b: 211ff.; Brhane 1997a: 255ff.; Mercer 1982: 55-62). These experiences in the domain of land tenure were only some of the many discriminations against sūdān, the latter had to suffer from. One result of these was that a national, political organisation fighting for the rights of the ḥarāṭīn, the movement El Hor, began a campaign of public action in 1978.

Today, many sūdān continue to cultivate land that was once vivified by their ancestors, but they do not own this land. Instead, as a consequence of the slave estate of the sūdān forefathers these sites have become the property of bīẓān, who thus continue to profit from the labour their forefathers exacted from their slaves. Bitterness about this status quo, which continues to remind the present generation of their past, is expressed by many sūdān, and becomes diverted into a very special reconstruction of the past: the sūdān, now considering themselves free and able to appropriate land by vivification, like to subsume the past to the present, and obstinately declare themselves to be the only owners of this land with any moral integrity.

> Zemmal, that was for the Legwāṭiṭ, the sūdān, and . . . [pause] We made that together, and when the work was over, the masters [ʿarabi] sent the sūdān away. Now it [the dam] is for the bīẓān, but it was all [people] that had made it together. This was at the time of my father, but it all remained with the bīẓān. They said it was their dam. . . . In 1983 it was finished at Zemmal. In this year we started work here, to get a dam for the sūdān,

> where the sūdān have full access to the land. Before we always had to ask the bīẓān to get land rented at Zemmal. And this while it was our fathers who had built that dam! In these times the sūdān only worked for their masters. (Interview Ahmed Ould Aimar, ḥarṭāni, 29.3.1995)

Meanwhile these lands nevertheless continue to be cultivated by sūdān under conditions reminiscent of sharecropping. These arrangements, already referred to several times in the preceding chapters, reflect many of the changes that have occurred in the relations of domination. Slaves in former times had no right to a fixed share of their harvest. Nevertheless the practice of dividing the harvest into two equal halves, symbolising a master's and a slave's share, seems to have been common even in these cases, but for different reasons. Masters, as freemen, had the obligation to pay the zakāt to the poor and needy. Obviously devious bīẓān who wanted to save themselves from paying the full amount of zakāt divided the harvest of their slaves, and found that they had to pay only for their share, thus considerably minimising the zakāt.[159] Once this obligation was settled, all of the harvest was put together again, and there was no more discussion of a slave's share, apart from giving him a daily ration of food (Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995).

All arrangements by which slaves entered fixed arrangements with their masters, defining what kind of services either side had to supply, meant a considerable amelioration of the slave's condition (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 118). This the French colonisers anticipated. They made the expansion of more formalised sharecropping arrangements one of their most powerful weapons in their fight against slavery. This strategy had the decisive advantage that it was both able to demonstrate the administration's abolitionist efforts, and to maintain exchanges between the different social strata, and thus to change little on the ground (cf. Leservoisier 1994a: 89ff.). However, as could be shown by the preceding analysis, not all relations between bīẓān and sūdān developing on the basis of granting access to land stick to the pattern of sharecropping. Some ḥassān big men, who individually own a lot of land, refuse to rent out land for a fixed share of the harvest, and instead prefer more flexible arrangements. These unspoken rules provide them with a wide range of "voluntary" services from the sūdān beneficiaries, and thus secure the bīẓān overlords a large number of clients.

Despite these persisting structures benefiting the continuation of discriminatory practices of the bīẓān vis-à-vis the sūdān, the present analysis takes an optimistic attitude. The rural world in Mauritania is changing rapidly. This change has brought about a major shift in the perception of space, and has led to a redefinition of tribal territories. Within this process the actions of sūdān have gained weight. Filling up the interstices of cultivable land left unoccupied by the bīẓān, the sūdān take part in shaping the tribal territories and contribute to its representation. In several cases where new dams were constructed, they participated in the construction and became legal owners of land. To the extent that land has become the last, and almost sole local

resource after the decline of pastoralism, its symbolic value for the representation of the tribe and as a means of identification has risen. Here again, the sūdān enter a new role. While some bīẓān converted to cultivation, and now are able to make a large share of their living out of it, many others have failed to do so. Pressing debts, as well as other reasons today drive them to sell their most valuable land: the plots behind large dams. Buyers are wealthy bīẓān living in the big cities, and rural sūdān. These latter invest cash earned in the course of wage labour migration in land for cultivation.[160] This new redistribution of parts of the tribes' heartland allows sūdān to move from the periphery to the centre. Together with the new, money-made bīẓān patrons, they protect the tribal land from intrusion by outsiders. Maintaining the occupation of the rural hinterland, which becomes more and more emptied of bīẓān,[161] the sūdān reveal themselves to be among the most dedicated protectors of tribal inheritance, i.e. the most fervent protagonists of tradition (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarāṭīn, 27.7.1995; Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma, ḥassān, 31.10.1995; cf. note 122, this chapter).[162]

Land tenure in bīẓān society so far has been presented in gender-neutral terms, raising doubts whether either men and women, or only men are being considered. Women, although in many cases cultivating like, and among the men, and quite often even replacing them in the fields, do not show up as actors in those discourses focusing on access to land and conflict over land. The same applies to the academic discourse on land tenure in bīẓān society. While the women's contribution to agricultural production – a most visible and obvious fact – is at least documented, little is known about land tenure and women in this context.[163] Although in theory women can legally own land, and in quite a number of cases do so, it is by the majority the men who exercise the effective control of land, by managing access to it.[164] This is most obvious when men migrate and their families' fields are watched not by their wives, but their brothers (Interview Ahmed Ould Breik ḥarṭāni, 11.4.1995; cf. note 62, chapter 6).

Already in precolonial bīẓān society, women were often excluded from receiving their share of inheritance by practices of pre-inheritance or the constitution of land and animals as ḥubs (i.e. as an indivisible entity, the use-rights of which remained with the family but could not be alienated; cf. De Chassey 1977: 79; Féral 1983: 185). Nevertheless women owned animals, and continue to do so until now (cf. Tauzin 1984a: 88; see also the narrative of Valha, p. 69-72).[165] In certain conditions, however, women preferred ownership of less bulky goods such as jewellery. A dowry of this kind was easily taken along and unlikely to be reclaimed by the husband in the case of divorce (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 41).

Women are also actively engaged in their own businesses, and their significant number, as well as the economic success they have and the respect they gain (cf. Simard 1996), prove that there is no restriction to female property and female economic activity in bīẓān society. This is confirmed by the success new economic activities of women have in the rural area. There

numbers of shops, as well as the production of various items, are run by, and to the direct profit of, the women involved. The limited importance of women in the traditional scheme of land tenure therefore results from the very specifics that make land in this context a commodity very distinct from others, and different too from the plots in the new irrigation schemes. These have become the object of speculation by members of the urban business class and local elites, and were often registered in the name of women, who were merely a front (cf. Blanchard de la Brosse 1986: 201).

A wide range of arrangements is practised in order to lend and share land among owners and non-owners, among friends, or within the family. These many means of access to land not only allow for the maintenance of relations of dependency, but also meet the need to continually adapt access to land to changing requirements. Families grow or shrink, strangers come and go, and thus a surplus of land arises in one place, while the need for land increases in another one. Too much individualisation of property rights, further downscaling the amounts of land controlled by single parties, would be detrimental to this flexibility. On the other hand, the joint and flexible management of land, as is the case for family patrimonies, often discriminates against women.

Providing a family with basic food, which today has come to mean grain, is one of the men's most important obligations. In order to be able to do so, the men also have to have access to the necessary land. Women, while maintaining their option on a part of their own families' land, when marrying do not longer need to make use of it. They may claim it under certain conditions,[166] but in general giving their husband land would mean to relieve him unnecessarily of one of his most urgent obligations, and this to the disadvantage of the women's own families, who are in need of land as well. Maintaining the women's land under the control of their own families is also crucial, as these are the place women go to and seek support in case of divorce. Within the families the distinction between women's and men's property is preserved. It is the mothers who are entrusted with the management of the women's property in land (Mahmoude Mint Ali, ḥarāṭīn, 26.7.1995), and in the case of inheritance have to defend it from becoming usurped by the women's brothers. This threat of dispossession is extended to the women's new families. Women's claims upon the estate of husbands who die early quite regularly face strong opposition from the men's family, unwilling to give up a part of its patrimony.[167]

Increasing pressure on land is likely to further weaken women's access to land whenever these are unable to take part in the competition for ownership rights. This tendency is reinforced by recent changes in land tenure practices. Among the sūdān the ownership rights in land, which the majority could only establish recently, are highly individualised.[168] As in most cases the dams are built by the men, their women, although contributing to the work in one way or another as well, frequently fail to obtain direct rights pertaining to this land. By strengthening the principle of individual appropriation and ownership with regard to new or enhanced dams, the dam-building activities

of the regional development project at Achram have contributed to solidifying this patriarchal tendency inherent to bīẓān land tenure. Although women in some cases took part in decision-making concerning dams, the issue, though professed to apply to households quite "naturally" became above all a men's affair. Project activities designed to promote the women's situation did not change this state of affairs. Such activities had the objective of developing new opportunities of generating income for women and of providing basic education,[169] but were not aimed at interfering directly with gender relations or their manifestation in such domains as land tenure. The delegation of major elements of decision making and administration of the land behind new dams to the local communities thus had ambiguous results. While it was possible to achieve local participation, and in the case of collectively owned dams sūdān were no longer discriminated against as regards access to land, the men were favoured with regard to the appropriation of the newly developed land.[170] This present increase in male control of land, however, is likely to change in the course of subsequent generations. Once the land becomes part of family patrimonies, a space for the redefinition of the gendered imbalance in individual land ownership will open up. This will be the locale where sūdān women, who proved to be sensitive towards the issue, will be able to articulate their interests.

Chapter 8
The Difference in Identity

The Politics of Ḥarāṭīn Identity

Relations of dependency, as they are experienced by the great majority of sūdān, are far from uniform. It is a major characteristic of master-slave relations that they produce a great diversity of conditions which the dependents experience despite being bound to a uniform estate. Men and women still bound to the slave estate, manumitted slaves, slaves who gained autonomy by leaving their masters, and ḥarāṭīn who claim never to have been bound to the slave estate, today live in a great variety of conditions. Many continue to experience social and economic discrimination, while a few have been able to make a career, and have become part of the bīẓān establishment.[1]

Major aspects of this diversity in relations of dependency have been analysed so far. Biographical narratives illuminated how highly diverse, and often ambiguous personal experiences have shaped particular perceptions of bīẓān society, and of discrimination against sūdān. Gender in this context was revealed to be a major category providing an analytical tool to unravel different configurations of hierarchy and dependency. Further fields which manifest the varying levels of dependency and social differentiation, including not only the sūdān, but numbers of dependent bīẓān too, are the division of labour and land tenure. In the following, the focus will shift from the analysis of distinct configurations of dependency to practices of group formation and identification within these contexts. In a number of case studies it will be explored how sūdān describe themselves, and how they are perceived by bīẓān. As the fundamental question for the sūdān is to overcome their stigma as social outsiders, or at least as descendants of these, their discourses and practices are marked by a fundamental ambivalence. Either they stress difference between sūdān and bīẓān, and portray the *sūdān as distinct from the bīẓān*, or they depict *sūdān* as members of bīẓān society, and thus *as being bīẓān*. In a second step, the analysis will show that these two discourses, despite their inherent antagonism, are used more or less simultaneously by sūdān to locate themselves in the social space. Depending on the context of these discursive practices of identification, sūdān either stress difference from, or identity with the bīẓān. The sūdān, or ḥarāṭīn identity (as the political activists prefer to call it) is thus revealed to be deeply

contradictory and fragmented. This contradictory consciousness, however, appears less to be so once "being bīẓān" or "being ḥarāṭīn" are understood as relational categories. Rather than describing an essence of being, these identifications describe what one considers oneself to be vis-à-vis specific environments.

Ḥarāṭīn Identity in the National Context

While the social topography of the dependent strata of bīẓān society, as has been revealed by the lines of analysis already elaborated, varies considerably, and proves to be at the basis of a number of internal cleavages, the relevance of these characteristics is downplayed by discourses which depict the sūdān as one homogeneous group. Their shared experience of uniform social and economic deprivation is considered to create a distinct group solidarity of the oppressed, which will result in a common, then ḥarāṭīn identity. These discourses, elaborating an ideal of sūdān being, are developed by political activists of this stratum. Their aim is to raise awareness of being discriminated against among the sūdān, and thus to incite them to struggle for their emancipation, the end of bīẓān predominance, and equal rights. Most prominent in this respect remained for a long time the organisation El Hor (Arabic: al-ḥurr; free, noble, freeborn; Wehr 1976: 165), which was founded in 1974, and since 1978 has fought in public for the cause of the ḥarāṭīn,[2] who are no longer to feel inferior, but become self-confident (cf. El Hor 1993; Mercer 1982: 31ff.).

> El Hor also wants to be, from now on, characteristic of a completely new society, where the word Haratine will be worn with pride, like a standard, and will no longer be synonymous with a bad destiny, to be endured with fatalism. (El Hor 1993: 3; author's translation)

The unity of the sūdān is to be achieved under the banner of a common identity. The term ḥarāṭīn therefore has to be freed from its pejorative connotations, and instead become the symbol of the new society in which all sūdān have united, and thus put an end to their social discrimination. This project for a new ḥarāṭīn identity clearly aims to transform the meanings the term "ḥarāṭīn" has been ascribed by the dominant bīẓān discourse (i.e. either "freed slave", or euphemistically "all slaves and ḥarāṭīn"). In this attempt the counter-hegemonic discourses, however, differ considerably. The majority tries to build a bridge from the past into the future by reference to ethnic categories. Either the origin of the ḥarāṭīn among the black African ethnic groups is stressed, and the ḥarāṭīn thus are considered to have to go back to their roots, instead of remaining within bīẓān society,[3] or, as is the more influential, and current position of El Hor, they form a distinct social entity, which is neither entirely bīẓān nor black African,[4] but an original synthesis of both cultures. Lastly, a third major stance portrays the ḥarāṭīn as completely assimilated into bīẓān society. They are considered to be Arab by birth, and hence Arab forever. Being a part of the bīẓān universe the ḥarāṭīn

therefore will have to struggle for equal rights within this framework, and have nothing to gain but only to lose beyond it (Interview with Boïdel Ould Homeïd in: Mauritanie Nouvelles, nº 28, 18.8.1992: 6f.; Brhane 1997a: 242ff.).

Despite their contradictions over the issue of what the ḥarāṭīn are to become, all political leaders claiming to speak in the name of the ḥarāṭīn assume that these constitute a distinct group that can be discerned by a set of distinguishing marks. According to El Hor this is manifest in several domains:

> The specificity of the haratin thus is manifested by their Hassaniya language which they speak despite their black colour, by their folklore, their games and leisure. (El Hor 1993: 11; author's translation)

The cultural boundary thus drawn makes references to both history and cultural practices. The ḥarāṭīn are part of the bīẓān because they speak their language, the ḥassāniyya Arab dialect. However, they are different from the bīẓān because they speak ḥassāniyya only as a consequence of their assimilation to bīẓān society, which is a consequence of their slave past. This different historical background is also responsible for a set of cultural practices the ḥarāṭīn do not share with the bīẓān, namely folklore, games and leisure.

While this discourse on ḥarāṭīn cultural features and practices conforms well to the exigencies Fredrik Barth (1969a: 14f) revealed to be crucial to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries, it remains an open question what significance the project of a distinct ḥarāṭīn identity has gained. Meskerem Brhane (1997a) most recently evaluated this question in the urban context of Nouakchott, and ascertained that there still is no uniform ḥarāṭīn identity. Instead ḥarāṭīn, i.e. sūdān, tend by appealing to distinct strategies (e.g. patri-centred versus matri-centred narratives) to locate themselves either within, or outside bīẓān society. This distinction, described as one of "radical ḥarāṭīn" versus "conservative ḥarāṭīn", structures social life in major domains. Ḥarāṭīn of the two distinct categories not only have different perceptions of their history, but also practise different patterns of social relations.[5] They furthermore oppose each other on the political scene, where the ḥarāṭīn have become a significant factor in the process of democratisation.[6]

When the City Goes Rural

The rural hinterland, of which the region of Achram-Diouk is to be considered a part, has for a long time been closely related to the urban centres. Bīẓān society, despite the recent sedentarisation, is still highly mobile. Seasonal migration between towns and the rural areas seems in many respects to have replaced former nomadic mobility (cf. Ruf 1995) and now means that the city and its ideas go rural. Major news in bīẓān society continue to spread quickly, despite various limitations experienced, especially by the most heavily deprived populations, in this respect.[7] The counter-hegemonic discourses, created by ḥarāṭīn elites located above all in the modern sector, thus did not remain limited to the cities, but spread over the

whole country, and became effective even in the most remote locations. Or, as a ḥassān told me with regard to the sūdān of his tribe living in a nearby adabay:

> It was in 1976 that the sūdān in . . . stopped paying half of their harvest. . . . This was because a part of the ḥarāṭīn went to Nouakchott. Every time they went there, they heard that there are no more slaves, and that all people are equal. Once back at the adabay, these sūdān started to tell all the others about what they had heard. So each time one sūdāni came back from Nouakchott, he started to change [the attitude of] all the other sūdān there in the adabay. (Interview ḥassān, 9.12.1995)

Discourse and action, however, do not have to correspond as neatly as the ḥassān interviewee assumes to have been the case here. In many cases, the configurations of dependency on land grants outlined in the previous chapter leave the sūdān little room to publicly reject bīẓān exploitation. Instead resistance in this context is a more subtle process, and counter-hegemonic discourses remain restricted to the backstage or what James C. Scott (1990) has called "hidden transcripts".[8] A selective reading and narration of the past is a powerful means to interpret the present and make sense of it. Ḥarāṭīn, seeking to develop a historic background for their we-group, develop accounts of the past that make it possible to portray today's ḥarāṭīn as free and independent. As this in the context of bīẓān society implies developing genealogical accounts, the ḥarāṭīn, who lack precisely this means of reference to the past, face a major challenge to their project (cf. Brhane 1997a: 101ff.). Besides developing a number of mythical accounts aimed at compensating for the lack of a genealogical representation of their past, sūdān and bīẓān make use of many more discursive and other practices to articulate social group identity in the context of bīẓān society. These different modes for the production of meaning, based on expressions of identity and difference, will be analysed in the context of several case studies from the region of Achram-Diouk.

Marking Difference, Marking Identity

The Two Brothers: Narrating Difference by Allegories

Invoking the past to speak about the present is but one option to fuel processes of identity formation. Narratives of the past in this respect, especially whenever they portray mythical accounts, intersect with allegories. Smadar Lavie (1990: 29ff.) has recently shown the central place which allegories, and with them an allegorical mode of reasoning, have in the process of identity formation among Mzeini Bedouins. This argument, developed for the context of how the Mzeini remember and construct their history and identity in a context of oppression threatening in some respects

their very existence, namely Israeli and Egyptian rule, applies well to the case of the sūdān. Both projects of identity formation have to make sense of a present that still is marked by the social and economic turmoil of the recent past. While among the Mzeina, the distant past and the genealogical charts of their tribes and ancestors seem to have lost much of their significance for the production of Bedouin sense in a rapidly changing social and economic environment, the sūdān are perturbed by their lack of such a past. The following narrative highlights the sūdān concern with this deprivation. It was presented to me by a Badeyn (cf. his narrative p. 57-59) in a moment of deep relaxation one late afternoon, after we had had lunch together, he had milked his goats, and all glasses of tea had been drunk:

> There once was a bīẓān from this region [northern Aftout/southern Tagant]. He probably was a ḥassān. He had stolen his wife from the Bambara at the river Senegal. Here, on the Tagant, he made this woman his slave, in order to make her his wife and marry her. With this woman, the man had several children.
>
> One day two of his sons went on a journey. One of them was of light complexion, because he had had a bīẓān mother, the other one was of dark complexion, because he descended from that stolen Bambara woman. The two brothers[9] went together to the town of Atar in the Adrar. Having arrived there, the light-skinned brother went onto the market and sold his dark-skinned brother as a slave. The latter did not know anything about the ambitions of his brother. The light-skinned brother arranged with the new slave master that he should tell the dark-skinned brother only fifteen days later about his fate. Until then, they should only act as if the light-skinned brother had gone on a short journey, and would come back soon.
>
> Meanwhile the treacherous brother left with all of the money he got from selling his brother into slavery, and travelled back home to the Tagant. There the mother of the dark-skinned brother saw him return with his pockets full of money, but without her son. She immediately realised what had happened, and started to scold the returned brother in the presence of all people. Therefore the father came to know about the story, and indeed there were many indicators speaking against the light-skinned brother. The latter denied all reproaches against him, and insisted on his version of the events, stating that his dark-skinned brother had remained of his own will in the Adrar. Finally, the family decided to take all of the money they found on the light-skinned brother, and to travel to the Adrar to investigate what had become of the missing brother.
>
> The latter in the meantime had been informed about his fate, and he had accepted it with the words "If I am to be your slave, then I will follow you".
>
> The people from the Tagant reached the Adrar about two months after the sale had been concluded. After a while they managed to meet people telling them that they had bought a slave about two or three months ago. However, there was no trace to be found of the dark-skinned son. This

> was because he had become a shepherd, and remained all time out in the bush with the animals. When he returned to the camp one evening, his voice was immediately recognised by members of his family present there. The latter then took all the money they had found with the light-skinned brother, and gave it back to the master of their brother, thus buying the latter's freedom, and revealing the treachery of the light-skinned brother. Badeyn, 23.12.1995)

At first sight this narrative seems to tell little more than that sūdān always have to beware of the bīẓān proneness to treachery towards them, and of their unconditional brutality. In this respect the narrative accounts for little more than a radical ḥarāṭīn perspective, according to which the dividing line between bīẓān and sūdān is the one separating slave raiders from the enslaved, ore else evil from good. However, this is not all the story is about. It is indeed about a bīẓān (by his patrilineal descent) who becomes subject to treatment as a slave due to his maternal descent from a slave woman, from whom he inherited his dark complexion. But being a full-fledged bīẓān, he cannot become the victim of anybody, only of his brother. The latter in turn does not need to feel much concern for his half-brother, because they both have different mothers. While on the one hand, the story is about the discrimination against a bīẓān because of his slave mother, it is also about the segmentational structure of conflict within bīẓān patrilineages. These do not necessarily arise along the division of sūdān versus bīẓān uterine ties, but such a configuration is likely to create unity of a distinct kind among bīẓān kin of different, but nevertheless bīẓān affiliation on the mother's side (cf. the case of the ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, p. 105-108). The attitude of the dark-skinned brother once he becomes aware of his new condition is also striking. Rather than oppose it, he submits to his new master, and becomes a shepherd living with the animals in the bush – a kind of life that is a synonym for backwardness and ignorance in bīẓān society. It takes his mother, for whom the status of her son is the materialisation of her own rise from slave estate to the legal wife of a bīẓān, to make the bīẓān aware of what had happened, and to free the enslaved son. Indeed falsely enslaved freemen, which is a recurring pattern in narratives concerning slavery, never directly oppose their estate. Their freeborn status is revealed only on occasions in which the circumstances account for their true identity.[10] Overt resistance in this constellation for a true bīẓān would mean violating the rules of good conduct, and subverting the foundations of social hierarchy by giving a bad example to all other slaves.

The tale of the bīẓān who sold his brother thus serves not only ḥarāṭīn propaganda, but also opens up insights into the complex universe of bīẓān social relations. In the last instance it is the slave woman who gains most. She, due to her slave origin, was able to transgress exactly those boundaries of social conduct the bīẓān were unable to cross. It was she alone who could blame the treacherous bīẓān for having sold his brother, and make her

husband look for his lost son. Finally she not only gets her son back, but also strengthens her own, and her children's position in the competition with those members of the family who are of bīẓān descent on their mother's side.

Taken as an allegory, the story of the two brothers says much more than simply that the sūdān have to fear bīẓān dishonesty and racism.[11] Like the narrative of Badeyn (cf. p. 57-59), it is instructive on the most sensitive issue of whether sūdān can become bīẓān or not. The matter remains full of ambivalence for the sūdān. Indeed, there are avenues to becoming bīẓān in legal status, but these are strained by the jealousy and overt disregard such an enhancement of individual status may produce among fully-fledged bīẓān. The sticky nature of a sūdān past is also revealed by a number of narratives in which bīẓān who had a sūdān mother continued to express their sympathy with the sūdān. A slave woman from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed (Interview 21.12.1995), who lives at Daber on the Tagant, told me how in 1969, at the height of the drought, she was given jewellery by two bīẓān women of the emiral family. These women, who lived in Néma, where the slave woman had travelled to in order to get some medical treatment, were so generous because they themselves had a former slave mother, she said. Surely the most prominent defender of the slaves was the former ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, whose mother too had been a slave. Within the ḥella, the emiral camp, he was recounted to have had not only absolute authority, but to have owned everything. Sūdān who had lived at the ḥella were unanimous about one point: although they had served different bīẓān, they had had only one master, the ʿamīr of Tagant. Several sūdān also reported that Abderrahmane was aware of the risks his protégés would encounter once he was gone. On his deathbed he therefore ordered his sons not to change the slaves' condition, and to prevent the bīẓān of the ḥella from appropriating slaves who had so far been under his authority individually. While these narratives surely are part of the glorification of the old ʿamīr, who was also reported to have shown little mercy as a slave master himself,[12] the enthusiasm of many sūdān for this personality does not stop at this point. It is marked even among sūdān of tribes other than the emiral Ahel Swayd Aḥmed.[13]

Slave Behaviour as Expression of Good and Evil

Masters and slaves were meant to occupy distinct spheres in bīẓān society. This not only concerned the locality and the distinct character of their respective work (cf. chapter five), but also opposing behavioural patterns. According to the bīẓān perspective, slaves represented the uncivilised world, and in this respect naturally were the counter-model to the bīẓān, who were supposed to represent refinement and civilisation.[14] The mastery of distinct behavioural patterns and emotion management are a basic means for the production of difference, and the legitimation for the assumption of a superior position in society (cf. Elias 1988, 1990). Out of everyday practices of discriminating social strata develop links between behaviour, psychological disposition and the legitimation of social inequality in society. These

provide a fruitful domain for the analysis of master-slave relationships, as a recurrent pattern in the ideology of slavery shows; the portrayal of the slave as a minor, who needs to be socially and physically controlled by the masters. Rather than take up the discussion whether this conception of slavery makes of it an "institution of marginality" (Miers/Kopytoff 1977a), or excludes slaves from society (Meillassoux 1986), the focus here will be on how difference and hierarchy were to be produced among slaves and masters in bīẓān society.[15]

The most striking insights into the opposing characteristics of bīẓān and slave personalities as conceived by the master's ideology, are given by narratives about slaves. First of all slave women are portrayed as unable to act of their own will, and even worse, they are not even able to develop one they could stick to. The tale of Vneyde (cf. Tauzin 1993: 71ff.), a slave woman who always swore not to do what her masters asked her, but nevertheless always ended up doing it, illuminates well this concept of a slave mentality – one that, albeit with less vigour, is applied to slave men too (cf. Tauzin 1989b: 86). According to the masters, the slave needs somebody to direct and guide his actions. together they constitute a complementary couple: while the master is unable to bear the hardship of manual labour, he is able to direct the actions of the slave, who himself is able to bear any hardships, but cannot plan his actions. While in the domain of work this distinction helped more to legitimise and maintain a division of labour between working slaves and non-working masters,[16] than take the shape of a symbiosis like the one between the blind and the lame, the non-sociability of the slaves which it expresses is fundamental to the bīẓān ideology of slavery. The perception of the slave as the incarnation of the uncivilised being, or else the antithesis of one's own identity, has so deeply impregnated bīẓān thought that major elements of this distinction are still present today.[17] Discussing the issue of illegitimate children with a young ḥassān woman of about eighteen, attending high school, and quite ambitious to emancipate herself by becoming a professional, and getting a qualified job of her own, in this respect was quite a revelation. Having an illegitimate child, it emerged, had completely different meanings to bīẓān and slave women. While for the former, it meant losing their power, and running the risk of not getting a husband corresponding to their status, illegitimate children were described as being no real nuisance to slave women, because these were ignorant of the laws and values, and thus had no consciousness of the social implications of their action (Interview ḥassān woman, 10.9.1995).[18] How much this view is shaped by the masters' ideology and negates the sentiments of slave women can be discerned from the accounts of slave women who were forced to have their children illegitimately, because their masters denied them the right to enter into marriages (cf. the narrative of M'Barke p. 68; Interview ḫādem, 6.2.1996).[19] Discrimination against slaves and ḥarāṭīn does not stop at this point. Until today, they are excluded from leading prayers in the mosques, and from performing other duties symbolising moral integrity and leadership.[20]

Most sūdān nowadays are well aware of these prejudices about sūdān, i.e. about the slaves' and slave descendants' modes of behaviour and their supposed ignorance. In former times, slave women used to perform a particular kind of folk song, while pounding millet. Accompanying the monotonous rhythm of millet-pounding, they sang songs mocking their masters, and especially the mistresses present at their work. The contents of these songs showed little concern about vulgarity, as the following verses show:

> Vous êtes témoins, je ne la blâme pas
> La chienne, je ne la blâme pas
> Son honneur est son cou
> Elle qui attache serré le sac de mil
> Elle qui cache tout sous la natte
> Et qui boit à même l'outre
> (Tauzin 1989b: 79)

Not to react when publicly called a bitch, a designation which is one of the strongest offences not only in Arab-Islamic culture, required a good deal of emotion management on the part of the bīẓān mistress. In turn, however, bīẓān success in this domain meant taking part in the reciprocal manifestation of distinct cultures, of distinct involvement in civilisation, and hence in reproducing social hierarchy. Today, at least in the region of Achram-Diouk, the sūdān women have become reluctant on the topic of these songs.[21] Not only has this genre almost died out because there hardly are any more women pounding millet in mortars, and the number of slave women who still do this work in front of their mistresses is even smaller still, but also the sūdān women no longer want to perform this kind of song. Raising the topic made everybody feel quite uncomfortable and embarrassed.[22]

A different case is that of another genre of distinct sūdān culture, a variety of spirituals and blues performed by sūdān women, and called meddh. These songs, which praise the prophet Muhammad, are perceived as laudable by the bīẓān. Even some rigorous interpreters of Māliki Islam, like the local qāḍi at Achram, Ahmed Ould Aly (Interview 24.12.1995), have the highest esteem for this music because unlike the genres performed by the iggāwen, it consists only of vocals, and is not accompanied by instruments, which this branch of Islam considers to be evil. While in the region of Achram-Diouk there were not many performances of meddh, it was ardently performed by the sūdān living at Daber on the Tagant.[23] Well-arranged sessions, and a veritable art of meddh, has developed in those quarters of Nouakchott inhabited primarily by sūdān. Meddh has also become integrated into the political agitation for the ḥarāṭīn cause. New texts, inspired by the little red book of Mao, and calling for ḥarāṭīn freedom, were superimposed on the classical songs (cf. Brhane 1997a: 245, 255; Houssein Ould Mahand in: Al-Bayane nº 64, 10.3.1993: 9; Interview ḥarṭāni, 23.12.1995).[24]

Putting an End to Ignorance

The most serious and far-reaching means for the maintenance of bīẓān hegemony within society was their knowledge of Islam. As long as the bīẓān were able to mediate all of the spiritual world, and sūdān at best were attributed the ability to manage the forces of evil, it went without saying that no sūdān could become the equal of a bīẓān. On the contrary, this very relationship, and the central role the practice and knowledge of Islam has in bīẓān society for the generation of symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1987: 205ff.), soon made the acquisition of religious knowledge one of the most important fields on which sūdān struggled for social recognition. The issue of this struggle was the more sensitive, as the boundary between the learned and the ignorant never did coincide with the one separating bīẓān from sūdān. Decrying the ignorance of pastoralists or cultivators living out in the bush[25] is as much a means to ascertain inner-bīẓān social hierarchy between those who are aware of religious obligations and those who are not, as it is a means to discriminate against sūdān. In view of these inner-bīẓān contradictions, gaining some knowledge of Islam meant for the sūdān – and here one has to speak of sūdān men to be precise[26] – becoming at least equal if not superior to a number of bīẓān. From the 1950s on, a small number of sūdān boys was able to receive Qur'ānic instruction, and thus to learn not only about religion but to read and write Arabic too.[27] The implications this had for sūdān boys, such as e.g. the seasonal interruption of learning by agricultural work, and the need for the sūdān family to be already quite well off, is revealed by the narrative of Brahim (cf. p. 59-66). In a later interview I asked Brahim about his motivation to engage so deeply in Islamic scholarship:

> *Author:* Why did you attend the Qur'ānic school [maḥaẓra], and what did this have to do with the matter of ignorance?
> *Brahim:* I wanted to know my religion, and the maḥaẓra was the way to learn something about it, to get out of the unawareness. Today one can also go to school, this is now just as good. In those times, the issue was to know what the prayer means, to stop resigning oneself with the situation. Today one needs also to know reading and writing whenever one wants a good job, otherwise one will always remain a day labourer. In those days many people were ignorant, but only the sūdān were so profoundly ignorant that they did not even know how to get out of this situation. And the bīẓān always kept all the knowledge for themselves. I never saw a bīẓān ask a sūdān whether he would like to learn something. The sūdān were ignorant, the bīẓān knew this very well, this was the way the bīẓān then were able to oppress the sūdān.

The arguments of Brahim show that opposing bīẓān dominance does not mean rejecting bīẓān culture on the whole. The critique raised by Brahim goes right to the heart of the matter, the exploitation of religious knowledge for the maintenance of oppression. Rather than spread religious learning, as they should have done to obey the precepts of Islam among all, and especially

among their slaves, many bīẓān did withhold their knowledge, and did not even let the sūdān know the meaning of the prayers.[28] Brahim, however, does not stop at this point, but criticises the sūdān themselves too. He blames them for another kind of ignorance, the one of not knowing how to escape from ignorance. This implies that Brahim perceives the sūdān of these times as not conscious of their social and religious deprivation, and thus as complying with the masters' prejudice against slaves as beings unaware of Islam and disregarding its precepts.[29] This discourse is central to the definition of distinct ḥarāṭīn characteristics, and hence to the definition of central elements marking "ḥarāṭīn-ness". Brahim not only draws a boundary between the oppressive bīẓān and the deprived sūdān, but also one distinguishing ignorant, and hence passive and submissive sūdān, from sūdān (or rather ḥarāṭīn) dedicated to knowledge, and aware of the modern world. Ignorance in this discourse becomes differentiated into simple ignorance caused by the circumstances, and for which the individual concerned therefore cannot be blamed, and "ignorance of ignorance", meaning the lack of interest in becoming aware, and feeling responsible for one's own fate. While this distinction remains contradictory, for either one is ignorant, and thus does not know about his state of deprivation, or not, it is central to the outline of a new mode of life, based on the will to base life on one's own means, i.e. on manual labour. The ḥarāṭīn consider themselves, and to some extent are considered by a number of bīẓān too, to be the protagonists of this attitude towards the difficulties of life in rural and urban Mauritania,.

Their knowledge of work and gaining a living from it enables the sūdān to avoid the modern side of ignorance, but it does not save them from the risk of betraying ignorance in the second domain, i.e. vis-à-vis religious practices. While still slaves, the sūdān did not pay the zakāt, the tithe for the poor prescribed by Islam as one of the five duties of every Muslim. This was because anyone bound to the slave estate did not exist socially, and thus did not have to comply with social obligations. While the masters should have taken over this responsibility, many seem to have neglected this aspect of their obligations.[30] Beginning to pay the zakāt thus had two distinct meanings for slaves. This moment not only demarcated a definite change in the master-slave relation, but also the coming into existence of the slave as a social being performing the same ritual practices as the bīẓān. While paying zakāt thus on the one hand becomes an instrument of demonstrating independence,[31] many sūdān still feel uncomfortable about it. They fear not knowing well enough the prescriptions defining how to pay zakāt (cf. note 159, chapter 7), and thus failing to achieve the full range of symbolic capital this practice is able to produce. Disseminating knowledge about the zakāt therefore is subject to many discussions among sūdān, especially at the time of harvest. Sūdān intellectuals then are expected to disseminate their knowledge, and to enable their fellow sūdān to face the bīẓān challenge in this domain.

Practising the payment of zakāt is also significant of how the sūdān redefine

their relationship with the bīẓān in a second way. The major question arising when sūdān start paying the zakāt is who will benefit from these donations. It is commonly argued that manumitted slaves become the clients of their former masters (cf. Ould Mohamed 1988: 50; Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 188). As a consequence of the manumission both enter a relation of walā' (patronage). The former master thus becomes walī, or mawla, the "legal guardian" (Schacht 1964: 120) of his former slave, who thus becomes mawla too, while the term then means freedman or client (cf. Pipes 1979; Ibn Abî Zayd al-Qayrawânî 1983: 229). The relations with former masters, today, are more likely to be defined by sūdān in categories of nearness, or by disavowing them altogether, than in the legal categories of walā', which indeed most sūdān (like most bīẓān) ignore. A major manifestation of the current state of these relations is the issue whether the former master is looked upon as being close enough to become the beneficiary of the sūdān zakāt payments. In this domain sūdān attitudes are controversial. Some continue to maintain good relations with their former (or, sometimes, formally at least, current) masters and therefore pay them zakāt, while others insist on giving zakāt only to the needy in their vicinity, be they bīẓān or sūdān; and again other sūdān stress that they have put an end to all relations with bīẓān and now give all their zakāt and further charity only to sūdān. These practices in fact do not contradict the logic of walā', for this relation is described as analogous to relations created by filiation, and does not create distinct rights, especially not in respect to property. The manumitted slave therefore is not obliged to contribute materially to the patrimony of his former master, as a fatwā of Šayḫ Sidyya al-Kabīr (1775-1868), one of the most illustrious religious and political figures in precolonial bīẓān society, who lived in the Gebla concludes (cf. Ould Mohamed 1988: 64f.).

The controversy among sūdān concerning the modes of paying zakāt outlined here throws a light on some unorthodox interpretations of this tithe, which according to the Qur'ān is supposed to benefit only the poor. In the history of bīẓān society, the term zakāt, however, has frequently been employed synonymously with other terms designating taxes like e.g. gabeẓ, and thus came to be used as a means of expressing and defining relations of patronage.[32] Therefore the issue of whether the beneficiaries of zakāt payments necessarily have to be poor remained disputed among zwāya scholars, despite the clear-cut definition provided by the Qur'ān (cf. Oßwald 1993: 104f, 115f., 120f.).[33] This intermingling of zakāt payments with tributes and levies means that until today receiving benefits declared to be zakāt involves no stigma for the beneficiary, but rather expresses some close social relation. This also allows for different interpretations of the nature of such payments, which thus can be declared zakāt by the sūdān, while former masters perceive them as remnants of tributes, or may perceive themselves as trustees who manage the zakāt payment for a third party.[34] The question whether one favours a close affiliate as beneficiary of one's zakāt payment, or a poor person regardless of his affiliation, thus proves to be the expression of a

deliberate choice how to shape the relationships with former masters and one's own community. Each position can be legitimised, as long as the opposition between a rigid interpretation of Islam and one stressing local customs is maintained.[35]

The Ḥarāṭīn "Work Ethic"

Many aspects of the specifics of sūdān work have already been outlined previously (cf. chapter five). This analysis has revealed the importance of hard, manual work in the life of most slaves and ḥarāṭīn. Today this former marker of low social status has been turned into symbol of a new, a modern attitude. Sūdān demonstrate pride when telling that they live from the work of their own hands, and portray these as being the sole source of wealth:

> *BOS:* The most wealthy were the ḥarāṭīn.
> *Author:* Oh really, how did they become so?
> *BOS:* The ḥarāṭīn, they are the most wealthy because they worked with their own hands, and they had the fields. The ḥassān and the maʿalimīn, they all depended on them [the ḥarāṭīn]. They [the ḥarāṭīn] were the ones who made everything.
> (Interview Brahim Ould Soueilim, ḥarṭāni, 26.8.1995)

This new ḥarāṭīn self-confidence, which has become reinforced by the revaluation of manual labour in recent times, makes for a ḥarāṭīn "work ethic" (a terminology introduced by Ann McDougall 1988: 379), which can be summed up in the motto that there is nothing a ḥarṭāni cannot do.[36] The sūdān claim to have always done all the work, and especially the hardest. They also continue to cultivate, and to work in the new industries, i.e. to (re-) produce the material world of bīẓān society today.[37] This image of the sūdān as universal worker is maintained by the bīẓān too. There is no problem in turning a sūdān cultivator who never in his life tended animals in only a few weeks into a highly skilled herdsman (Interview Mohammed Sid'Ahmed, zwāya, 12.9.1995). Likewise the bīẓān now engage in a discourse valuing manual labour and personal responsibility for one's fate. According to Abderrahmane Ould Ahmed (zwāya, Interview 13.7.1995), there are now several kinds of ignorance. One who knows the Qur'ān of course cannot be accused of ignorance, but today, anyone who does not know how to make a living by his own efforts and who has no occupation must be regarded as ignorant. A similar view is held by Hamoud Ould Amar (Interview 4.11.1995), a member of the ḥassān nobility who classifies the ḥarāṭīn (i.e. sūdān) into two opposite groups: either they now are among the best, thus sometimes even superior to all other strata in contemporary bīẓān society, or they continue to behave like the slaves by doing stupid things, stealing and the like.

The esteem manual labour and production is now gaining among all strata of bīẓān society is a result of the changing social and economic conditions. Indeed manual labour has become an ever more important means for gaining

a living not only for the sūdān but for many bīẓān too. More significant, however, is the influence of a discourse of modernity and development that is specific to countries which like Mauritania rate among the least developed of the world. Development cooperation now for years has been calling for the participation and the commitment of the "target groups", and no longer wants to strengthen passivity and dependency. The people of Achram-Diouk, and most Mauritanians as well, are well aware of these expectations of the international community of donors, be they state-funded or NGOs. While the discourse on the new value system, based on the appreciation of manual work, thus proves to be a response to Mauritania's dependency on foreign aid, it cannot be reduced to this single factor. For the sūdān struggling for their emancipation, the ideology of self-reliance, reinforced by the spread of capitalist culture and wage labour in the course of globalisation, has opened up a field in which they are able to take part in the production of common sense and hence to compete successfully for social power with the bīẓān (cf. Bourdieu 1985: 729).[38]

The Politics of Cattle and Goats

Religious learning and manual labour are by far not the only fields on which sūdān pursue their quest for symbolic capital, which despite all achievements, continues to take place on unequal grounds. Further arenas for the production of difference between bīẓān and sūdān were the possession and control of land (which was the subject of the previous chapter), and the ownership of livestock. This latter issue, for the bīẓān originally were a pastoral nomadic people, is burdened with especially strong emotions, and was laden with high symbolic value.[39] The possession of livestock, and within this domain especially of large animals like cattle, camels and horses, symbolised (and continues to do so)[40] welfare and status. Consequently livestock in former times was concentrated almost exclusively in the hands of the bīẓān masters. Slaves, within the restrictions resulting from their estate, in a few cases managed to acquire a number of small ruminants. They either profited from compensation for special services given in livestock by their masters, or acquired sheep and goats themselves This latter option had become frequent when the wage labour sector expanded after the Second World War, and bīẓān began more often to pay in animals for the herding and watering of their livestock. Finally the reinvestment of surplus millet was another means for sūdān to accumulate animals (cf. p. 184-190).

Cattle, which were much more expensive, and a symbol of affluence and status, were only rarely in the hands of slaves. Youba (Interview 22.1.1996), a man of slave origin of the ḥassān tribe of the Awlād ʿAlī Ntūnva, told me how his father's family got two cows during the big drought in 1969. While Youba's father watered the cattle of his master, a bīẓān herder approached with his herd of cattle. While resting, one of the stranger's cows calved. However, the cow and its calf were too weak to pursue the southward emergency migration of their herd. The bīẓān therefore gave them both as a

gift to Youba's father, the slave who had helped him water his animals. After the animals' return to the camp in the evening, the master of Youba's father became aware that his slave had been given a cow and a calf by a stranger just passing by. He then went to Youba's father and immediately gave him another cow as present.

The case throws a light on the very specific tie between a bīẓān master and a slave who had played already an important role in the management and maintenance of the animal wealth of the former. Youba's father was already well off among the slaves. His family owned quite a number of small ruminants. Getting a cow, however, meant considerably more than just getting an animal of great value (about the value of ten to fifteen goats prior to the drought). Getting a cow meant possession of an animal species which until then had been reserved for the master, and thus entering a sphere of symbolic representation that until then had been occupied solely by the bīẓān master. Confronted with this accidental turmoil in the well-established hierarchy of symbolic goods, the master had to react and to save his face, i.e. he had to manifest his leadership in the management of symbolic goods. This he achieved by one of the most powerful means to acquire prestige, generosity.[41] The bīẓān master's giving his slave a cow was a significant gesture not only on material grounds, because it acknowledged the slave's right to possess an animal species otherwise owned by bīẓān only. Nevertheless, as all post-hoc actions, this one too was hardly able to disguise its hasty and reactive character. Today the slave's son, who at the time of this event was about six years old, still vividly remembers this moment, and makes of it a central argument underscoring his family's very close contact with the bīẓān and hence their likeness with the bīẓān. However, becoming more like the bīẓān within this social matrix remained an individual experience, which above all became employed by Youba to underline his family's difference from the other sūdān in their camp.

Cultivation and Pastoralism, Adabay and Vrīg

Like the drought, several other external factors fuelled social change in bīẓān society, and opened up spaces for a redefinition of what it meant to be sūdān or bīẓān. While in the preceding case, the sūdān family had managed to become a little bit more like their bīẓān master's, changing circumstances also made it possible to stress difference between bīẓān and sūdān. The intensification of agricultural production throughout this century, which had been promoted by the colonial administration ever since it was established, enhanced differentiation between agriculturists and pastoralists in Mauritania. This meant increasing the gap between sūdān as cultivators, and bīẓān, together with numbers of their sūdān dependents, as nomadic or transhumant pastoralists. Although this dichotomy had been well established in bīẓān society for centuries, the new structuration of space resulting from the pacification of the Mauritanian territory, and the policy of free access to pasture, increased these differences, which are significant to the representa-

tion of the self. Those sūdān living in the adwaba continued to live on their own in almost sedentary camps for large parts of the year, while the bīẓān were engaged in herding and trading often far away from these spots. Part of this process was an increased professional specialisation of many sūdān. They now were able to develop a larger knowledge of millet cultivation than in the times when this activity occurred only occasionally, and the rhythm of work was dominated by the needs of the livestock. In the south of the Tagant, as well as large parts of the Assaba, the expansion of date palm cultivation opened up another path to a non-pastoral, professional specialisation (cf. p. 161-165, 205f., 221-226).[42] Though the segregation of work among bīẓān and sūdān is less marked in the case of date palm cultivation than it is for millet cultivation, and a number of bīẓān had effectively been engaged in caring for date palms established in a few locations on the Tagant for centuries, there is no doubt that the most profound knowledge of date palm cultivation lay with the long-established sūdān populations of the oasis. This intensification of several branches of agricultural production soon after colonisation affected lifestyles too. The adwaba, as the camps of the sūdān cultivators are called, and which are by and large immobile, became a means of reference by which sūdān were able to distinguish themselves from the bīẓān supposed to live in nomadic camps (ḥassāniyya: pl. vargān; sing. vrīg), and vice versa. The antagonistic relationship between the two concepts is revealed by the following interview statements:[43]

> On the plateau there are people who are not fixed, i.e. who have constructed until now, but they have fixed points where to they always go. . . . Adabay, that is a camp of sūdān, there are only sūdān, if it is composed of bīẓān, you will say vrīg [camp]. (Interview Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, zwāya, 1.8.98)

> Adabay means a camp that remains in one place for a long time, it may stay at one place for even more than one year. . . . We went to the adabay when we started to cultivate. Once the harvest was over, the adabay dissipated, and everybody went back to the [bīẓān] camps. (Interview Boye Mint Abeide, ḥarṭāniyya, 10.1.1996)

> There always was a camp of sūdān, an adabay. It is in Wād Lġnem. There were sūdān who always stayed with us [in the bīẓān camp], and others who were in their own camp. Adabay, that means an aṣl [origin] of the sūdān. When someone searches for a sūdān, then he will go there, because it is their aṣl [origin]. We visited these sūdān every year at the time of the harvest. (Interview Yahya Ould Heime, ḥassān, 9.12.1995)

The accounts illuminate that there is nothing like a clear-cut opposition between the vrīg, the nomadic camp, and the adabay, the location of sūdān residence. Rather the contradictory characteristics are developed within the limitations resulting from the background of mobile agro-pastoral produc-

tion in an arid environment, shared by bīẓān and sūdān alike. Mobility and immobility could formerly be, and still can be found among both sūdān and bīẓān. Many bīẓān nomadic pastoralists had quite restricted areas of nomadisation, which they left rarely. Others were transhumant, and consequently engaged in major seasonal migrations only twice a year, while they remained rather immobile throughout the rest of the year.[44] The adwaba in the northern Aftout and on the Tagant in turn greatly resembled the bīẓān camps, because they were (and many still are today) composed of tents.[45] Like the bīẓān, the sūdān shifted their camp to new locations when the pollution of the current emplacement had become too annoying. An interrelation between these distinct spheres was assured by many of the sūdān living not permanently in the adabay, but in the vrīg as well for a part of the year. Finally not all sūdān moved into an adabay, for many remained in the vrīg, and close to the bīẓān throughout the year, and did not even have knowledge of cultivation, but only of livestock rearing.

These analogies reveal how patterns of life in the adwaba and vargān resemble each other despite the opposition suggested by the concepts of adabay and vrīg. Rather than represent and describe the situation on the ground, or the degree of mobility, these concepts aim to construct difference between what are considered to be sūdān and bīẓān characteristics. At the heart of this opposition lies the reference to distinct professional specialisation, agriculture and pastoralism respectively, to which are attributed different modes of residential mobility, conceptions of space, and patterns of life-style.[46] The location of the sūdān camps depends largely on the location of their agricultural work, i.e. the major cultivating areas. These plots in fact are much less subject to annual variation than are the pastures frequented by the bīẓān pastoralists. As the sūdān become identified with the location of their fields, they acquire the attribute of immobility and sedentarity, while the bīẓān, associated with the needs of their animals, are perceived as mobile. This opposition is stressed by another assumption: although many adwaba in the centre and the north of Mauritania did not persist throughout the year, but were constituted only during the cultivation cycle, they nevertheless are attributed characteristics of permanency. This results in the qualification of adabay as an origin of sūdān proposed by interviewee Yahya Ould Heime (cf. above). The adwaba, by their association with ideally annually exploited agricultural sites, become transcendent localities, independent of their actual state, which may vary considerably. Though effectively shifting their location every year (admittedly within a restricted range), and often composed of tents, the adwaba are not perceived as having this characteristic, but as fixed locations. They are referred to by the name of the agricultural site its inhabitants exploit (e.g. Daber, Wād Lġnem, etc.). Like in the processes of trans-local identity formation observed among Lebanese migrants in West Africa (cf. Peleikis 1998), the adabay thus during a part of the year are maintained as virtual entities, serving as a means of identification to both bīẓān and sūdān,

and thus providing the sūdān with what they so fundamentally lack: a location of origin.

While the means by which sūdān camps are identified is the association with a locality, the reference to bīẓān camps is derived from genealogy and kinship, and refers to persons. A camp thus is referred to by the name of its leading member as "vrīg ahel Sīdi". Whenever the reference is beyond the level of personal acquaintance, the mode of identification shifts to a more general level, such as the fraction's or the tribe's name.[47] This is the case although, like the adwaba, many bīẓān camps can be found almost every year at the same series of places, e.g. wells, springs, pastures etc. The association of bīẓān communities with a genealogical reference common to camps does not apply to permanent settlements like villages and cities. These, like the adwaba, become identified with a locality.[48] Genealogical terms may be added, whenever the reference to a place fails to be unanimous. This is the case with the two separate neighbouring villages of Wassaʿa. These are distinguished by an appendix to the villages' name marking the different fractional affiliation of the sūdān residents, who either belong to the Tarkoz Awlād Tīkī, or the Tarkoz Awlād Sīd Aḥmed. Similar cases can be found among bīẓān villages too, but there appendixes may also distinguish villages or neighbourhoods inhabited by bīẓān of only different factions of one and the same tribal group.[49] These factions, revealing internal cleavages that may lead into a more complete separation into two distinct branches or fractions, most often differentiated by colour attributes such as the "whites", the "green" and the "blacks".[50]

As a key to these distinct modes of either personal or topographical reference to inhabited localities, appears the need for a universal mark of reference, the logic of which is revealed to be deeply impregnated in pastoral-nomadic concepts of space (cf. Schlee 1992). Neither the adabay, with its constantly changing inhabitants of low status, many of whom were not even considered members of bīẓān society by the bīẓān nobility, nor the village or town, which in many respects shares the negative characteristics of the adabay, complies with the need to provide for common, personalised references.[51] This is clearly different in the case of the camp, where the fluctuation of members does not affect the mark of reference, the name of one family which constitutes the core of the camp. This personalisation of references to localities is experiencing a resurgence in the modern, urban context. While in Nouakchott and other Mauritanian towns street names have hardly ever been used (not even for postal services), streets are distinguished by reference to well-known people living there (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1998: 81, note 11).

Sūdān Hard Talk

Beyond sociostructural changes opening new arenas for the production of cultural difference, a number of past experiences, alive and well in the collective memory of the sūdān, account for their difference from the bīẓān. These elements of a collective history of the sūdān concern the experience of

major deprivations resulting from their social status, and of major advances which brought to an end many of the most direct and coercive relations of dependency.

One recurrent element in sūdān descriptions of the past is the ḥassāniyya term istʿammār, which literally means "the times in which the people could be obliged". Thus being widely applicable to different conditions of oppression, the term has come to mean different things to sūdān and bīẓān. For the latter istʿammār is a synonym for colonisation, which is remembered as having been the time when the French had all rights, and everybody, bīẓān and sūdān alike, had to obey their orders.[52] The sūdān are well aware of this meaning of istʿammār, but subvert it into one blaming the internal colonisation of bīẓān society, i.e. the systematic oppression of the sūdān by the bīẓān. Istʿammār then comes to describe the state of mind of somebody "who takes the others like the goats, like a part of a herd which he wants to sell" (Daouda Ould Haroun, ʿabd, 19.12.1995), or "people who come and start to compel other people to give them animals or other things" (Interview Moisse Ould Emine, ʿabd, 10.2.1996), or simply to force people to work for somebody else. On a second level of meaning, istʿammār stands for a past where there were no rights for the sūdān – the time of slavery[53]:

> *GOEK:* It was Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar [the old ʿamīr of Tagant] who decided what he wanted to leave with the cultivator. First it was him to make his choice and take [of the harvest] what he wanted, then it was the turn of the cultivator and his family. . . .
> *Author:* Was there a distinct name for this system of giving a share of the harvest?
> *GOEK:* No, this had no proper name, this was not gabeẓ, and not ʿašūr, this simply implied work, istʿammār. This was the time of istʿammār, then the ʿamīr decided [all alone]. If he wanted, he could take all of the harvest. (Interview Ghalim Ould El Kheir, ʿabd, 17.12.1995)

Speaking of istʿammār as of a past that no longer exists, raises the question when this time of oppression ended. Over this issue there is no consensus among the sūdān. For most of them, the times of istʿammār are long-gone, or at least never concerned them personally, but only other sūdān. However, this past is not so far away, for it can be remembered that Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, who was just reported above to have been practising istʿammār died only in 1982. Consequently, the proposition of a ḥarāṭīn that istʿammār ended with the independence of Mauritania raised much laughter among several other sūdān present at the interview. In an ensuing lively debate everybody came to agree that it was most probable that istʿammār had ended with the rule of colonel Ould Haidalla in the early 1980s, a time by which also numerous other traditional levies were no longer recognised (Interview 12.12.1995).

The reign of colonel Ould Haidalla has in two more respects become a synonym for sūdān emancipation. Under his rule slavery in Mauritania was

abolished for the third time during the 20th century on 5 July 1980, and it was Ould Haidalla himself who made this decision public another time on the 5 July 1983 in a speech broadcast by the national radio (cf. Mauritanie Nouvelles 1997, nº 235: 8). Among sūdān the colonel became famous for saying on this occasion that all Mauritanians were equal, that black and white were the same, that everybody should look on each other as brothers, and ask for permission before taking others' belongings. A message that put simply meant that the time had come to stop treating others as slaves and inferiors (Interview M'Barke Mint Lebeid, ḥarṭāniyya, 22.10.1995; cf. the narrative of Brahim, p. 59-66).[54] Besides initiating the land reform and strengthening the sūdān's rights to land ownership, Ould Haidalla also created the "Structures d'Éducation des Masses" (SEM). This nation-wide institution was designed to replace the old unitary party, which had been dissolved by the military regime after the coup against president Mokhtar Ould Daddah in 1978. The very peculiar thing about the SEM was that they were supposed to represent all Mauritanians and structured according to a military model. Every ten families were to elect a "chief of the ten" (or "cell"), ten of these chiefs were to elect among themselves a "chief of the one hundred" (or "quarter") and so on up to regional and the national level, where four executive secretaries were placed. These represented the different domains in which the SEM would intervene for the promotion of the living conditions and the development of modern attitudes: orientation, organisation, economy and culture, Islamic morality and social action (cf. Marchesin 1992: 186).[55]

These benefits of the era of colonel Ould Haidalla do not prevent Mauritanians from remembering it as the most severe period in the history of independent Mauritania until today. Indeed the regime under Ould Haidalla was famous for the introduction of the penal code of the šarī'a, and the practice of executing punishments in public. This raised strong disapproval, for all this meant a radical shift away from the traditions of Islamic jurisprudence prevailing in Mauritania, which constitute a major element of zwāya identity (cf. Ould Cheikh 1991b; Oßwald 1993: 62ff.).[56] The regime also reinforced the secret services, and thus created fear of prosecution due to false accusation and denunciation. In sum, the times of Ould Haidalla are remembered as having been a time of conspiracy and unmeasured brutality by the executive (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 30.1.1996).

To this extent both sūdān and bīẓān agree about the nature of Ould Haidalla's policies. A significant difference in their respective conclusions arises over the issue whether the SEM had a democratic character. For bīẓān, it goes without saying that the SEM had nothing to do with democracy, for this period only began with the first free communal elections, and the establishment of multi-partyism under the rule of later president Ould Taya from 1989 on (Ould Cheikh 1994b: 32ff.; Interview Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, zwāya, 1.8.1995).[57] Sūdān on the contrary describe the introduction of the SEM as the first arrival of democracy in Mauritania (Interview M'Barke Mint Lebeid, ḥarṭāniyya, 22.10.1995; cf. the narrative of Zeyneb,

p. 66). Indeed this rather rigidly structured institution was implemented in many regions in a way that for the first time came to introduce the principle of "one man, one vote". Sūdān thus had equal rights along with bīẓān, and were elected to represent their communities, for in communities with a large majority of sūdān, such as the adwaba, it was sūdān who became the representatives of the SEM. While on the regional and national level, the SEM still remained marked by the tribal fragmentation of political power (cf. Marchesin 1992: 187f.), they nevertheless portrayed a different ideal, and sometimes even managed to curtail the influence of the traditional elites.[58] This was largely anticipated by the sūdān, and made them sympathise with this project, while interest in the institution remained mitigated among the bīẓān.[59]

Being a Part or Being Apart?

The preceding accounts describe sūdān first of all as different from the bīẓān, thus fitting in many respects into the image propagated by the ḥarāṭīn activists, such as the leaders of El Hor, and the more recent political party "Action pour le Changement" (AC), of the ḥarāṭīn as a distinct "ethnic" group. The tendency of sūdān to describe themselves as different from the bīẓān is strongest in accounts portraying the past as a time of injustice and oppression, marked by bīẓān neglecting their commitment to Islamic precepts, being treacherous and racist, and many other misdemeanours. Consequently it could be expected that on the basis of these many experiences of deprivation and disregard, the sūdān would find it difficult to identify themselves with the bīẓān. Nevertheless, this is the case. In many of these accounts the individual sūdān's claim to being part of the bīẓān appears included as a subtext in the radical discourse decrying bīẓān oppression. This profound ambivalence in most sūdān discourses is created by several means. First of all talking about bīẓān oppression is portrayed as talking about the past, i.e. relations of dependency which no longer exist in this configuration. Whenever the context of the events thus described does not allow recourse to this strategy, because most recent cases of what can be defined as istʿammār are concerned, a second strategy comes to the fore. The experience of istʿammār in any case is denied to have been a personal experience. It only was, and maybe continues to be part of the experience of other sūdān. Suffering from istʿammār in this perspective is an experience above all which the sūdān concerned have to be blamed for. Rather than being portrayed as social structures allowing for the oppression of whole groups, the relations of dependency resulting from the practice of slavery are delineated as individual ties, in which the individual sūdān has a large responsibility for whether he lives under oppression or free like the bīẓān. Istʿammār from this point of view becomes the result of ignorance, which both sūdān and bīẓān do not challenge (Interview Daouda Ould Haroun, ʿabd, 19.12.1995).

While the major lines of this argumentation can already be derived from the preceding strains of analysis, all focusing on different fields for the production of difference and sameness, a few further case studies exploring sūdān attempts to locate themselves in the bīẓān universe are needed to fully grasp the present line of argumentation. A second step then will develop a synthesis able to explain the frequent parallelism of marking difference (which is most pronounced in the case of processes of segregation such as described above; p. 267-270), sūdān efforts to become like the bīẓān through the appropriation of symbolic goods (cf. p. 266f.), and the mastery of corresponding cultural practices (cf. p. 259-265).

Significations of Black and White

Asked about what constitutes the difference between sūdān and bīẓān, terms which are literally translated into "blacks" and "whites" by the francophone inhabitants of Mauritania, interviewees from both groups in the region of Achram-Diouk most often respond by saying that both are just the same. As it is a paradox to refer to two different entities, i.e. the "blacks" and the "whites", only to claim their sameness, these statements are complemented by the remark that the only difference is colour, but differences in colour are of no significance. Indeed, phenotype is one of the least reliable criteria for discerning bīẓān and sūdān. While in the present all seem to have become the same, differences among bīẓān and sūdān are manifest once the focus shifts to the past. Here perceptions of what marks difference between bīẓān and sūdān start to follow a distinct logic, depending on the speaker's affiliation.

> The sūdān are like the bīẓān, this is all the same, there is no separation between the two, there is no reason to do so. In former times everything was mixed. We were all together, made our tea together, ate together, slept together under one tent, *but everybody knew his status.* (Interview Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma, ḥassān, 31.10.1995; author's emphasis)

> We visited them [the sūdān] every year, at the time of harvest. Then every [bīẓān] family went there [to the adabay] to visit her family of sūdān, who gave them half of their harvest. And the bīẓān too, helped him [the sūdān], with goats, clothing, tea. . . . Today this no longer exists, *now everybody does his own work*. (Interview Yahya Ould Heime, ḥassān, 9.12.1995; author's emphasis)

Both bīẓān narrators stress that the sameness they attribute to bīẓān and sūdān resulted from their close interaction. Either they did everything together, or at least they had a more or less mutual relationship, in which complementary agricultural and pastoral products were exchanged. The changes which have occurred ever since seem to be minor, but nevertheless are made responsible for a new kind of difference. In the first case the sūdān may continue to live quite close to the bīẓān, but the basis on which the bīẓān

allowed them to be like themselves – the proper knowledge of one's status, and thus of difference – has crumbled away. The same forgetfulness has struck the sūdān of the second example. They no longer remember what related them to the bīẓān, and how they came to interact so closely with them. While the accounts reveal that in effect the sūdān became more like the bīẓān, i.e. more independent, they deny that this increased their "bīẓān-ness". Although the old distinctions and the paternalistic framework are no longer in place, the bīẓān continue to portray the sūdān as still being as much like the bīẓān as they ever had been. This demonstration of a half-hearted and complacent generosity of bīẓān towards their sūdān brethren reveals that describing themselves as a true part of the bīẓān is a major challenge for the sūdān, and has to take place in a narrow framework.

There is a wide range of discourses of sūdān in the region of Achram-Diouk on the previously stated likeness between them and the bīẓān. Sūdān and bīẓān are supposed to be alike because everybody knows his place in society, because there is no difference between the two but the phenotype, which has been created by Allah, because both cultivate, and finally because all Muslims are alike, and therefore there is no difference between ḥassān, zwāya, and all other status groups in bīẓān society. Some sūdān, however, when elucidating their point of view on my request, switched their discourse on this occasion. Instead of describing further patterns of sameness, they started to depict patterns of difference. The difference between bīẓān and sūdā n, which before had been described as non-existent, then turned out to be the difference between oppressors and oppressed (istʿammār), between bīẓān feeling superior, and sūdān feeling inferior, both united only in their ignorance.

How is it possible to make sense of these contradictions? James C. Scott (1990) suggests differentiating discourses of the oppressed into public and hidden transcripts: those destined to reproduce the point of view of the dominant people, and those speaking at face value, where both the thoughts and the knowledge of the dominated about power relations resurge, and account for resistance. Indeed many interviewees might have wondered what interest lay behind a great many of the absurd questions they had to answer. And despite my all-sūdān research team, many sūdān interviewees are likely to have felt unsure what kind of discourse this nasrāni (the common term for Christians in Mauritania, designating them as the people from Nazareth) wanted to get. Therefore they shifted the emphasis of their accounts whenever they had new assumptions about the state of mind of the researcher. Tempting though this approach is, and admitting that it focuses on the observation of discourses in different settings, it will be dismissed here. Taking up the interpretative framework distinguishing public and hidden discourses would lead into the dilemma of what interviewees were actually displaying: their mastery of the dominant discourse or their "false consciousness" (a term falsely ascribed to Karl Marx), or perhaps fitted neither category. In line with the criticism of Susan Gal (1995: 409), according to

which Scott "develops a notion of the natural (precultural, presemiotic) interacting self that is at odds with recent understandings about the role of linguistic ideologies and cultural conceptions in the production of self and emotion", the accounts will be seen as spontaneous utterances of a contradictory consciousness, which were created by a very unusual and dynamic conversation between the researcher, his assistant and the interviewees.[60] This mode of interaction, to a large extent alien to the local context, by raising different issues supposed to be interrelated, and thus actively shaping associations between topics, created a distinct framework within which the interviewees not only developed meaning, but also came to reflect on these meanings, and portray different and contradictory understandings of their social relations and practices.

These expressions of contradictory consciousness, the portrayal of both consent and resistance to dominant discourses, will be interpreted here from a point of view located in the tradition of Marxist approaches to a theory of consciousness (cf. Marx [1846] 1983b, especially p. 5-7 "Theses on Feuerbach"; Leontjew 1982), and concepts of hegemony building on the work of Antonio Gramsci ([1929-35] 1971). Social supremacy in this perspective manifests "itself in two forms: 'domination', which is realized through the coercive organs of the state, and 'intellectual and moral leadership', which is objectified in and exercised through the institutions of civil society, the ensemble of educational, religious and associational institutions. This latter form of supremacy constitutes hegemony." (Femia 1975: 30) Precolonial bīẓān society (as well as in many respects colonial and postcolonial Mauritanian society), fails to provide the multitude of institutionalised arenas of the production of consent which are essential to the constitution of a civil society, for which Gramsci developed his concept of hegemony (cf. Lewis 1992: 281). Nevertheless, besides coercion slave societies, and here especially those practising mainly household slavery such as the bīẓān, had to produce a modicum of social consent, and an ideology where there was a place for the slaves, and on which the slaves could rely to make – at least partially – sense of the world they lived in. Jonathon Glassman (1991, 1995), concerned with the analysis of slave resistance on the Swahili coast, gave an outline of how this relationship between the ideology of the oppressor and its partial incorporation by the oppressed could be configured:

> The quest for rebellious slave consciousness must therefore begin not with the depiction of a seamless ideology of domination that was uniformly rejected by slave rebels but with an understanding of the incoherent cultural idioms in which slaves and masters defined differing visions of the bonds that tied them. (Glassman1991: 288)

Drawing the attention back to the two bīẓān accounts introducing this chapter, it has to be noticed that their definition of the relationship between bīẓān and sūdān focused on the decay of what for them marks the decay of their practice, while simultaneously upholding the major assumption that the

sūdān are part of the bīẓān, because there is no difference between the two. By this statement, the bīẓān (much like the sūdān statements) blend both a discourse of paternalism and a discourse of domination. Both sūdān and bīẓān indicate that their ideological universe is not closed and coherent, but is composed of several and sometimes contradictory ideological strains.[61] The narratives and practices of identification presented so far show a great variety of means by which sūdān produce identity with and difference from the bīẓān. They reveal that there is no clear-cut opposition between sūdān seeking integration into bīẓān society and those rejecting it. Contrary to what Meskerem Brhane (1997a) concludes, the dominant mode of identification among sūdān in the perspective developed here is not marked by a dichotomising tendency which leads sūdān to either identify with the bīẓān, or with what is supposed to be ḥarāṭīn. Not only are the sūdān discourses full of ambiguities, but the bīẓān ones too. This, however, is not the reflection of a so-called "false consciousness", but of the lived experience of contradictory social relations, which underlies the formation of individual consciousness, a relationship Karl Marx ([1846] 1983b: 6) summed up in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach: "Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum inwohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse."[62]

Now taking up again the question to what extent the sūdān become integrated into present bīẓān society, and how both bīẓān and sūdān rationalise these attributions of difference and sameness, the outlined theoretical framework will be employed as a foil for the analysis of a distinct discursive practice. Accounts of one's origins are central not only to the definition of being bīẓān, but to localising oneself in the bīẓān social universe as well. Comparing slaves and former slaves' accounts of their genealogies with those of bīẓān means engaging in a battle on uneven ground. It is well known, and has already been outlined, that most sūdān lack the means of producing the same kind of lengthy genealogical charts as do – at least some – bīẓān. The sūdān also lack written chronicles and other means accounting for a glorious past in the same way as the bīẓān do. Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 101-161) brought to light how sūdān bypass these pitfalls. They subvert the bīẓān mode of referring to the past by putting mythical narratives of their collective origin in the place of the genealogical references telling of individual and tribal bīẓān origins. These insights open up the floor for an evaluation less interested in the plausibility of the individual account than the distinct modes by which origins are expressed by different actors.

Talking about what one is in bīẓān society, a member of a distinct tribe, a zwāya or ḥassān, an Arab etc., means talking about the past. This does not imply that each claim to being this or that will automatically be underpinned by a chronicle of the past. Rather the past becomes part of the present. Being a Legwāṭiṭ, i.e. a member of the Legwāṭiṭ tribe, implies that one's father had been so, as well as his father, and so on. In everyday discursive practice, however, these distinctions frequently collapse, and one and the same person

comes to be referred to as either father or grandfather, and narrators blend themselves with their ancestors. Indeed there is no need to maintain this distinction, for what one actually claims to be is considered to be the invariable essence of past generations' social being. Social position, in this perspective, has a primordial character, and cannot be changed (cf. Brhane 1997a: 105f.). It is this mode of producing social status affiliation that allows the maintenance of a rigid classification in a society with a considerable social mobility. Whenever in narratives of the past, present status can be intermingled with statuses of the past, and when present practices can be relayed to the past by confounding actors of the present with those of the past, then the present engages in shaping the past. Lively and controversial discussions of family histories (cf. Brhane 1997a: 105) thus reflect the ongoing process by which the past is made to match up with the present and its needs. These ambiguities in the genealogical imagination mean that a profound knowledge of one's family history (be it contested or not) remains the most crucial cultural material. New emphases added to bīẓān narratives of origins have to be subtle not to endanger their legitimacy, and in turn can only be apprehended on the basis of a knowledge extending from the present to the past.[63]

Talking about origins, however, implies more than just family history and individual social status. The links created by filiation, which make up the core of family genealogies, are the same which link the individual to those social bodies providing group solidarity, i.e. the tribes, virtual communities of awlād ʿamm (descendants of father-brothers).[64] Further patrilineal filiation links the individual, and by shared ancestors whole groups, to Arab origins, and from there back to the descendants of the prophet Muhammad. According to this ideology, already analysed by Ibn Khaldun, the famous 14th century North African scholar and pioneer of modern social sciences, common ancestry is a necessary element of group solidarity, but does not by itself create it. What it needs is the development of an esprit de corps, the ʿaṣabiya, which will only become fully effective if it takes into account common ancestry, and makes of it a means of identification (cf. Hamès 1987: 111; Ibn Khaldun 1992: 78f.).[65] The notion of origin in the context of Arab societies, as this short overview reveals, is closely intertwined with the notion of sharing ancestors. These multiple dimensions of what makes up an origin are revealed by the Arab term nasab. Used by Ibn Khaldun to designate those relations by blood essential to the development of a common identity, and thus as the complement of the ʿaṣabiya, nasab is commonly translated as filiation or genealogy (cf. Bonte/Conte 1991: 39; Conte 1987). However, like many Arab terms, this one too has a multitude of readings. According to Hans Wehr (1976: 959) these are lineage, descent, origin and kinship.

This multi-dimensionality of notions like nasab and ʿaṣabiya means that they can be employed with quite different meanings in different contexts. The notion of ʿaṣabiya thus came to signify several distinct levels of solidarity in the discourses of bīẓān and sūdān in the region of Achram-Diouk. Building upon a basic meaning of "tendon", ʿaṣabiya was designated as being

that which holds something tightly together.[66] Thus it could mean solidarity on varying levels, ranging from unions, or else diyya (blood-money) paying groups at tribal (or infra or supra-tribal) level,[67] or it meant a group of patrilineal affiliates comprising between five or six generations (sometimes more), and thus sharing reciprocal rights of inheritance.[68] The meaning of the term nasab in the local context shifted slightly away from the common translation too. It thus came to designate first of all "status", i.e. the quality of belonging to a distinct and recognised family (literally a "great tent"). This does not contradict the inherent idea of nasab meaning to relate oneself to the past through genealogical ties, but relays this reference onto a collective level, i.e. the status a whole group has achieved. However, the question of one's nasab did not lead interviewees to describe their individual affiliation to these status groups, but raised only discourses in which the interviewees claimed to be a part of those groups they considered to make up their status identity.

Distinct family genealogies, in turn, were not directly associated with matters of status or nobility, but described as representing the interviewees' ʿaṣabiya. The gap between these two modes of referring to the past by individual filiation was meant to be closed by a third notion, that of aṣl. Also incorporating a whole universe of divergent meanings in standard Arabic (root, trunk (of a tree), origin, source, cause, reason, descent, lineage, stock foundation; Wehr 1976), it was meant to represent a personal origin (Khalifa Ould Kebab), but also has the notion of genealogical and ethnic origin (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1988: 21). In fact the differentiation between nasab and aṣl rarely did work out, and some interviewees (both bīẓān and sūdān) used nasab and aṣl interchangeably.[69] It thus can be assumed that both terms, though with different emphasis, represent the two meanings inherent also to the English notion of origin, namely ancestry and parentage on the one hand, and origin, source, inception and root on the other hand (cf. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1997).

Already this short outline of three terms central to the understanding of tribal identity formation reveals that their proper use needs a very good command of Arabic. This the sūdān are most likely not to have, and it was among sūdān (though there are probably numbers of bīẓān too) that I encountered interviewees checking what was meant by asking about "aṣl" (ḥassāniyya: aṣelan šenhu?). Nevertheless with many interviewees, the issue of "origins" could be discussed, and the statements they made in this context revealed some differences between sūdān and bīẓān in their respective reasoning about who had been one's ascendants and of whom one is part today. According to one of the most elaborate bīẓān statements the origin of most tribes in the region of Achram-Diouk is among the Qurayš, the tribe of the prophet (cf. Busse 1989: 17f.), to whom most local tribes are supposed to be linked by the fraction of the Bani Umayat (the Idawʿlš are designated as tracing their link via Bou Bakkar ben Amar, the Almoravid leader to Ḥimyar, and thus to the Qurayš).[70] All awlād ʿamm, i.e. all members of the (bīẓān) tribes – according to this view – are considered to have an Arab aṣl (origin)

and to share the same forebears (ḥassāniyya: nasabu wāḥid ; i.e. one genealogy). Both ḥassān and zwāya thus are equal from the point of view of their common Arab forefathers, and the difference among them arose only from their choice of different occupations (warrior versus religious scholar; Interview Bettarmo Ould Cheikh, zwāya, 8.2.1996).[71] While this account reproduces to a significant extent the common myth about the foundation of bīẓān society, according to which the once united society became divided into different statuses according to their respective occupations, it excludes all groups which are not ḥassān or zwāya. Thus neither the znāga nor the ḥarāṭīn, both of whom are seen as constituting the workers of traditional bīẓān society, are classified as having Arab antecedants. Mythical narratives of the origin of the division of bīẓān society into three different status groups were more generous in this respect. Pierre Amilhat (1937: 45) reported local traditions of the Tagant, according to which it was the Almoravid leader Bou Bakkar ben Amar who took the initiative of dividing his followers into noble warriors, clerics, and those people charged with working. The division between all major groups, including the workers, according to this account, thus was by work, and not by distinct ethnic origin.[72]

The notion of origin, which in the broadest sense implied claiming Arab ancestry, generally was detailed by bīẓān by referring to their tribal affiliation. This identity marker was designed in most cases to tell as much about one's status (aṣl) as one's ancestry (nasab), and thus revealed yet one more time the close interrelationship between these two notions. This insight was put in nutshell by a ḥassān intellectual (Interview Sid Mohamed Oud Dey, 27.8.1995) by stating "The tribe is the origin."[73] This point of view, the bīẓān practice of locating one's origin within the tribe, is not shared by sūdān. For them – and here the interviewed sūdān were quite unanimous – their origin is from the kwār, the black African ethnic groups. This origin, as one ḥarāṭīn interviewee noted, may not be considered a good origin, but at least one respected as such. For sūdān it thus is better to have a kwār origin than none (Interview Brahim Ould Soueilim, 26.8.1995). A second point peculiar to sūdān origins is that they usually trace decent by the matrilineage. Thus one slave woman reported her mother to have been from the Awlād Mbarek, where she had come to as a kūri, i.e. as a member of a black African ethnic group (Interview Moime Mint El Abd, 26.12.1995). Claiming the inheritance of an independent status is also said by many sūdān to have been passed on to them by their mothers and not their fathers. This applies to sūdān claiming to have had ḥarāṭīn ancestors for generations, as well as sūdān who deny the legitimacy of their slave estate. In the former case, a ḥarṭāni claimed that his mothers had all been ḥarāṭīn, while he did not want to affirm this status for all of his forefathers, who thus were ejected from the family genealogy.[74] The legitimacy of a freeman's status was additionally underscored by describing one of his foremothers as having been a znāga woman.[75] These, though socially despised too, were at least known to have definitely no links with servile estate. The construction of origins by a descendant of a slave woman

who had adopted parts of the ḥarāṭīn political discourse was different. To him his grandmother had been a Bambara, an origin he assumed to apply to all sūdān in the region of Achram Diouk. As a kūri,[76] he argued, this woman had been free, and therefore all of her descendants were free too (Interview Bekkai Ould Elemine, 20.12.1995).[77] The lack of a definition of origins in tribal terms applies even to those sūdān who claim most forcefully to have no slave past, the ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. For one of them, as well as another sūdān, their origin was among the ḥarāṭīn, i.e. among the free people. This distinct status, however, was not stressed to mark difference from the bīẓān, but from sūdān supposed to be tent-slaves (nānme),[78] and hence to display the corresponding behavioural patterns.[79]

The almost demonstrative location of their origin among the black African ethnic groups, and here almost always among the Bambara, seems to contradict the point of view held by most sūdān that there is no difference between them and the bīẓān other than their different phenotype. However, that sūdān think of themselves as being bīẓān, while they are well aware that their origin is alien to this society, only reflects once again their very condition. They are acculturated to bīẓān society, and thus constitute a part of it, but can still be recognised and referred to as a group apart, which is distinct from the bīẓān (among other factors) by origin. This insight is rationalised by Brahim, whom we know to have contracted manumission for himself and parts of his family with his former master, and to have attended bīẓān teaching of the Qur'ān.

Author: Did you pay for your manumission?
Brahim: Yes I did, I paid only the zakāt and the vaṭra,[80] this means what is comprised by what one calls walā' [clientage/patronage; cf. p. 264].
Author: Do you still pay it?
Brahim: Yes.
Author: And you agreed about this matter with your master?
Brahim: Yes, completely. You know, we now have become the same, we now are aṣabi, we share the same ʿaṣabiya [close solidarity among people having a common ancestor],[81] he manumitted the whole family, and I was the first among them.
Author: And what is your origin [aṣl]?
Brahim: aṣelak? My aṣl [origin] is only ḥarāṭīn. What do you mean by this? I know very well that I have been a slave, but now I am free. But the origin, any slave has a father and a mother, so this is one origin.[82] Look, what is important to me is that I am Mauritanian. What has been before does not interest me. That I once was a slave, that I remained a slave until I became manumitted, and that I now am a free man like everybody else. If I want to investigate my origin scrupulously, then I will perhaps be able to find a kūri, and be a kūri.[83] But [instead of] a kūri, I prefer to be a bīẓān. I know very well that my origin comes from the kwār, but the only thing important to me is to be a bīẓān, to be free.
Author: Can't you get a bīẓān origin?

> *Brahim:* The difference is only the colour, this is of no importance. I am like the bīẓān. I ask you. Am I kūri? Am I a šarīv? These often are black [of black phenotype]. The colour is not important, you can also see light-coloured slaves.

The past that takes the shape of "origins" – this is made obvious by Brahim's narrative – is of little interest to former slaves who wish to integrate themselves into bīẓān society. Indeed, they, like everybody else in bīẓān society, assume the origin of the overwhelming majority of sūdān to be among the black African ethnic groups. But the ties to these societies are cut off for the sūdān, and they shall remain so, because going back to these roots has no advantage for the individual sūdān. This does not mean that sūdān generally are not interested in the question where they come from. One sūdān interviewee told me his father had managed to find out his ancestors among the kwār, to have gone there and been welcomed. Nevertheless he returned to the Tagant, for it was the place his family lived, and he found it to be his home (Interview Bekkai Ould Elemine, ḥarāṭīn, 20.12.1995). That slaves, now, after generations of acculturation to bīẓān society, are aware of making a choice about where they want to belong to is revealed by another case. Having talked about her (female) ancestors, of whom she knew quite a lot, a sūdān woman concluded that these, her origins, were of no interest to her, for all that mattered now was to be a Lʿaweysyāt, i.e. a member of the tribe she had been affiliated to through her slave past (Interview Moime Mint El Abd, ʿabd, 26.12.1995).

Talking about one's origin, i.e. talking about one's genealogy, is an ambiguous issue for sūdān. It is important for them because it demonstrates their ability to master idioms central to bīẓān culture and society, it proves that slave descendants and subordinated groups are able to express themselves in the language of the superiors. Adopting the masters' language, however, also means absorbing some of the ideas it is designed to communicate (cf. Glassman 1991: 312; 1995). Speaking of their origins thus is for the sūdān also an experience and reinforcement of their exclusion from bīẓān society. The outcome of these discourses reveals itself to be of no use for sūdān, other than to distinguish themselves from the bīẓān. In this respect the sūdān living in the region of Achram-Diouk seem to have made their choice long ago: they want to take part in bīẓān society, and their struggle focuses on getting equal rights, and becoming like the bīẓān. This unanimous will for integration, which contradicts in some respects the conclusions on ḥarāṭīn identity formation drawn by Meskerem Brhane (1997a, b),[84] does not mean the same to all sūdān. By far not all of them are interested in becoming as closely associated with the bīẓān as Brahim is. Many want to gain autonomy, and live at a distance from the bīẓān. Therefore, besides the production of similarity between bīẓān and sūdān, there is room for marking difference. While social evolution is starting to blur major social differentiations such as the distinctions between zwāya, ḥassān and znāga, and environmental and

economic developments mean that the vast majority of rural residents are subject to and live in almost the same desperate conditions, there is also a new social space for the articulation of difference between sūdān and bīẓān opening up. As has been shown, especially with regard to the development of a "ḥarāṭīn work ethic" (cf. p. 265f.), these struggles for differentiation are taking a new shape. Rather than opposing bīẓān and sūdān within a hierarchical order, these new demarcations represent a challenge to the definition not only of what it means to be a bīẓān, but what it means to be a good, i.e. non-ignorant and modern member not only of bīẓān, but Mauritanian society.

Chapter 9
Where Do They Go To?

The end of slavery in Mauritania – as this analysis shows – has not yet been accomplished, and the master-slave relations of dependency have proved to be of a longevity which is intriguing in itself. However, those patterns and practices of slavery that still persist do not account for the continuation of an archaic social order in Mauritania. Any such assertion misses the point about social change in this country, and – perhaps even more important – shows a lack of respect for those it professes to speak for, namely former slaves and slaves. These are not just passive victims of their brutal masters, but take an active part in shaping the master-slave relations. In focusing on these relations, this book has, it is hoped, succeeded in elucidating major aspects of the many more or less subtle differentiations characterising the slave condition and allowing to discriminate against both slaves and freed slaves.

In this respect it could be shown that relations of domination were not uniform, but differed in many respects. Gender and patterns of work appeared to be among the most significant variables in this respect. To own slave women was until recently – and in some cases continues to be – more important to bīẓān masters and mistresses than to possess slave men. Work far from the tent of the masters, which most often was men's work, allowed for greater liberties than work close to the tent, which was considered to be the women's domain. While slave men were able to acquire skills in their respective occupations which gave them a distinct value as labourers, slave women performed their tasks under the direct observation and guidance of the mistresses. Historic evolution too accounts for changes in the nature of bīẓān slavery. Although historical accounts of the situation of slaves in former centuries are few, it can be assumed that slavery had been well established in the pastoral nomadic western Sahara for centuries. Within this household slavery, slaves to a great extent performed almost the same tasks, and did a great deal of the work that until recently marked life in rural Mauritania. They worked as household maids, herders, and cultivators. Nevertheless bīẓān slavery changed its shape throughout the centuries. As extrapolations on the development of the different slave trades both within and beyond of sub-Saharan Africa suggest, the number of slaves in bīẓān society rose considerably in the course of the 19th century. This evolution allowed the bīẓān to deepen and extend complementary patterns of production within their

society, namely pastoralism and agriculture, which were linked by master-slave relations.

Slaves and ḥarāṭīn did experience major social deprivation, among which the exclusion from parentage, and often from major social practices like marriages, were the hardest to bear. Slaves were very well conscious of this situation and they offered resistance. Taking resistance as an analytical category, however, is an ambivalent issue. Any such project is at risk of over-interpreting the actions of the subordinated, or of narrowing the focus of what is understood as resistance in such a way that the often subtle expressions of slaves and ḥarāṭīn would hardly fall into this category (cf. Rubin 1995).[1] Slave resistance as such therefore is not the issue of this discussion. Rather it has tried to unravel how the different constituents of bīẓān society placed themselves in different configurations of hierarchy and dependency. For the slaves and ḥarāṭīn, the issue of these different configurations was symbolised by their struggle for a place in bīẓān society. Both discourses and practices producing social spaces and attributing them to different social strata have been analysed. This undertaking involved a number of different levels, such as individual biographic narratives, the question of land tenure, and discourses on sūdān identity with and difference from bīẓān society. Based on interpretations of the theory of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci ([1929-35] 1971), it could be revealed that there are no homogeneous interpretations of their world by the subservient strata in bīẓān society. The vast majority of their attitudes continue to express both their wish for integration into bīẓān society and their knowledge (and to some extent their wish too) to be different from the bīẓān.

By this characterisation of what sūdān identify with, the present analysis contrasts with the conclusions drawn with regard to processes of ḥarāṭīn identity formation in Nouakchott by Meskerem Brhane (1997a,b). According to the latter, ḥarāṭīn develop a number of different attitudes of what it means to be ḥarāṭīn. The range of these identities ranges from identifying being ḥarāṭīn with being bīẓān up to defining both groups as antagonistic. In the perspective developed in the preceding chapter, these ḥarāṭīn identifications can be understood as further differentiating, and even accentuating the logic which produces jointly both difference and identity among bīẓān and sūdān. Much of this issue concerns how to determine bīẓān-ness and ḥarāṭīn-ness. In the present work a great emphasis has been laid on the point that sūdān struggle to *become like the bīẓān, but not to become bīẓān*. This argument was underscored by the sūdān's knowledge of their black African origins, and their knowledge of the implication this has for possible claims of a different origin being accepted by other sūdān and bīẓān. Certainly the strongest argument raised by Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 101ff.) is the existence of mythical narratives which are shared by bīẓān and sūdān and tell of a non-slave origin of either all ḥarāṭīn or of a distinct group of ḥarāṭīn. Claiming that there are ḥarāṭīn without a slave past, however, is a topic encountered also in the region of Achram-Diouk (the case of the ḥarāṭīn of

the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed). Beyond the deconstruction of this supposedly better status with regard to major domains like e.g. land tenure (cf. p. 236-241), all claims for a distinct ḥarāṭīn status are simply a variation on how sūdān struggle for better status ascription within the complementary differential bīẓān-sūdān. As to their nature, the discourses of a free ancestor differ only slightly from those portrayed in the preceding chapter.[2] These blamed slavery for having no origin, and underlined the illegitimate nature of this institution, which was supposed to result from the enslavement of free kwār (i.e. members of black African ethnic groups).[3] But while sūdān claiming a kwār ancestry face few problems in getting their position to be recognised as legitimate, those ḥarāṭīn who individually want to trace an ancestry among the unrightfully enslaved bīẓān will remain subject to suspicion from either sūdān or bīẓān. To effectively change sides, and thus live a new identity is a matter of acquiring consent on this issue not only among the bīẓān but among the sūdān too.[4] The former indeed in some cases were willing to integrate sūdān, i.e. to make bīẓān out of them. In such cases they were also ready to provide the necessary ideological background (like e.g. an origin which could be traced to a znāga woman), but on occasion they could also withdraw this support.[5] The sūdān, however, were unlikely to forget as quickly as that about the past of these suddenly "whitened blacks", and they perhaps are even less so today,[6] when sūdān discourses are gaining a greater public than they had done in former times.[7] The sticky nature of a slave past is even felt by people who emerged from the sūdān, and whose career enabled them to be accepted as equals by bīẓān on probably the ultimate level, namely by marrying a bīẓān women. Lastly, the most limiting factor to becoming bīẓān may not even result from social control by either bīẓān or sūdān, but is likely to arise from the internalisation of a deep concern about this issue which many of those sūdān who have effectively managed to rise to the highest ranks of society seem unable to overcome (cf. McDougall 1988: 384; Meskerem Brhane, personal communication).

When insisting so penetratingly on the longevity and indelibility of a real or assumed slave past, one is at great risk of essentialising social categories, and attributing to them a primordial and immutable nature. Indeed the present argumentation may be perceived as one stating in essence that one who has once been a slave will always be recognised as such. This is neither the case, nor the argument developed here. Rather the point is that the nature of one's origins continues to be a decisive element, marking sameness and difference, inclusion and exclusion in the discourses on identity in bīẓān society. Processes of identification, which here are understood as a set of practices, rely on this cultural material of the past to produce those differences that shape the boundaries constituting the imagined "identity". Identity formation as a differentiation between "us" and "them" is thus not an autonomous process, but results from interaction not only within the symbolic borders, but across these (cf. Hall 1996; Schlee 1994b). Taking up Norbert Elias' (1990) notion of social configurations, changing patterns of identification

take place in a social context where the shift of one position affects the relations of all others. Changing social identity means challenging given configurations of social power. Thus shifting from a ḥarāṭīn identity to a bīẓān one involves both the ḥarāṭīn we-group and the bīẓān we-group, and demands that both achieve consent on the new configuration. Shifting among identities, which like "bīẓān" and "ḥarāṭīn" are representations of a hierarchical order, means engaging in the mutual redefinition of these categories. For the bīẓān, the very act of accepting the inclusion of – this here is taken for granted – people known before as ḥarāṭīn or ʿabīd means redrawing exactly that boundary which defines bīẓān first of all as non-ḥarāṭīn and non-ʿabīd. Maintaining the fiction of this boundary being impermeable thus is constitutive of both bīẓān and ḥarāṭīn identities.

Processes of identity formation by status groups within a sharply stratified society, where until recently the range of hierarchy not only differentiated members of the society, but extended to discrimination against many of its constituting elements as non-social beings, comprise both typical elements of identification processes and distinct features. In the perspective of the current analysis, the issue of identification among sūdān, i.e. ḥarāṭīn and ʿabīd, has emerged less as one of shifting between either a bīẓān or a ḥarāṭīn identity, like those switches observed with regard to ethnic identities (cf. Schlee 1989), but as engaged in redefining these essentially social categories. Processes of identification for sūdān have a major goal; they aim at their constitution as social beings and at economic promotion. Therefore members of the subordinate strata have developed two major strategies. Either they stress the *difference in identity* of the ḥarāṭīn vis-à-vis the bīẓān, meaning that though different in origin, the ḥarāṭīn as a result of acculturation have become like the bīẓān and thus have to share equal rights, or they express *identity in difference*, which means that as a distinct ethnic or better we-group, the ḥarāṭīn are equal members of Mauritanian society, and in this respect have to be granted rights of participation by the dominating bīẓān. Both concepts in effect are like two sides of the same coin. Both serve as legitimation for claiming more or less radically the participation in the power of a distinct group, called the ḥarāṭīn, which effectively comprises a variety of subordinated groups (subsumed under the designation sūdān throughout this book). Though the first discourse puts great emphasis on describing how the ḥarāṭīn are like the bīẓān, and effectively leads some of its proponents to describe themselves first of all as bīẓān, it does not question the distinction between bīẓān and ḥarāṭīn (or else sūdān). Rather it acknowledges it as the basis for an integration of ḥarāṭīn into bīẓān society, which grants them rights to participation and economic resources. This political project, like the second one, adds a new facet to the meaning of bīẓān identity. According to the first concept of difference in identity, being bīẓān comes to mean two different things. Either only those who have bīẓān ancestors appear as bīẓān, or all people sharing the ḥassāniyya language and bīẓān cultural practices. While the first definition proposes a closed mode of membership, where belonging

to the bīẓān can hardly be extended beyond those people linked by blood, the latter perspective embraces an open mode. A modern, cultural definition of bīẓān as an ethnic group fits into this latter scheme in so far as it leaves room for the assimilation of strangers.[8] The sūdān can achieve advantages from this antagonism whenever they juxtapose both perspectives, and become able to switch between their social inclusion and exclusion. A different strategy is pursued by the concept of identity in difference. Within this framework genealogical affiliation is acknowledged to be the single hallmark of being bīẓān, and the sūdān appear as a distinct group, which can no longer be incorporated by the bīẓān.[9] The objective in both models, however, remains the same. Activists of both discursive strains seek participation and benefits within the bīẓān dominated Mauritanian society on the basis of what then becomes positive discrimination with regard to "ḥarāṭīn" (for a discussion of such patterns of identification refer to Schlee 1996).

This general orientation of the sūdān towards an integration into bīẓān society is to a large extent the result of the generations of acculturation both ḥarāṭīn and ʿabīd living today in Mauritania have as their historical and cultural background. Recently this trend – manifest already in the first years of independent Mauritania – became heavily intensified. Under the rule of Mauritania's first president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah, power in the state had been distributed between the bīẓān elite and the elites of the different black African ethnic groups, the Halpulaar'en, Soninké and Wolof, according to a more or less fixed quota.[10] The military regimes, and later on president Maouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, changed this system. The access some ḥarāṭīn were granted to high positions in the government were achieved to the disadvantage of the representation in power of the black African ethnic groups (cf. Brhane 1997a: 314; Ould Cheikh 1994a: 34).

The most decisive turn towards an "ethnic" bipolarity in Mauritania, and the discrimination against the black African ethnic groups occurred in 1989, when about 200 members of black African ethnic groups were killed in the course of bloody riots on "Black Tuesday". These riots had been triggered off by an incident in the Senegal river valley among Mauritanian and Senegalese members of black African ethnic groups. The conflict escalated quickly. A number of bīẓān shops in some Senegalese towns were looted and a few days later bloody riots, targeting all supposed "Senegalese", and hence black Africans, started in the Mauritanian towns and in the Senegal river valley.[11] In Senegal it was in turn the bīẓān minority which became increasingly the target of violence articulated in ethnic terms. In an international airlift 100,000 so-called Senegalese living in Mauritania and 100,000 bīẓān living in Senegal were repatriated. In addition in the Senegal river valley another estimated 100,000 Mauritanian black Africans were forced to leave the country. The governments of both countries, rather than seeking mediation, joined in the conflict and in early January 1990 were close to declaring war. International mediation under the aegis of the secretary general of the United Nations (UN), Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and the president of the Organisation

of African Unity (OAU), Hosni Mubarak, finally succeeded in preventing a further escalation of the conflict and re-establishing negotiations. A decisive step towards regular relations between both countries was taken on 18 July 1991, with the decision to resume diplomatic relations between both countries and to reopen the borders (cf. Magistro 1993: 203ff.; Clausen 1994b: 249ff.).[12] As in riots before, e.g. in 1966 on the occasion of demonstrations sparked off by black African pupils, "ḥarāṭīn" built up street gangs chasing, beating and killing black Africans (cf. De Chassey 1984: 392ff.; Baduel 1989: 26f.).[13]

How far the balance of power has shifted further to the detriment of the different black African groups, and in favour of the bīẓān ensemble, now probably composed more tightly than ever of all strata of this society, may be understood from the growing number of members of the low strata of the black African ethnic groups who now claim descent from ḥarāṭīn who had once been enslaved by black Africans (cf. Brhane 1997a: 321). This trend is also one towards the Arabisation of Mauritanian society, which had its onset already shortly after independence, when a shift to Arabic was promoted to the detriment of French (and the languages of the black African ethnic groups) in the educational system. A number of compromises on the issue turned out to have been concluded mainly to appease the black African communities, rather than grant them a stronger recognition of their languages. Since 1992 the Arabisation of major branches of the education system[14] and of parts of the administration increased further. As not only French-educated, but also black Africans trained in Arabic countries are discriminated against, tensions between the two ethnic groups continue to be fuelled (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1994: 147f.; Sall 1999 : 92f.). At present this trend towards a confrontation in ethnic terms seems to have passed its climax. In April 1999 a reform, the outcome of which will have to be watched carefully, was launched, reinstalling French as Mauritania's standard language for the instruction of mathematics and natural sciences.[15]

In the light of these events it is no wonder that in mid 1995 a number of Fulbe Aynaabe[16] founded an association called "Association Nationale de l'Amitié et du Retour aux Origines" (ANARO), supposed to propagate the truth about Fulbe origins, meant to be their supposed Arab origin (the Fulbe Aynaabe are part of the Halpulaar'en, a designation for all speakers of the Pulaar language). In late 1995 the ANARO made more explicit their point of view by publishing a document dismissing all of the many visions of Fulbe origins contradicting their claim for an Arab origin of the Fulbe. While the undertaking is still highly controversial within the Mauritanian Halpulaar'en community,[17] this recent step forward by one (minor) faction deeply involved in both Arab and Islamic culture clearly indicates that disintegration is becoming a concern for this largest black African ethnic group in Mauritania. Like numbers of leaders of the political opposition, who in this period opted to change sides and joined the party in power (PRDS)[18], the members of the Fulbe Aynaabe in question opted for rallying, in ethnic terms, round

the bīẓān controlling the power in place (cf. Le Calame, nº 120, 26.12.1995: 5; and nº 123, 13.1.1996: 3; Sall 1999).

While the general direction of where Mauritania is heading to is thus outlined, the question of how the sūdān, i.e. the ḥarāṭīn and ʿabīd, will take part in this process remains open. Here parallels can be seen with the case of the Sudan, where slavery was alive and well up to this century too. There the vigorous Sudanese nationalism provided a basis on which slave emancipation and integration into society developed faster than in Mauritania. Nevertheless, descendants of slaves long remained a stigmatised group, marked by distinct cultural and religious practices. The former slaves practices of a self-demarcation from the dominant and enslaving Arabs that developed as a response to this continued social discrimination went into a significant decline, and their meanings became partially reinterpreted when the country's north-south conflict was intensified. The growing emphasis laid on the difference between the Arab-Islamic north and the Christian-Animist black African south paved the way for an homogenisation of the northerners in terms of shared cultural values, and hence the integration and assimilation of the slave descendants (cf. Makris 1996; Sikainga 1996).[19]

In the rural areas of Mauritania, there actually seems to be no real impediment to the resurgence of tribes as territorial and political entities. However, as has been demonstrated, this process is far from reproducing the past. Though still alive, the relations of power between bīẓān and sūdān are in a process of transformation. While difference continues to be marked in several domains, this appears also to provide the basis for a stronger integration of the sūdān into bīẓān society, and the attribution of more autonomy to the former subservient strata. Thus, as could be witnessed at Achram, even those sūdān who are among the most fervent propagators of the ḥarāṭīn cause, are able to engage in violent conflicts, opposing "their" tribe to another one.[20] Another indicator for the continuation of this kind of due integration into bīẓān society as clients comes from the fact that many sūdān who have not yet received an official manumission by their masters still continue to pay for the formal act of their liberation. Prices vary, and in quite a few cases may have a more or less symbolic value, but those cases where sūdān have to pay considerable sums are still frequent. As recently as 1993 three brothers agreed to build a house for their master, corresponding to a value of about 100,000 UM (approximately US$750 at that time), and in turn received contracted manumission in the presence of a qāḍi and several witnesses. A sūdān woman received manumission in compensation for working for one year without payment as a housemaid, labour that was worth a sum of 24-36,000 UM, for her freedom alone.[21]

Another factor which will have a decisive influence on the shape of the future bīẓān and Mauritanian society, and especially for the future of collective action by the sūdān, is the evolution of Islam.[22] Like most other predominantly Muslim societies, Mauritania is witnessing a strengthening of Islamist groups and discourses at present. This issue was merely glanced at in

the present analysis, for this would have meant embarking on a subject worth its own extensive evaluation (on this topic refer to Stone 1994, forthcoming; Boubrik 1998, 1999). Islam in Mauritania, which has long been shaped by the traditions of zwāya scholarship, is currently undergoing major changes, among them a secularisation of religious knowledge and learning. Although there are numbers of dispossessed bīẓān who profit from this evolution, the turn towards a less hierarchical version of Islam above all works in favour of the sūdān. Islamist interpretations, denouncing the unfitting behaviour of the powerful, and proclaiming salvation to come from the individual's efforts to comply with practices they believe to be demanded of a good Muslim, are undoubtedly opening up one of the most important arenas for the development of a distinct identity, uniting the disadvantaged (both sūdān and bīẓān) against the Mauritanian establishment. However, until now, and especially in the rural context, the grip of the traditional religious elite remains tight.

In summer 1995 an Islamist activist was transferred to work at the development project at Debissa near Achram. Soon after having arrived there, religious life in the very small village was thrown into turmoil. A mosque was installed in a small building, and – and this is still revolutionary in rural Mauritania – a muezzin, amplifying his voice with a megaphone, started calling the believers to prayer on a regular basis. Among sūdān, and here above all among those already concerned with behaving as a good Muslim, the new mosque became a point of great attraction, and hours were spent there in the evening after the prayer, taking part in long discussions.[23] A short time later, a number of activists arrived from Nouakchott, and started to disseminate their view of Islam on a greater scale in different villages. However, after some weeks, the megaphone remained mute for a while, only to reappear on an irregular basis, and then used by a group of young men. Among the sūdān, the initial euphoria had subsided considerably in the meantime. Asked why they no longer attended the mosque they answered that it was no longer a place for serious men to go to, because now it had become occupied by children "kidding around". In fact, much more had changed. The propagators of the Islamist cause, driven in from Nouakchott, had put the visitors to the mosque under a lot of pressure to join the long recitations of propaganda they added to the evening prayer. Work at home, like the milking of animals, thus had been postponed, probably causing annoyance among the women, who saw their men abstaining from their duties. A little later the cultivation season began, and almost all sūdān moved out of the village to live under the tent close to their fields. While going to the mosque to pray had meant no great effort as long as it demanded only a few hundred metres' walk, it became a considerable time-constraint on cultivation and pastoral activities when for this end more than just a couple of kilometres had to be crossed by foot. However, this practical problem, of which the Islamist activist was aware, was but one element which eased the process of raising reservations towards this new practice of Islam. Soon after the appearance of the Islamist activists on the local scene, several important

marabouts from the Tagant made a visit to Achram, and obviously called the deviants to order.[24]

These last remarks reveal but two aspects which set the question of the emancipation of former slaves in a wider context, allowing comparative perspectives to develop. Indeed in recent times interest has grown not only in the Mauritanian ḥarāṭīn and ʿabīd (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais/Brhane/Ruf forthcoming; Bonte 1998b), but also in other slave and former slave groups within the societies of the Sahelian band and in Africa. At present, besides the work of Makris (1996) and Sikainga (1996) on the emancipation of slaves and former slaves in Sudan, a number of studies on different Tuareg communities (cf. Waibel 1998), on former slaves of the Fulbe in northern Benin (cf. Hardung 1998 and forthcoming) and on the current situation of slaves and former slaves of the Tuareg, the bīẓān and the Fulbe (cf. Botte 1999) focus on this issue. A broad scope of case studies, reconsidering the issue of slavery not only in the context of African societies is provided by Botte (2000). New studies focusing on the impact of colonial rule on systems of slavery (Klein 1998) have also been developed in the field of the history of slavery in Africa and provide a number of case studies from West, North and East Africa (cf. Klein/Miers 1999). This growing scholarly attention, of which the present book is a part, is to be welcomed, as the issue of persisting relations of hierarchy and dependency is an important factor shaping the present and future of many African societies.

Notes

Preface

1 Slavery was abolished de jure in 1903 as a consequence of the French colonisation of Mauritania, in 1961 when the universal declaration of human rights of the United Nations was ratified by independent Mauritania, and finally on 5 July 1980, when Colonel Ould Haidalla, then leader of the military committee for national salvation, declared slavery to be abolished. Legislation for this last abolition was passed as ordinance nº 81.234 on 9 November 1981 and included a stipulation that masters who freed their slaves should be compensated (cf. Mauritanie Nouvelles, nº 235, 23.1.1997: 7f.).

2 Public concern over the issue of slavery in Mauritania is actually greatest in France, the former colonial power in Mauritania, and the USA: examples in recent articles decrying the persistence of Moorish, i.e. bīẓān, slavery are Mercer (1982); Salondon (1983); Paringaux (1990); Jacobs/Athie (1994); Diallo (1995); French (1996); Montefiori (1996); Burkett (1997), and finally more tempered views presented by Hecht (1997) and Daddah (1998).

3 Traditional forms of servitude also survive in other areas, such as many parts of south-east Asia, or India, where bondage persists (cf. Klein 1993b: 26).

4 Indeed the notion of slavery is not altogether dead, but it is often used metaphorically today to compare living conditions of distinct groups and individuals with what are commonly assumed to have been slaves' living conditions. There is a bitter irony in the fact that today children from Mauritania become subjected to such modern types of exploitation. They are employed as jockeys for the camel races in the oil-exporting countries of the gulf, where they live more or less without payment, while their job of riding camels at the highest speed is an excessively dangerous one. Once they become too big for this task they are sent back home.

5 Among others Frederick Cooper (1979: 105) voiced this reproach to Africanists studying slavery. In the quest for an African, emic description able to contrast African slavery with slavery in the Americas, they reproduced the ideology of the elites. Recently the UNESCO "Slave Route" Project, inaugurated on 1 September 1994 at the old slaving port of Ouidah in today's Bénin, put the systematic study of the reciprocal influences the

Atlantic slave trade had on Africa and the Americas on the agenda (cf. Lovejoy 1997).

6 Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1995: 28ff. and 1997: 587, note 1) recently suggested applying Louis Dumont's (1966) theories on social hierarchy to bīẓān society, and hence concluded that belonging to hierarchically stratified status groups in this society is not perceived as disgraceful, unconscious, or rejected but is a social classification adopted voluntarily by this society. This definition begs the question of how such consent achieves hegemony in society and whether there are any groups contesting it.

7 Mauritanie-Net@Home.Ease.Lsoft.com

8 The Mauritanian NGO SOS-esclaves defines its position towards this question as follows:

"4. N'y a t-il seulement que des séquelles de l'esclavage en Mauritanie?

Une certaine opinion voudrait, sans doute pour se donner bonne conscience, qu'il n'y ait plus que des séquelles de l'esclavage en Mauritanie et non pas une véritable pratique de ce phénomène. Pour ce faire on recourt à la vieille rengaine de la cécité, si ce n'est de l'amnésie volontaire. Il n'y a pas d'esclavage. Il n'y a que des survivances, car on ne veut pas voir une réalité qui, pourtant, crève les yeux. Parler de séquelles permettrait en effet de justifier le peu d'empressement des autorités sur ce dossier. Se pencher sur les restes d'un phénomène supposé disparu, permettrait ainsi de légitimer la négation officielle du problème.

C'est une approche bonne pour mystifier l'opinion internationale et non à usage interne. La réalité vécue et non pas seulement vue des palais officiels, lui apporte, en effet, un démenti certain. *Dans ce pays, des hommes et des femmes continuent de souffrir d'un esclavage qui, pour être multiforme n'en est pas moins réel.*" (SOS Esclaves 1995: 2f.; emphasis added)

9 The five, Maître Brahim Ould Ebety, Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara, Boubacar Ould Messaoud, Fatimata M'Baye, and Abdel Nasser Ould Yessa, were accused of "faux usage de faux" and "création et appartenance à association non autorisée et propagation d'allégations mensongères" (cf. L'Autre Afrique, 18.2.1998: 35).

INTRODUCTION

1 On the impact of the war with the POLISARIO on Mauritanian politics refer e.g. to Pazzanita (1997: 18ff.).

2 Albert Memmi (1993) distinguishes between the relation of domination-subjection on the one hand and purveyance-dependence on the other. While dependence is based on consent resulting from the purveyance of goods, domination reflects a relation of power likely to be called into question.

3 On a micro-level scale this insight is used as a methodological device, for example in ethnomethodology, where Garfinkel (1967) developed crisis experiments as a means to uncover common-sense and the structures of society incorporated in everyday life.

4 The existence of discrete and hidden though not powerless forms of resistance by subservient strata, such as peasants, has been highlighted by James C. Scott (1985, 1990). While the theoretical assumptions of this approach are subject to strong criticism (cf. Akram-Lodhi 1992; Rubin 1995), which are seen as justified in the present analysis (cf. chapter eight), its strength lies in raising sensitivity to the subtle elements in the localised manifestations of social power. The need to take into account slave action as a substantial element defining the master-slave relation has been highlighted by Frederick Cooper (1979) and Jonathon Glassman (1991 and 1995).
5 Jonathon Glassman (1995) gave his both favourable and critical review of Claude Meillassoux's (1986) theoretical contribution to the study of slavery the title "No words of their own" to highlight the lack of concern with slave action and expression not only in Meillassoux's work.

Chapter 1

1 Later a Catholic abolition movement developed as well, having the foundation of several societies in France in 1888 as a starting point (cf. Klein 1993b: 17).
2 Only recently a DNA-analysis proved that Thomas Jefferson (1746-1826) had fathered several children on his slave Sally Heming, a fact he had continued to deny during his lifetime.
3 Of course the socialist states' ideology was critical of slavery as well, but the kind of freedom the capitalist market economy professed to be the alternative was criticised as failing to meet essential needs of mankind.
4 The definition of slavery as resulting from an initial act of violence is controversial as there were also non-coercive ways to become slave, for instance as a result of debts (debt-bondage), or became subject to arrangements very similar to slavery as famine refugees or war captives (cf. Glassman 1995: 134). Stressing that the slave estate results from an initial act of violence, however, by narrowing the definition makes it possible to link slavery as an institution more consistently with a systematic versus a kind of accidental use of slaves in society. While the latter case also expresses an act of violence, though on a lower level, two theoretical concepts have been based on this distinction. James L. Watson (1980b) differentiated between "open and closed systems" of slavery, societies which offered modes of integration to slaves and those which denied such options. Other scholars, such as Martin A. Klein (1983: 79) and Paul E. Lovejoy (1981: 22f.), have tried to frame these distinct patterns of slavery in terms of a distinction between a household mode of production and a slave mode of production. However, most of the evidence they present distinguishes between societies in which slaves constituted a significant part of the population, and thus were important to its functioning, and societies in which slaves were of minor importance. Claude Meillassoux (1986), who is a proponent of the mode of production approach, refrains from applying this concept to slave

societies, while Frederick Cooper (1979: 116, note 51) denounces it in the context of the analysis of slavery as a "pigeonhole".

5 Claude Meillassoux (1986: 35) characterises the slaves' deprivation in the following terms: "l'incapacité sociale de l'esclave à se reproduire socialement" and in the statement that slavery constitutes "l'antithèse de la parenté".

6 Wendy James (1988: 133) emphasised that the enslaving society has to construct a boundary separating itself from the enslaveable other. By this practice of attributing features to alien people the slave society engages in the definition of its own identity.

7 The French terms used by Claude Meillassoux (1986) are "état" and "condition". The translation used here follows the one proposed by Martin A. Klein in his translation of Claude Meillassoux's (1983) article on "Female Slavery", wherein this latter author notes (note 3) "I distinguish *estate* from *status* because the jural situation of the slave stands on negative criteria whereas *status* defines people on positive jural grounds." (original emphasis)

8 M.I. Finley (1968: 310) suggests that slavery becomes institutionalised once slaves are essential to the working of the economy and consequently that slave work outweighed other forms of labour.

9 The notable exception to the demographic deficiency of slave populations not only in Africa but on other continents too, is the US South. There the slave population grew and thus – quite paradoxically – this slave system therefore fails to fit into the theoretical framework of Claude Meillassoux (1986), who argues that there needs to be a slave mode of reproduction by trade and warfare.

10 The impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa remains disputed among scholars, although a majority of these confirm the thesis that the Atlantic trade indeed affected Africa in many ways. A thorough discussion of this topic is provided by Paul E. Lovejoy (1989: 365), who concludes that the Atlantic trade "marked a radical break in the history of Africa, most especially because it was a major influence in transforming African society." As a consequence of this evolution, enslavement on the continent increased, the trade grew, and African societies themselves employed a growing number of slaves, thus developing new modes of enslavement. For a more complete elaboration of Lovejoy's transformation thesis refer to his "Transformations in Slavery" (1983). The issue of the responsibility of the Atlantic slave trade for today's Africa's underdevelopment is still vigorously discussed (cf. among others Manning 1990a, b; Klein 1990 and 1992; M'Bokolo 1998; Rauzduel 1998).

11 This very special mode of reproduction of slaves, namely by warfare and trade, which constitutes the central thesis of Meillassoux's (1986) book, is expressed by a subtle metaphor in the subtitle: "le ventre de fer et d'argent".

12 In his descriptions of slaves as having completely internalised their subservient status and being incapable of developing thoughts of their own, Claude Meillassoux (1986: 127f.; 318, 359) moves even beyond the position forwarded by Orlando Patterson (1982), who has been blamed for merely reproducing dominant ideology in his descriptions of slaves and slaves' actions (cf.

Glassman 1995: 136ff.). For the very same reason Frederick Cooper (1979: 110) expressed discomfort with certain aspects of the earlier work of Meillassoux (1975a).

13 According to David B. Davis (1966: 33) these two characteristics of the slave were already acknowledged by Roman law. While in most legal contexts the slave was treated as a thing, in distinct cases, such as provision for preventing the slave from being murdered, he was considered a person. Islamic jurisprudence, while maintaining the divide between the slave as a thing and as a person, later widened the number of circumstances in which slaves could appear as legal persons. Nevertheless, despite becoming "the brother of the freeman in Islam and before God" (Lewis 1990: 6), slaves remained discriminated against in many regards, e.g. they could testify, but their testimony had only half of the weight of a freeman's (cf. Brunschwig 1960: 26ff.).

14 This concern indeed takes up a major criticism Frederick Cooper (1979: 117) expressed with regard to Africanist studies of slavery: "Africanists have tried too hard to say what 'rights' slaves did or did not have or what the 'status of slaves' in a particular society was, and not hard enough to analyse how such rights and statuses became customary or how they changed."

15 It has to be called to mind that until recently isolated cases of slave sales have been reported from Mauritania, the most prominent case of which certainly is the one of a woman sold on the market of Atar in 1980, an incident which took place at the height of the confrontation between El Hor, Mauritania's first political organisation of former slaves and manumitted slaves and the government, and resulted in strong national and international protests (cf. Mercer 1982: 31f.).

16 In this feature slavery in Islamic societies differed from slavery in many African societies which had no codified legal system. Although Islamic jurisprudence, especially in the western Sahara, did not provide the institutional support the state institutions in the US South did for the maintenance of slavery, it remained a powerful source of reference for the masters. This argument, however, does not mean that Islam has been a causative agent shaping a distinct kind of slavery, as it appears in a number of writings (such as Claude Meillassoux 1986). Rather the Qur'ān and numerous ḥadīṯs which demanded that slaves be treated well and recommended manumission, but did not question slavery (i.e. conversion of a slave to Islam was no reason for manumission, cf. Brunschwig 1960; Lewis 1990: 5ff.), were used as a cultural means by the masters to produce an ideology legitimising their rule. However, this is a two-edged strategy. The two tendencies present in the Qur'ān and further developed into a legal framework by the Islamic schools of jurisprudence allow the oppressed to make the interpretation of Islam an element in their struggles for social recognition (cf. Cooper 1981; see also p. 262-265).

For an overview of Islamic jurisprudence concerning slavery refer to Daumas (1883: 319-344), Schacht (1964: esp. 127ff.), Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî (1983), Willis (1985a) and Lewis (1990).

17 Until today one of the most common conflicts between slaves and former slaves and their masters or else former masters develops from quarrels

involving the question who has the right to inherit from dead slaves: the master or the children of the slave. Numerous such cases are documented by SOS esclaves (1995) as well as the independent press of Mauritania. These contemporary cases, concerning deceased slave women and men alike, however, mark the definite break in master-slave relations more than manifest how slavery is maintained. Those masters who now want to inherit the few belongings of their deceased slaves want to profit a last time from an estate that has lost most of its significance, and would be of no benefit with regard to the slave's descendants anyhow.

18 The case also shows how the bīẓān effectively did not respect slave marriages as legally valid. This contradicts Islamic jurisprudence, which respects slaves as legal persons, though not endowed with full responsibility. However, as subjects of their masters, they were allowed to conclude marriages (although they could also be married contrary to their will by the master), and hence should have had the right to enjoy their marital relation fully (cf. Schacht 1964: 127).

19 The Qur'ān is especially rigid in defining the circumstances allowing slavery to arise: through war (against infidels) (4:94, 8:67) or by birth as a slave (cf. Lewis 1990: 6). The enslavement of Muslims is hence banned and soon became forbidden by Islamic jurisprudence. However, this point was often not respected. What remained unquestioned, even by Sudanese Muslim reformers wanting to restrict slavery, was that conversion of slaves after (due) enslavement did not entail their manumission (cf. Barbour/Jacobs 1985: 130). Great emphasis is laid in the Qur'ān on the fact that masters should do good unto their slaves and other dependents (4:36), that they may not force female slaves into prostitution (24:33), and that freeing slaves is recommended after war is over (47:4), as a break with pre-Islamic traditions (90:13), as a penance for a broken oath (5:89) and the death of believers fighting against you (4:92), and also for retracting a divorce (58:3). Freeing is also described as the act of a truly pious person (2:177) and the master is asked to share sustenance with his slaves (16:71). For a discussion of the prescriptions of the Qur'ān with regard to slavery by a Mauritanian scholar refer to Ahmed (1983: 26ff.)

20 Martin A. Klein (1993c: 189f.) portrays slave masters in the region of the French Sudan as not having been able to suppress much of the emancipation of their slaves after colonisation, but as having won another battle, that of controlling the slaves' past, i.e. maintaining the memory of their slave ancestry and estate.

21 The settling of runaway slaves in new villages was difficult first of all because these people lacked almost all means of production and at best were only able to start cultivation directly after their arrival in the new area, which meant they had to wait almost half a year until their first harvest. During this time, they had to find other means to secure their survival. These problems runaway slaves had to overcome contributed decisively to the development of a free labour market in the Sudan and in the peanut-basin of Senegal (cf. Roberts 1988: 287ff.; Moitt 1989; Klein 1993c: 182ff.).

Lee V. Cassanelli (1988: 321f.) describes how runaway slaves formed

independent villages in Italian Somalia. While the first villages thus built were inhabited by former slaves of like ethnic origin, those founded later, i.e. at the turn of the 20th century were occupied by runaway slaves of diverse ethnic origins who identified themselves as ex-slaves of various Somali clans. Within these villages principles of seniority developed, which granted the first settlers control over resources like land and political power. The resulting disadvantages for newcomers are responsible for the successive development of many small villages inhabited by groups of runaway slaves who had settled together.

22 In fact by far not all slaves were exploited in economic terms. Some were integrated into the state apparatus, where they often occupied important positions, or as what is probably the most prominent example, the Mamluks of Egypt, shows, became themselves the rulers of a state (cf. Hunwick 1992: 17; Patterson 1979: 42f.).

23 Until today the volume edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (1983) remains to my knowledge the only comprehensive approach to the question apart from local studies such as e.g. the one by Claire Oxby (1978), Aurelia Martìn (1991) and Marcia Wright (1993).

24 In these features, these societies fit a Marxist interpretation of what constitutes a slave society: "the most significant distinguishing feature of a given mode of production is not so much *how the bulk of the labour of production is done, as how the dominant propertied classes*, controlling the conditions of production, *ensure the extraction of the surplus* which makes their leisured existence possible." (De St. Croix 1988: 20, original emphasis) However, as the bīẓān case will show, things are not always as neatly to be discerned, and hence the demographic significance of slavery, though being no theoretical device, comes to be an appropriate means to discern different kinds of slavery (cf. Klein 1993c: 172).

25 Indeed the great camel caravans were constituted in the north of the country, especially in the trade towns and the Adrar, which was the western Sahara's link with the north, i.e. Morocco. More to the south, in the Tagant and the Gebla regions, caravans were much smaller, and trade was more decentralised (cf. Webb 1995: 61).

26 Indeed little is known about this group, whose name recurs in different contexts. E.g. a distinct group of date-palm workers in the oasis of Tidjikja is also called ʿaġzāzīr. Even more scarce is information on other bīẓān salt mines. The earth-salt dug at Tîchît e.g. seems to have been extracted by free people of a distinct group, the Masna, but perhaps these employed slave workers too. In the Trarza there were also earth salt deposits, which seem to have played an important role in the region's history, but even less is known about their exploitation than is about the Tîchît case (cf. McDougall 1990: 248ff.).

27 Similar structures of complementary production patterns linked by relations of servility are found among the Tuareg and their slaves (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1976: 26ff.).

28 These literal meanings of the two ḥassāniyya terms have entered the French discourses of Moors in Mauritania, in both newspapers and academic

writing. There sūdān and bīẓān appear often as "Maures noirs" and "Maures blancs".

29 The term kwār might be derived from the North African kāfir, designating the unbelieving (cf. Aguade/Meouak 1993).

30 This latter etymology is something of a paradox, for the ḥarāṭīn of the Sahara cultivate by the hoe, not by the plough.

31 Such groups, representing a kind of a ḥarāṭīn nobility, effectively existed in bīẓān society. In the Adrar a number of ḥarāṭīn own written manumission contracts which are already 200 years old (Pierre Bonte, personal communication 1994). Among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed ḥarāṭīn were among the closest counsellors of the ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar (deceased in 1982). And ḥarāṭīn of the Kunta living in the Tamourt en-Naaj on the Tagant plateau claim to descend from independent workers who lived in the nearby former Kunta trade town Kasr el Barka. Such distinctions are taken up by El Keihel Ould Mohamed El Abd (1986: 28), who makes a distinction between independent populations that became ḥarāṭīn and imported slaves that did so, calling the former "Noirs Maures" and the latter "Maures Noirs". While it can be affirmed that there existed a kind of a ḥarāṭīn nobility in precolonial bīẓān society, there is also a recent trend to describe a growing number of independent groups of low status as ḥarāṭīn of free origin (cf. Brhane 1997a: 58ff., 78f.). This use of the term ḥarāṭīn helps to affirm the representation of bīẓān society as marked by a bipolarity between ḥarāṭīn (or else sūdān in the terminology adopted here) and bīẓān, which is less and less embarrassed by social groups not fitting into this scheme.

32 Among the Fulbe of Boobola, who also owned slaves (*maccubbe*) and who called the manumitted slaves *riimaaybe* the latter term is reported to have received a new meaning recently. While *riimaaybe* used to be a euphemism among Fulbe freemen speaking of both former slaves and manumitted slaves, there now are Fulbe stating that the term does not mean "those to whom we gave birth" but "we have grown together" (cf. Diallo 1997: 103).

33 Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 59, note 39) remarks that the use of "akḥal" in order to refer to sūdān might be a recent evolution of ḥassāniyya language which does not imply a reference to phenotype but to distinct race and therefore can also designate black Africans. This contradicts an earlier finding of Catherine Taine-Cheikh (1989a: 97) stating that this adjective is not used in ḥassāniyya to describe human beings.

34 Several sūdān interviewees in the region of Achram-Diouk presented the sūdān living at Daber (the former location of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar's main camp on the Tagant) as all being nānme and hence subservient to and dependent on the bīẓān.

35 The feminine form of ʿabd can be derived regularly from the masculine form and hence is ʿabda (cf. Wehr 1976: 586).

36 These conclusions are based on written documents, which admittedly use classical Arabic and not ḥassāniyya. Within this corpus of sources the term kwār occurs as well, but often in an adjectival form and only for distinguishing prominent bīẓān figures who have a close relationship with people of black African ethnic groups (cf. Taylor 1996: 37, note 1).

37 The list of references to descriptions of bīẓān social hierarchy is long, as almost all works dedicated to aspects of bīẓān society provide an introduction to this topic. Certainly the most important works in this respect are Ahmed Lamine Ech Chenguiti (1953, which includes a description of bīẓān society at the end of the 19th century written by a zwāya emigrant to Egypt to introduce his country and people to members of his host society) and the colonial ethnologist Paul Marty (1919, 1920, 1921a,b). New perceptions of bīẓān society were shaped by Pierre Bonte (1979, 1987a, 1991, 1997, 1998c), Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a, 1991a,b, 1997), Charles C. Stewart (1972, 1973) and Harry T. Norris (1960, 1968, 1972, 1986). Recently the debate on the characteristics of bīẓān society has been reanimated and fuelled by new evidence by Rainer Oßwald (1986, 1993), Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1995, 1997, 1998), Raymond Taylor (1995, 1996), Timothy Cleaveland (1995), Glen W. McLaughlin (1997), Meskerem Brhane (1997a) and Urs Peter Ruf (1995).

38 Part of the strategies to portray this tripartite order as invariable are mythical narratives. One such tradition refers to the Almoravid leader Bou Bakkar ben Amar (died 1087). While fighting against the blacks of the south this historical figure is presented as having taken the decision to divide his followers into three groups, one specialising in warfare, one in religious scholarship and one working manually (cf. Norris 1972: 154, note F; Amilhat 1937: 45). Another tradition, focusing especially on the establishment of a hierarchy between ḥassān and zwāya, locates the definitive establishment of a hierarchical order among the three status groups at the war of Šurr Bubba, which is reported to have taken place from 1644-74. However, this event, which opposed two bīẓān coalitions in the Gebla region (one led first of all by zwāya and one by ḥassān), hardly had the character of an ethnic confrontation between zwāya Berbers and ḥassān Arab invaders (members of both ethnic affiliations could be found on either side of the two opposing groups), nor did its regional character allow the shaping of ḥassān-zwāya relations in all of the vast bīẓān territory. Rather the confrontation was part of a struggle for the control of the economy of the Senegal valley at the start of the trade with European merchants at Saint-Louis (cf. Ruf 1995: 108ff.; for different strains of interpretation refer to Stewart 1972: 378f.; Ould Cheikh 1985a: 830-964; Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 153ff.; Marty 1919: 60; Norris 1960)

39 Bīẓān traditions, which were strengthened and underscored by colonial ethnologists, portray an initial ethnic divide of bīẓān society. Here the ḥassān are descendants of Arab invaders who continued to migrate into the western Sahara from the 15th century on and defeated the Berber (Ṣanhāğa) population. The latter, once beaten, are supposed to have given up warfare and as a consequence converted to peaceful religious scholarship (for an overview of these traditions refer to Villasante-de Beauvais 1997: 592-611). This reconstruction of the past in ethnic terms, however, is not convincing, not only as far as theoretical assumptions about the nature of inter-ethnic interaction are concerned but also with regard to empirical facts. First, the in-migration of Arab tribes into the western Sahara, which continued over centuries, is unlikely to have produced a direct and violent confrontation,

but suggests slowly changing patterns of interaction. Second, the Idawʿ Īš, a major ḥassān tribe, have a Berber and not an Arab ancestry. What indeed took place after the arrival of Arab groups was an increasing Arabisation of the western Sahara, including an Arabisation of tribal genealogies (cf. Ruf 1995: 104-115).

40 Derived from the Arabic root ṬLB, meaning search, quest, pursuit, from which is also derived the word meaning student (cf. Wehr 1976: 563f.).

41 The word is derived from the Arabic root TWB, meaning to repent, do penance, be penitent (cf. Wehr 1976: 98).

42 Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1997) argues that the occurrence of this less rigid social order is specific to the eastern regions of the bīẓān territory as opposed to a more complete evolution of rigid patterns of hierarchy in the Gebla and the Adrar. While this assumption is tempting, for it allows new interpretations to be added to older ones without the need for a reassessment of the latter, it should nevertheless be dismissed. Raymond Taylor (1996), on the basis of bīẓān documents from the 19th century, draws convincingly a picture of Gebla society marked both by social mobility and shifting ethnic identities. Useful insights into how perceptions of the social order, and especially the status of zwāya vis-à-vis the ḥassān continued to be debated in precolonial times from the 16th century on, are also given by Rainer Oßwald (1993).

43 The common distinction was between zwāya of the sun, i.e. zwāya who did not have to pay tributes to ḥassān, who in return provided protection, and zwāya of the shade who did pay such tributes (cf. Norris 1968: 15).

44 This perception is highlighted by Ahmed Mahmoud Ould Mûdi, a leading member of the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd, who was interviewed on the issue of this tribe's characteristics by Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1997: 594; see also Ould Cheikh 1985a: 443).

45 Laḥme is considered to be a less pejorative name for the tributary groups and persons than znāga (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1997: 608). The Arab etymology of laḥme needs attention. The verbal form derived from the root ḤLM refers to "mend, patch, weld, solder (up) s.th.", and hence presents the laḥme/znāga as the base of bīẓān society and evokes the idea of solidarity among the different orders (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 399). The noun derived from the same root indeed is less romantic. Meaning "flesh, meat" it unmistakably hints at the major occupation of the tributaries: raising livestock (Wehr 1976: 861).

46 One of the most prominent examples of such an ascension from tributary to master are the Idawʿ Īš, one branch of which, the Abakak, later led the emirate of Tagant (cf. Amilhat 1937: 58ff.; Ould Cheikh 1991a: 110; Miské 1970: 110). Raymond Taylor (1996: 149-194) provides a detailed study of how the emiral power in the Gebla depended on support from tributary tribes, which, outnumbering the small ḥassān elites by far, managed to take advantage of conflicts among competing ḥassān lineages by shifting alliances or threatening their overlords with a change of allegiance. Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1997) recently criticised some of these conclusions for being

too strongly committed to the paradigms of segmentation theory and neglecting the centralisation of political power in the hands of the ʿamīrs.

47 Major aspects of discursive strategies vis-à-vis the znāga and the valuation of their status are found in the following interview with a ḥarṭāni:
Author: What is the difference between a znāga and a ḥassān?
BOS: This is a huge difference. The znāga have no origin [aṣl], they have no status [nasab], they are not recognised. You have to know there are true znāga and those where you cannot be sure about their true status. Their behaviour shows that they are znāga, but nobody knows where they come from. One doesn't know whether they are zwāya or ḥassān. In the times of the battles and wars, then people had to leave their tribes and had to go to other ones. Then nobody knows about the status [these people had]. There [within the other tribe] you started to do the work of a znāga. Before you could have been a šarīv, or a ḥassān, but this is not known. However, you continued to do the work of a znāga. . . . These people have a secret. (Interview Brahim Ould Soueilim, ḥarṭāni, 26.8.1995)

48 Among the iggāwen the women play a harp (ardīn), and the men a lute (tidinīt). Both sing, though they veil their mouths every time their voices rise. The topics of their songs, which today have become an important means of bīẓān identification, cover a wide range, from praising and mocking to topics associated with sexuality (cf. Guignard 1975; Norris 1968).

49 A few interviewees did not want their statements to be documented on tape. In these cases extensive notes were taken and also later transcribed.

50 These efforts surely are exemplary of the pitfalls of intercultural communication. While I always admired the oral memory of my sūdān and bīẓān friends, the latter, basing their methodology of "teaching" ḥassāniyya on such skills were annoyed by my inability to match up to their expectations. I on the other hand missed the kind of a textbook that until then had accompanied my learning of foreign languages.

Chapter 2

1 For the most concise presentation of Norbert Elias' arguments against the static impetus of "social change" see Elias (1977).

2 The present chapter owes much of its inspiration to seminars and colloquia held by Prof. Dr. Karen Knorr-Cetina, Dr. Stefan Hirschauer and Dr. Claus Amman at the University of Bielefeld, all discussing new trends in ethnography as well as their publications (cf. Knorr-Cetina 1991; Hirschauer/Amann 1997).

3 Mark Hobart (1997: 12) formulated one of the most trenchant critiques of anthropology. To him "much of what we wish to convey by 'understanding' anyway is closer to 'recognition', the mutual, but momentary and situated, appreciation of difference." In fact there hardly ever is complete understanding, but if this is true of the dialogue with other cultures, it is also essentially true of any communication. For this reason, understanding is not to be

negated, provided one is aware of its partiality, its momentary and contestable nature.

4 The idea of the anthropologist being passively permeated by the foreign culture is no longer maintained as the constituting dogma of anthropology, and other core assumptions are also under severe criticism; e.g. the methodology of participant observation constitutes a permanent shift from the inside to the outside, that if taken by the letter would constitute a paradox. Participant observation therefore should be interpreted in terms of hermeneutics (cf. Clifford 1988: 15).

5 There has been and still is a lively debate on the post-modern challenge (cf. Alexander 1992) to ethnography, dealing first of all with questions of the construction of ethnographic authority (cf. Clifford 1988), the epistemological consequences of the relation between textual representation and fieldwork (cf. Agar 1990) and the question of writing ethnography in times of an "epistemological hypochondria" (cf. Geertz 1988: 71).

6 Mark Hobart stresses the partial character of field research when stating that most communication the anthropologist performs is confined to people to be considered as "organic" intellectuals in the Gramscian sense (personal communication, 12 May 1997, at Bielefeld Workshop on Ethnography and Lifestyles). These people, often outsider themselves, rationalise their society in a way communicable to the western-trained anthropologist. Their discourse is much like the scientific discourse, and translation – understood as taking place between different types of logic and reasoning – thus is minimised.

7 As the interview was held in French, Badeyn here used the term "noir".

8 Long periods of apprenticeship are common for novices in trade and other occupations like driving trucks. It took my driver Nanna Ould El Vaida six years of work as an apprentice with a truck driver before the latter helped him get a driving licence.

9 The unusual character of this religious knowledge among people of slave of origin is revealed through the fact that during the entire period of fieldwork, I only became aware of three cases of slaves/ḥarāṭīn who had participated in traditional religious education.

10 The zakāt is the tithe for the poor prescribed by Islam and paying it used to be a privilege of the free. However, former slaves often lack the knowledge of how to determine the amount of zakāt and it is the masters who are the beneficiaries (cf. p. 263-265). Freed slaves continuing to pay the zakāt to their former masters after having gained independence subsequent to the First World War are also reported by Roberts (1988: 296) from the Banamba area in Mali.

11 Approximately 40 kg, the mūd being a measure of capacity whose weight equivalent varies greatly throughout Mauritania; in the Tagant/Aftout Region one mūd is equivalent to 4 kg. For the different measurements of the mūd refer to Pierret (1948: 185).

12 According to his mother, this dam was first constructed in 1975. Whatever the exact date may be, the case fits well the general tendency in the region to

increase agricultural production after the partial destruction of the livestock sector due to the severe drought in 1969.

13 I use this term following the convention of livestock classification in French literature. In Mauritania sheep and goats are commonly subsumed under the term lġnem, and not distinguished in most contexts. This although – taken for granted numbers of livestock attaining the herd level (100 to 200 head) – goats and black and white sheep were watered at different times of the day, in order not to mix up the species. Today preferences with regard to the different species are changing, favouring to some extent goats for being more resistant to poor pasture than sheep. Today most families in the rural areas own just a few animals. These, together with other people's animals, are led to pasture by children who assemble both sheep and goats in these herds thus making of the lġnem a true entity.

14 The preference for a high share of females in the herds of pastoral nomads is well known. In this context it nevertheless becomes significant in a second way: the obligation to pay the herder did not specify whether he should be given a male or a female animal. Most logically the owner of the herd too wanted to maximise his stock, hence the herder in most cases was remunerated with male animals. This is the reason why male to female exchanges were essential to the creation and perpetuation of the dependent's livestock.

15 Interviewees used to call the colonial tax on livestock ʿašūr, although the French had a different term for this tax, namely zekat, thus alluding to the alms tax prescribed by Islam (zakāt). The tax on livestock, measuring one tenth of the animals' assumed value, replaced in the colony of Mauritania the poll tax common in all other regions of French West Africa (A.O.F.). A colonial tax called ʿašūr existed as well, but concerned one tenth of agricultural production. Unlike the zekat it was collected only irregularly and was suppressed as early as in 1940 (cf. Toupet 1959: 103).

16 This is a euphemism used frequently by bīẓān to speak of their slave. In employing the nisba *-ī* a relation to a place or proprietor is expressed, e.g. the master is speaking of "his" ḥarṭāni. For an elaboration of the nisba as a variable category of social identification in Moroccan society refer to Clifford Geertz (1977: 487ff.).

17 During the years 1994-1995, the price of one mūd was about 100 UM in sales of peasants to traders at the time of harvest. The approximate value of the millet involved here therefore is about 12,500 UM, or about four goats, quite a significant sum.

18 Colonel Ould Haidalla indeed decreed the official abolition of slavery on 5 July 1980 during his first year in office and legislation was passed in November 1981. The famous national radio broadcast condemning slavery in question here, however, was on 5 July 1983 (Brahim's mother Zeyneb's memory seems to be more accurate, cf. p. 62). This public discourse was initiated by the removal from office of a judge who had refused to apply the new legislation on slavery (Mauritanie Nouvelles, nº 235, 23.1.1997: 8).

19 I.e. the master as the owner of the slave was also his legal tutor and hence replaced the slave's parents. Without permission of the slave master, no slave could get married. It also was the slave master who was involved in setting

the dowry and arranged the marriage ceremony. Slave parents could be consulted, but until these days cases can be witnessed in which the master's will remains decisive for a marriage to be concluded or not (for the legal aspects refer to Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 173ff., 181).

20 According to Abdallahi Ould Youba Ould Khalifa (1991: 700) "the year of the first banknote in Mauritania" was in 1919. An age of about seventy-five at the time of the interview seems realistic to me. According to Khalifa Ould Kebab, my research assistant, who worked for years as a basic health agent, by "the year of the diseases" most probably an epidemic of syphilis is meant.

21 These grains are from *Panicum turgidum*, a meadow plant. It starts growing with the first rain that appears, the grains are mature at the end of August (cf. Ould Hamidoun 1952: 23).

22 This is *Boscia senegalensis*, which Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun (1952: 19) describes as follows: "Arbre aux feuilles assez grandes, à l'écorce fibreuse; inerme. Il produit des baies (*mandyhagha*) qui ressemblent un peu au café. Les gens de basse classe les mangent après les avoir lavées et fait cuire. Ce fruit et très nourrissant et sain en raison des matières grasses qu'il contient."

23 Being big symbolises feminine beauty. In former times young girls were forced to drink large amounts of fat milk and eat huge portions of millet – often prepared by specialised slave women or ḥarṭaniyya – in order to grow fat (a most detailed description of the cruelties imposed on a young noble girl by a slave woman in former times is presented by Caillié [1830: 98f.], another eye-witness account comes from Daniel Meyer [1959: 53f.]). While in former times the custom was mainly restricted to the better off people, and often restricted to the short period of unmarried women's youth, the custom nowadays is fading. Many young girls refuse to get fat, while many other women of high status tend to retain a life-long cycle of fattening.

24 There are several Oued (wād) Labiod, as well as places called Achram etc. in the region of Tagant/Aftout.

25 According to the French model, which the Mauritanian educational system is based on, access to higher education often is restricted to successful participation in entry examinations. In early independent Mauritania this concept permitted the ad hoc establishment of university level education, while formally qualified adherents were still lacking. In addition as in the case described, the system offered reintegration facilities to those once excluded from the formal educational system.

26 As the interview was held mostly in French, the term "serviteur" employed by Youba is adopted here. It is one of the numerous common euphemisms to circumscribe "slave" and the condition of "slavery".

27 In ḥassāniyya "tent" [ḫaima], is a synonym for family, e.g. one speaks of descending from a good tent to indicate noble descent. Counting slave tents like those of free people thus means to accept them as a families on a more or less equal footing and to include them in the social community.

28 The mniḥa is a loan of use-rights that can be concluded according to different conditions, e.g. as here for the duration of one rainy season. Often a mniḥa is lent without a fixed time schedule, until the lender feels himself to be in need of his property.

29 Ḥubs according to Islamic jurisprudence transfers property into a pious endowment (cf. Oßwald 1993: 188f.; Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 231ff.). In the bīẓān context this is realised by a definitive loan of rights of use, either limited through the lifetime of the proprietor or the beneficiary of the loan. These arrangements most often concern palm trees, agricultural plots or animals, but also slaves. The idea behind a ḥubs is that the property in question becomes indivisible and inalienable. An animal under ḥubs thus cannot be slaughtered (except if at risk of being wasted through natural death), and agricultural plots cannot be divided amongst inheritors (Interview Ahmed Ould 'Aly, qāḍi, 24.12.1995).

30 The Ougiya has been the bīẓān unity of currency for a long time. Like in other regions of Africa, in bīẓān society money is counted in units of five. The French Franc and later the Franc CFA (until its replacement by the UM on the 29 June 1973) used to be counted in "Ougiyas", with five Francs being considered as one Ougiya.

31 During the regime of colonel Ould Haidalla the seat of the national iron ore mining company (SNIM) was transferred from Nouakchott to Nouadhibou. The former headquarters building of the company then was used to lodge ministries.

32 This statement refers to the so-called "événements" of 1989, when after riots against black Africans in Mauritania and bīẓān in Senegal both countries expelled a great number of people from these ethnic minorities (cf. p. 289f.).

33 Throughout the interview a sūdān was sitting besides Youba. At an earlier moment of the interview, he already had referred to him as the one of his servants still with him. During the sequence concerning the plots for, and the methods of cultivation, Youba was much helped by this servant to formulate appropriate answers.

Metric measurements provided by the interviewees have to be taken cautiously. The land flooded by the dams (*barrages*) and small dams (*diguettes*) is not right-angled but depends on the shape the depressed area has. Also the length of a dam does not determine the width and hence the surface of the fields thus created. The A. dam has in fact a length of 1,100 metres, but the total size of inundated and hence cultivable land measures only 67 ha.

34 Jonathon Glassman, although providing a profound critique of several aspects of Meillassoux's (1986) study, takes up and extends his central distinction between estate and condition (in Glassman's terminology, state). "Meillassoux also emphasizes the contradiction between the absence of a legal recognition of the slave's personhood and the fact that it is the slave's very humanity that makes him valuable. Focusing on this contradiction as the source of *struggle* is my own elaboration." (Glassman 1991: 289; original emphasis)

35 Martin A. Klein (1983: 77) notes that despite severe penalties slave flights had always threatened African masters. After colonisation and the abolition of slavery in 1848 the number of escapees grew even further, making of them a major topic of correspondence between African rulers and French colonisers.

This was true for the Mauritanian context as well. Slaves left their masters to seek protection from another master, or they fled to the adwaba (more or less independent settlements of slaves). As late as 1940 bīẓān complained to the French administration about ḥarāṭīn (in this case more probably slaves, ʿabīd, are meant) leaving the subdivision of Moudjéria for the plains of the Gorgol, and wished to get them back (AT Colonie de la Mauritanie, Cercle du Tagant, Résidence de Moudjéria, "fiche de renseignement tribu Torkoz" n.d., document kindly passed on by Roger Botte). Even in 1953 a meeting of local notables headed by the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, remarked to the commandant de cercle on the lack of labour power, and the continuing drain of labourers to the more southern regions of the colony (AM, Cercle du Tagant, "Procès Verbal de la réunion du conseil des notables du Tagant" 29.6.1953).

Analogous examples are reported from the French archives of the Adrar at Atar, e.g. slave women from Chinguetti fled to Atar, and slave men ran away to the Assaba and Senegal Valley to engage in commerce and agriculture (McDougall 1988: 373).

36 This is undeniably a rather simplistic characterisation of the economic system induced by the colonial powers. In fact "free labour" was very much a coloniser's ideology – but rarely applied to Africans. For a long time, coerced labour dominated the mode in which Africans were brought to work (cf. Klein 1993c). Frederick Cooper (1996) presents a detailed study of the hardships the French and the British colonists had in conceiving labour in Africa and developing a coherent policy.

37 I am well aware that this line of argumentation follows the dominant, i.e. the master's ideology. Orlando Patterson (1979 and 1982) has been heavily criticised for presenting this perspective as the somewhat emic perspective of the slaves, and of declaring the master-slave dyad to be the essence of slavery (cf. Glassman 1991 and 1995). This critique is right, but to explore slave consciousness one has literally to "go through" these ideological representations. This in fact is done in a brilliant way by Jonathon Glassman, in his critical evaluation of major contributions to the question of slavery.

38 According to the Māliki school of Islamic jurisprudence, damage caused by a slave had to be compensated by the master (cf. Brunschwig 1960: 229; for the bīẓān context: Ould Mohamed 1988: 100; Caratini 1989: 101). The matter is also discussed by Patterson (1982: 204ff.), who stresses that this practice is of pre-Islamic origin later rationalised by Islamic jurisprudence. A number of sources, among them Patterson, attribute this practice to the Tuareg. However, Claire Oxby, in her detailed study on a camp of Kel Ferwan Tuareg, did not find any trace of the practice (cf. Oxby 1978: 203). An account somewhat contradicting the bīẓān practice applied to slaves comes from René Caillié, who differentiated very well in his observations between the different social groups, He reported this habit only with reference to the tributaries, the znāga (Caillié 1830: 155). Finally Ould Mohamed (1988: 37, 58, 100) tells with reference to a French administrator's report of 1949 that only the ḥassān regarded this slave action as resulting in a change of the proprietor, and reports a council of zwāya notables of the Ahel Bārikalla and

the Tandġa having taken the decision to ignore these actions in 1865, in order to reduce the number of slave flights. The most concise information on this practice comes from Oßwald (1993: 107), citing several bīẓān legal documents which recount cases of slaves having cut off a bīẓān's ear or that of a bīẓān's horse, from 1901 Tîchît, 1859 Ouadâne, and an undated document from Oualâta. According to these documents, slaves were not automatically handed over to those mutilated, but often their masters preferred to pay high fines, usually in guinée cloth.

39 Of course as an outsider, the slave had no protection from injury by a third person than his estimated slave-value to the master, for a Muslim free man in this case was not to be punished by the law of retaliation (cf. Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 249ff.).

40 Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1993: 185) cites a French administrator who reported that he had met in 1942 a slave with burns so severe that they made amputation necessary. The master declared he had wanted to prevent the slave from fleeing by this measure.

Cruelty in the treatment of slaves is a sensitive matter. Human rights activists such as Hecht (1997) blame Mauritania for tolerating the continuance of practices such as the "camel treatment", the "insect treatment" and others. Whilst in no way sympathetic to many of the bīẓān masters' attitudes, however, I have to stress, I was not told of any such case.

41 This is an aspect Pierre Bonte (1993: 71) recently has focused on. He deals with an early period of colonial administration in the Adrar region, where the French had re-established one of the bīẓān emirates. This ʿamīr, for different reasons, started in 1932 to oppose the colonial power by arms. He failed after an unexpectedly short period and found very little support from the Adrar population – he had misconceived the important social change that had already taken place. But the administrators too had no less trouble in establishing and keeping their system of indirect rule running – for many remained prisoners of their static colonial-ethnographic misperception of bīẓān society.

42 The French army behaved very much like their Sudanese enemies during the conquest of what was later French West Africa (A.O.F.). Its troops, the "tirailleurs", were largely recruited among slaves, and during the war most prisoners were distributed among the French allies, the officers and soldiers; indeed even the slave trade was encouraged (cf. Klein 1993c: 176ff.).

43 According to various reports the living conditions in these villages were very much like those they had experienced among their former masters. The aim of the "villages de liberté" was largely to weaken the enemies of the French by creaming off some of their servile labour force, and put the latter to use as a coercible pool of labour. The success remained limited, since many of those few who did come to the villages merely used them as an outpost for another flight (cf. Roberts 1988: 284ff.; Ould Cheikh 1993: 187; De Chassey 1984: 92). Even long times after establishing their colonial rule the French had an at best ambivalent position towards the use of coerced labour. Only in 1937 did the Popular Front finally take the decision to ratify the 1930 ILO Convention on forced labour (cf. Cooper 1996: 91).

44 Kiffa, today Mauritania's third largest city, was until the big drought of 1969 inhabited predominantly by sūdān, some of them were categorised as "clan Khadara" (meaning the "green" and used as a synonym for ḥarāṭīn) by the French administration and allotted some fields in 1936 (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 194).

45 Two factors influenced a significant restructuring of the Mauritanian labour-market; first the creation of the MIFERMA, the iron-ore mine in the northern desert region of the country, which necessitated much wage labour for its construction as well as an extensive infrastructure (railway to the coast, roads, buildings etc.; cf. e.g. Anonymous 1996), and second the construction of the capital Nouakchott, located on a spot near the coast with only some hundred inhabitants in 1957. The big drought in 1969 gave the definitive kick to an already massive urbanisation process focusing heavily on the capital. Today out of an estimated 2.1 million Mauritanians an estimated 700,000 live in Nouakchott.

46 Fieldwork in an area of emigration inevitably brings to the fore those cases where people stay or come back. Narratives of family history or the life of friends nevertheless tell of numerous slaves leaving the zone. Often the economic feasibility of the master-slave relationship had ceased due to external influences and emigration seemed to be the most promising alternative for survival.

47 Ahmed Salem Ould Salik Liman, a warrior-poet of the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd, living at the end of the 19th century, is reported to have once manumitted a ḫādem for a very peculiar reason. On the occasion of the camp changing its location, the slave woman had been left behind in order to pack some very heavy tents onto a camel, and then follow the others to the new camp-place. Soon after she was left alone, some visitors arrived, and the ḫādem slaughtered the camel to fulfil the obligations of hospitality. Ahmed Salem, wondering why his slave did not turn up, returned and found her with the tents, but unable to proceed in transport, because she had sacrificed the camel in honour of the visitors. Ahmed Salem liberated her on the spot, because what she had done could only be done by someone with a warrior's nobility. While this legendary account has been interpreted as one praising the generosity of the warrior-poet (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 217f.), a second reading is possible too. The obligation of Ahmed Salem to manumit the ḫādem (undoubtedly a result of his deep commitment to the morality of paternalism), was the result of the slave woman's obvious ability to behave not like a slave, but honourably and responsibly like a noble warrior. Manumission in this constellation is hence a way of acknowledging a slave's qualities.

48 Meskerem Brhane reports a case of an escaped slave's son, who managed to trace his father's master's family on the Tagant. Both sides insist that they are now like brothers, and have the same rights. Their fathers, i.e. those related to the fact of slavery, are dead, and the fact it once existed is taken simply as a reminder of how the two families now allied once became connected; but is not considered to be a constituent of their present interrelation (cf. Brhane 1997a: 141ff.).

49 The case illustrates very well the aspect stressed by Orlando Patterson (1982: 63). Fictive kinship is either "adoptive" or "quasi-filial", and these ties "involve genuine assimilation by the adopted person of all the claims, privileges, powers, and obligations of the status he or she has been ascribed. Fictive kin ties that are quasi-filial are essentially expressive: they use the language of kinship as a means of expressing an authority relation between master and slave, and a state of loyalty to the kinsmen of the master." Though this characterisation emphasising the fundamental opposition between the two concepts is revealing, the structures of alliances as practised in Arab societies reveal a large number of ambiguities as well (cf. Conte 1991, Bonte/Conte 1991).

50 A bīẓān of noble descent, directly linked to the prophet Muhammad's family, in standard Arabic "šarīf" (cf. Wehr 1976: 467).

51 The abolition of slavery by colonel Ould Haidalla was embedded in the general project of the application of the šarīʿa. Legal advice was sought from experts before proclaiming the decree of abolition. Thus the masters' rights of proprietorship of their slaves were acknowledged, and they were considered to be compensated. This latter aspect of the decree in fact was never applied. Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1993: 191) notes the irony of a slave liberation bound to the establishment of the law of retaliation.

52 It has already been suggested that the pace of change towards freedom was more rapid for men than women. "Men more often had formal education and wage-paying jobs open to them, whereas women remained in labor-intensive work." (Klein/Robertson 1983: 17) The present example shows this to be more an outcome of a society's gender structure and its transposition onto slaves.

53 Brahim recounts that the first of his brothers left for the towns in 1982. The eldest of these brothers might have been about the same age as the master's son, as it was Zeyneb who nursed him.

54 Animals could be lent, e.g. under the terms of mniḥa, so that animal numbers with the household did not necessarily correspond to the numbers belonging to a family (cf. for the Tuareg and the problems of raising exact data on herd sizes Klute 1992: 131; Falkenstein 1995: 210). Granaries hence had to be guarded against theft. Nevertheless in former times, as several interviewees mentioned, millet sometimes was hidden by putting it in holes dug in the earth.

One example of the times of the old ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, reported in Daber on the Tagant plateau, confirms the difficulties slaves wanting to save a part of their harvest had to face. Daouda's father wanted to give his old mother a donkey. Directly after the harvest he bought the animal with some of his millet and sent it to his mother in Kehmeit. When the ʿamīr came to collect his share in the harvest, no sign of the transaction remained, and hence the ʿamīr had no reason to doubt his slave's honesty. This strategy failed in a second attempt following an especially good harvest. Of 600 mūd Daouda's father hid 200 mūd. The ʿamīr, however, took all 400 mūd his slave presented him and, after having been told by somebody that there was some more millet hidden, later returned to take off all the rest (Interview Daouda

Ould Haroun, ḥarṭāni, Daber, 19.12.1995). Besides throwing a light on Daouda's political attitudes, the two stories throw a light on the legitimacy and illegitimacy of different kinds of slave belongings.

55 Not all adwaba were exclusively inhabited by sūdān. Many interviewees in Daber on the Tagant stated – although not univocally – that there were bīẓān living among them in the adabay. This might have resulted either from bīẓān supervising sūdān as already reported by René Caillié (1830: 133ff.), or as can be observed nowadays, of impoverished bīẓān choosing to live among the sūdān. The adabay therefore are not necessarily equivalent to independent sūdān settlements with emancipatory aspirations, but can also be a kind of a satellite camp.

56 Changes in the slave's condition following marriage are reported of different societies practising slavery: "Most slaves 'born in the house' were permitted after marriage to farm for themselves. A fixed sum was paid every year for each man, woman, and child." (Klein 1983: 76)

57 In nomadic societies the co-residence of a couple was often the exception rather than the rule. Men herding animals like camels, those engaged in learning or warfare, or men engaged in business like caravan-trade were absent from their household or tent for a large part of the year (cf. for the Tuareg Spittler 1989b: 77ff.). While slave couples were often hindered from living together at all, separation among free couples resulted from the men participating in more or less self-determined and above all temporary tasks.

58 There are legal traditions which confer to the male slave's master the obligation to sustain his slave's spouse. But this right was more or less theoretical, for it was bound to the condition of the couple living together – a right slave couples were often denied. If ever this happened, and the slave man's master contributed to the bringing up of the slave couple's children, he had the right to be compensated for his efforts by the legal owner of the children, the slave woman's master (cf. Ould Mohamed 1988: 60f.).

59 The reverse case was also possible; slaves could be well treated, and e.g. be promised their manumission by their master (one common agreement was to provide liberty upon the death of the master). But once his former mentor was dead, the slave found himself confronted with the master's heirs, not necessarily prepared to acknowledge the slave's claims for the fulfilment of his dead master's last will. If written testimony was lacking, the slave had hardly any chance of experiencing the manumission he had been promised. Such a case was reported from the village of Achoueibir, and Brahim in his narrative stressed the point too, when he remarked that he got a second copy of his manumission contract, one for his masters (and descendants) and one for his family and himself.

60 The first marriage in bīẓān society should result from the parents' preferences. Under such circumstances, these marriages are concluded in terms of the classical preferential patterns, e.g. with the patrilateral parallel cousin or members of same status group. However, divorce is frequent, and subsequent marriages are ruled by individual preferences rather than group aspirations (cf. Tauzin 1984a: 89). The first marriage among the free thus marks a step out of parental hegemony. This clearly is not the case among

slaves. As the example of Badeyn's first spouse shows, living a marriage among slaves depends on the masters' approval to continue, and thus never completely loses its precarious character.

61 The point that property within the family was attributed individually to every member was stressed by several sūdān interviewees.

62 Property is individual, but exploitation of livestock nevertheless is organised by the chief of the family managing the animals collectively, as one of the few important livestock-owners in the region of Achram-Diouk explained: "We have 20 to 40 camels, these are for the whole family, my brothers, my father and me. Everything we have is regarded as belonging to the whole family, even if it's owned individually. Even the animals of the father are treated alike, it is considered as being of the family's, and his sons will have nothing." (Interview Mohammed Sid'Ahmed, 13.9.1995). Or in other words, unless a proprietor has constituted his own tent, his animals will be managed together with all others of the tent he belongs to. Often individual members of the family are assigned animals from childhood on. Men build up the herd that will be the nucleus of their own animal possession once they establish a household separated from their parents after marriage in a sort of pre-inheritance. Women too can own livestock. Often animals owned before marriage remain with the woman's own family; otherwise they are joined to the family herd, but assigned to the woman. These animals thus constitute a sort of individual relief property in case the marriage fails and the woman returns to her parents. A more important part of feminine wealth is constituted by jewellery (cf. Tauzin 1984a: 88ff.; Caratini 1989: 52ff., 86).

Chapter 3

1 Jonathon Glassman (1995) sums up in the title "no words of their own" his major criticism of Claude Meillassoux's (1986) work on slavery in Africa.

2 According to Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh the word "nānme" is of Berber origin, and the meaning unknown to him. Albert Leriche (1955: 175) refers to the znagui (former Berber language, spoken in the western Sahara) term of "en-anem", meaning adaptation, becoming accustomed to a family. These slaves, according to Leriche, are supposed to descend from ancient slaves of the times of the Almoravid ʿamīr Abū Bakr ben ʿUmar, or else Bou Bakkar ben Amar (died 1087 AD). Therefore their genealogy is supposed to be known and their sale is forbidden. I personally, like Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, never encountered this definition smelling so heavily the masters' ideology, and controverted by M'Barke's experiences. A second designation for slaves, tilād (root TLD), is of Arab origin. However, I did not witness its use in the region of my fieldwork. Like nānme, tilād carries the idea of an ancient possession (cf. Ould Cheikh 1993: 183; Wehr 1976: 96). Albert Leriche (1955: 176), whose description of bīẓān terminology of status groups is flawed by subsuming ḫādem (slave woman) under the category of tributary people, proposes for this case the meaning of inherited slaves.

3 I met one other old slave woman, of a zwāya tribe too, who confessed she had been denied the right to marry by her masters ("the bīẓān did not make a ṭbal [marriage ceremony] for the sūdān." Interview Boye Mint Ahmeide, 6.2.1996). In most of the cases however the marriage was reported to have been celebrated in accord with or even with the support of the masters. The problem of legitimate marriage among slaves is less one of assuming the same rights as the bīẓān, but of having legitimate children. This was obvious when I tried to look up some sūdān men I met once before by asking people. These men were recognised by other inhabitants of the village only by their first- or nickname, while the father's names these interviewees had told me (Ould: "son of") were unknown.

4 Rzāʿa seems to be a dialectal form of riḍāʿa, translated as "foster relationship", whereas the verbal form of the root RḌʿ refers to sucking and nursing at the breast (cf. Wehr 1976: 344).

5 This statement is somewhat paradoxical, for neither the Qurʾān nor the jurists explicitly assign men this predominant place with regard to the establishment of milk-kinship. Rather the jurists take great care to scrupulously list all possible relations prohibited according to this kind of relation (cf. Héritier 1994: 323f.). The ambivalence of this is revealed by milk-kinship thus becoming either more strictly integrated into the patrilineal model of filiation, as well as being made legally acceptable and valid. In bīẓān practice, the male line of milk-kinship, however, is of no significance. It rather is believed that all bodily fluids (blood, semen, and milk), are supposed to establish parental relations (cf. Meskerem Brhane, personal correspondence 22.1.1998). This vision is likely to be inspired by classical Arab humoral medicine, which was in turn derived from ancient Greek traditions and has been widely disseminated in bīẓān society. Therefore bodily fluids and their circulation play a major role in the constitution of health and illness (cf. Ould Ahmedou, E.G. 1990: 98f.).

6 The root ḤRM stands for "forbidden, prohibited, interdicted; taboo; holy sacred, sacrosanct; s.th. sacred, sacred object; sacred possession; wife; sanctum sanctuary, sacred precinct;" (Wehr 1976: 171).

7 "These iggāwen I could touch, because they were my milk siblings, they had drunk of the same milk as I had. . . . Milk parenthood entails the same rights as real parenthood, you can touch these people just like your own brothers and sisters, and it is the same case with a milk-mother. You have the right to touch her and sit around and talk with her. And both you are forbidden to marry. . . . But their food does not concern you, this is because they have their own father and mother, you are not responsible for them, as well you don't inherit." Ahmed Ould Aly, the region of Achram-Diouk's most famous qāḍi, who follows an austere interpretation of Islam condemning all instrumental music (Interview 24.12.1995).

8 Aline Tauzin (1984b: 98f.) discusses various aspects of bīẓān oral tradition; those about incest make strong allusions to bad spirits involved in these liaisons. These make that e.g. each time the couple is together creatures separating them appear; among other consequences it is described that these couples' offspring dies.

9 I was not able to get hold of a copy of Poulet's work. Until recently this type of nursing has been observed. Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (personal correspondence, 26.6.1997) reports two cases of slave women breast-feeding their mistress' babies in 1988 in the oasis of Kurudjel (Assaba) and states that nursing the mistress' children was more a rule than an exception. This is confirmed by Ann McDougall (1988: 364). Another recent observation is documented by Aline Tauzin (1989b: 76) from the east of Mauritania.

10 There are also reasons to avoid establishing milk-kinship with the masters by nursing their children. In order to breast-feed the master's or mistress' children, slave women had to have children of their own. This complied with the master's desire to breed slaves and cut short slave women's opportunities to resist or to flee. Last but not least, being responsible for the nursing of the master's or mistress' children meant reducing one's own children's supply of mother's milk (cf. Tauzin 1989b: 76).

11 I doubt that milk-sons rather than sons-in law are a secure source of material support for a woman, as proposed by Cleaveland (1995: 47) and Brhane (1997a: 76). This kind of responsibility was clearly denied by all local informants I interviewed on the question (Khalifa Ould Kebab, Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi 24.12.1995). This goes along with the prescription that only blood-kin are allowed to inherit (cf. Conte 1991: 77). Most women declared that their daughters were the ones to support them later. Material support nevertheless often is provided by sons, as e.g. in the case of Moustava, now living together with his sūdān mother and her ḥarṭāni husband. This view is also presented in the analysis of some bīẓān oral traditions on female ruses. "Il semble que l'objectif de ces trois ruses soit bien plus l'obtention d'un enfant que celle d'un mari." (Tauzin: 1984b: 93)

12 This very difficulty of employing milk-kinship for immediate purposes is highlighted by a tradition related to the prophet Muhammad, reported to have given a married woman the advice to nurse, and hence create an adoptive relation towards a former slave, whom her husband did not want to meet her for reasons of female seclusion. As the woman asked the prophet if he was aware of the man in question being an adult, the prophet told her he knew this very well. Although the suckling of adults is univocally rejected as not valid by Islamic jurisprudence (and hence dismisses female strategies to surmount seclusion by establishing milk-parenthood with adults), the prophet in this case consciously made an exception (cf. Conte 1991: 78f). The example reveals that the question of easing the relations between masters and slaves is not a general problem, but one of surmounting the barriers of gender segregation.

13 A very similar case is made for the West African Songhay-Zarma female slaves. Milk-kinship here is interpreted as a remnant of earlier matrilineal practices of alliance. A slave women nursing her mistress' babies rises to be a social mother, i.e., she stops merely breeding slaves. Relationships with milk-siblings were the safest way to preserve their status as slaves of the house, because they were secured by the magic of milk (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1983: 142).

14 Sexual relations or abuses of masters with regard to their female slaves are a

much obscured issue. Meskerem Brhane (personal correspondence, 30.6.1997) suggests that slave women were frequently inclined to have sexual relations with the masters or their sons, a statement very well illustrated by Gabriel Féral (1983: 287).

Although – as detailed later – the offspring of a free man and a slave woman should be recognised as the man's son or daughter and be assigned his social status, in practice there are many exceptions to the rule. Begetting a child with a slave milk sister, however, might have resulted in far more severe mental stress because this meant offending the incest taboo. Marriage between a master and his children's nurse on the contrary was possible.

15 This interpretation might also apply to milk-kin ties between patrons and clients, i.e. between ḥassān and zwāya on the one hand and znāga on the other. These are reported to be frequent in Tidjikja and to be an expression of close relations by Abdallahi O.Y. Ould Khalifa (1991: 284; for the Moroccan deep south see Ensel 1998: 80-87). Affective relations cross-cutting status barriers thus are not limited to master-slave relations.

16 Legally these two options do not exclude each other. A male slave holder did not lose his rights over his female slaves if these established milk-kinship with the master's children.

17 One interpretation of Māliki law derives the master's right over his female slaves from the integration of the latter into the master's dominium. Illicit are only sexual relations with slave women who are neither Jewish or Christian. While other people's slave women can be married by free Muslim, one's own slave women have first to be manumitted, for one cannot have one's slave as spouse (cf. Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî 1983: 179).

18 This was the case with slave women destined to be traded and employed as such, and who hence obtained the status of concubine (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 193).

19 The Islamic regulations concerning master-slave woman sexual relations and their offspring are largely based on pre-Islamic principles, refined by Islamic jurisprudence (cf. Abd el Wahed 1931: 255ff.). Nevertheless the slaves were given some definite rights for the first time. These – as any laws – then underwent a process of varying interpretation and application (cf. Hunwick 1992: 6ff.).

20 The practice of Islamic jurisprudence or the application of traditional law (ʿurf) varied according to the socio-geographical location of the community. Among nomads and in remote areas the ʿurf predominated, while in the oasis towns, or among zwāya, the šarīʿa was more likely to be followed (cf. Norris 1968: 18).

21 Monette Clapier-Valladon (1971: 68) in her observation of life in the town of Néma states that bīẓān men frequently took their slave women as concubines and assigns the black phenotype of most bīẓān in the Hodh region to this practice. "Becoming black", as the references indirectly suggest, was not only a matter of intermarriage between "white" masters and "black" slaves, or else the latters' descendants. The bīẓān kept various inter-ethnic relationships with the neighbouring black African communities, including intermarriage not only in the east (cf. Schmitz 1996; Leservoisier 1994a: 125f.).

22 Unfortunately Webb does not provide any source for his statement. Ahmed B. Miské (1970: 111) equally describes as frequently concubinage between bīẓān masters and their slaves, but states these became immediately free, and their descendants legal and full heirs.

23 This description of bīẓāniyya power reads much like a practical study of the oral traditions on women's ruses presented by Aline Tauzin (1984b, 1989a). According to her analysis, men only achieve superiority to the women if they unite and act together, whereas the corpus of female tricks is abundant.

24 This right is still in use today and extends to all form of adultery, be it with concubines or other women. It is codified in the bīẓān marriage contract, and follows scrupulously a stipulation from 1099 (cf. Oßwald 1993: 61).

25 This is also reflected in statements from zwāya asked for legal advice on the matter (cf. Oßwald 1993: 61).

26 I was told of one case of a slave woman still working for, and having three children of both sexes by her married master, a member of a ḥassān tribe's notability.

27 Freeing and marrying slave women rather than taking them as concubines seems to have been frequent in the West African Islamic context. It is reported to have been practised by scholars of Timbuktu, who were given Fulbe slave girls by Sunni ʿAli (cf. Hunwick 1985: 27). The urban centres of Timbuktu in turn, as well as Djenné, were the cradles of the evolution of the important western-Saharan Islamic civilisation (cf. Oßwald 1986: 200ff., 251f.).

28 The Moroccan meaning of this verb, here phonetically ğūra, is "living with slave concubines at the exclusion of free wives" (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1989b: 346). However in classical Arabic ğāriyye designates not a concubine but a "slave girl, maid, servant" (Wehr 1976: 122).

29 It goes almost without saying that such a strategy could fail. There were (and are) extra-marital relations that never become recognised publicly. This might be the case even in the paradoxical setting of everybody knowing about a relationship, but it nevertheless remaining a "public" secret. One such recent, and widely known case is reported from Nouakchott. Brahim Ould Daddah was not recognised as son by his father, a member of a prominent family. "Nevertheless, as a child, Brahim (and indeed the entire community) was aware of his father's identity. When as an adult, his father continued to deny his paternity, Brahim sued. The court ruled in his favor as his father's identity was common knowledge, thus giving him the right to bear the Daddah family name. The central piece of evidence was the public knowledge of the father's name which could only be propagated through information only women (i.e. his mother and those around her) had access to." (Brhane 1997a: 74)

30 To my knowledge besides Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais only Aline Tauzin once made reference to sarriye as a means of establishing ties between a bīẓān and a ḥarṭāniyya (cf. Tauzin 1989b: 87). El Ghassem Ould Ahmedou (1994: 121f.) describes sarriye in the context of his novel on bīẓān society. All in all there might be some overlapping in the meaning of ğāriyye on the

one hand and sarriye on the other hand, as derivatives of the latter word's root (SRR) also refer to "concubine/concubinage" (cf. Wehr 1976: 405).

31 The legitimacy of children is assured even if these are born after a marriage. The idea of the "sleeping child", known as maḥṣūr, which may reside for several years in its mother's womb before starting to grow, is approved by Islamic jurisprudence. This institution allows women to bridge several years of divorce without having to fear that a child born in this time might damage their reputation (cf. Al-Akhbar nº 7, 21.8.1995: 4f.).

32 A congruent case is that of Hammodi, an Adrar ḥarṭāni "who made it". Among many other "slaves of quality", he bought a slave woman from Mali, who first served him in the household and as his concubine (in the wider sense, without implying legal rights and obligations). In 1955 he opted for a change in her status and married her. She bore him a son (cf. McDougall 1988: 382).

33 With respect to bīẓān society Pierre Bonte has carried out a most detailed examination of different practices of marriage. These are found to aim at maintaining a hierarchical representation of different tribal entities. Nobility thus results from close strategies of matrimonial alliances as opposed to open ones. While deficient on symbolic grounds, the latter strategy allows for the inclusion of many new members into the tribe, and the transformation of gains in demographic weight into political power (cf. Bonte 1987a). According to this strain of analysis the concept of exogamous versus endogamous matrimonial strategies proves to be inappropriate, and has to be replaced by the notion of "open" or "distant" versus "close" range modes of matrimonial alliance (cf. Bonte 1991, 1994a,b; Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 661ff.).

34 This observation fits neatly into the framework of segmentary theory, providing a further level of fission and fusion to the popular interpretation: "I against my brother, my brother and me against my cousin, all of us against the rest of the world." Many criticisms have been advanced against this simplistic application and indeed the theory as a whole, but these are not the issue here (for some aspects of re-evaluation see Bonte/Conte 1991, Amselle 1990, Eickelmann 1984). On rivalry between half-brothers and sisters born of slave and free women refer also to Fisher/Fisher (1970: 105-107).

35 The fact that Abderrahmane in popular consciousness is remembered as having been born of a woman of slave, and not as being of ḥarāṭīn origin, reveals the profoundness of the distinction. A status formally achieved had to be transformed into one socially recognised. Hence he is remembered not only by his father's name but also as "wull at-tläylä" his mother's name. An analogous tradition is reported of the important ʿamīr of the Trarza Amar Ould al-Muhtar, who died in about 1800 (cf. Ould Mohamed 1988: 61f.).

36 Another similar case is the influential leader of the Kunta fraction of the Awlād Sīdi Ḥayballa, Mohamed Ould Ahmed, who died in 1995. His father had four wives, one of them a former slave. Her son was the one to become his father's successor. This chief in those days was the candidate to the office supported by his tribe, but opposed by the French colonial administration. Despite considerable pressure, the French candidate, the uncle of the still

very young Mohammed Ould Ahmed, could be dismissed (Khalifa Ould Kebab).

The success of prestigious ḥassān leaders with a ḥarṭāniyya mother raises questions of a more fundamental kind. Claude Meillassoux outlines the important role slaves could be assigned in the organisation of power in a single aristocratic lineage, where blood-ties create rivalry rather than solidarity. Slaves are exempt from multi-directional commitments (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 192). Likewise a ḥassān leader with a ḥarṭāniyya mother has only one filiative tie, the one to his father's family whereas descendants of more prestigious unions have to meet the expectancies of both their father's and their mother's lineage. Candidates lacking maternal kinsmen therefore were most liable to be of a certain neutrality in this regard and thus likely to become the exponents of compromise between competing lineages and to maintain the chiefly lineage (cf. Cooper 1979: 117). All in all the pattern is widespread. Among the leaders of the Songay empire, the Askias, all except Muhammad I were sons of concubines (cf. Hunwick 1985: 22).

37 Still in 1951 Ely Ould Bakkar was depicted as being among the most persistent enemies of Abderrahmane (AM, chef de subdivision Moudjéria, "fiche de renseignement" n.d.).

38 One member of the emiral lineage presented his own youth to me as being that of a spoilt child. He never had to work nor was obliged to do anything (Interview Sid Mohamed Ould Dey, 27.8.1995). This style of life is presented too by Youba – although his focus is on his brothers, who have a bīẓān mother. While he is obliged to go to school, they stay under the tent and pass their time in camel-riding and other diversions.

39 Much the same beliefs are reported from the ḥassān already in the mid of the 19th century (cf. Carrère/Holle 1855: 226; see also Toupet 1977: 182).

40 Claude Meillassoux analyses in depth both the attraction and pitfalls resulting from the lack of a maternal lineage. However, his concern is not with a case similar to those presented here. Central to any of these unions, in patrilineal- as well as in matrilineal societies, are factors weakening the offspring's social position (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 135ff.). Other such examples are presented by Keim (1983: 147f.) and Olivier de Sardan (1983: 141).

41 With the beginning of the new pasture after the first rains in the rainy season (normally in July), ewes with a lamb are imported from the Hodh and sold throughout the cities and also large villages like Achram. These are considerably cheaper than the local sheep, and many people profit from the occasion to buy some, take them out to the seasonal camp they are living in, drink of the milk and later, when back in town where keeping animals is problematic, sell the fattened animals at local conditions, thus making some profit.

42 An individual's outfit is not a good indicator of status or affluence. Quite noble, rich and influential people may dress more than modestly. Somewhat recognisable to western eyes is the symbolism nowadays applied to houses and household utensils. The more money at hand, the more likely there will be a nice set for the tea-ceremony, a carpet, a radio etc.

43 There were many bīẓān who did not want to send their own children to school, but managed to make their dependents' children go (cf. De Chassey

1984: 141ff.). However, some local leaders – forced initially to send children to school – at least from the 1950s on perceived the opportunities offered by school education, and made their sons enter the colonial and later independent administration (Interview Hamoud Ould Amar, 4.11.1995).

44 This ḥarāṭīn community insists that it was never anybody's slave, but only the ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. They had close tributary-like ties with the ʿamīr, but did not keep individual patron-client relations with specific families. This consciousness of status reaches a peak of a certain kind in the statement of a ḥarṭāniyya who refused to let her children marry descendants of some other communities whom she perceived as not being true ḥarāṭīn, but ʿabīd (slaves; Interview Bâke Mint El Mokhtar, 2.11.1995).

45 This ambiguity and precariousness in the status of a slave woman married by a freeborn man is very well analysed for the Songhay-Zarma. Being married to a freeborn man thus meant advancement to a new status, however reminiscent of the master-spouse's goodwill. While entering into such a relationship needed the display of sexual attractiveness, one of the major characteristics of female slaves, the objective of slave women in these circumstances was to overcome these stereotypes by consolidating their role as wives. This they achieved by giving birth to children who no longer suffered from the stigma of servility, but who in turn later would deny all of their maternal origin for this reason (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1983: 141).

46 This pattern of non-integration of the former slave, woman-spouse into the family of the noble, or better-off status is also apparent in the case of Hammody, a ḥarṭāni from the Adrar, who made a great career and fortune during the colonial rule. He married several freeborn and noblewomen and one of his female slaves. Until today this woman and her son live separate from the rest of the family, and relations between the two branches of the family are strained, because of the memory of their slave origin (cf. McDougall 1988: 384).

CHAPTER 4

1 These are only the most important, and with respect to West Africa, the main destinies of slave trade. However, on the African east coast and horn a quickly expanding, but small and short-lived slave trade developed as well (cf. Manning 1990a: 73ff.).

2 From 1700–1809 an annual average of 2,458 slaves from the interior West African regions are calculated to have been exported across the Atlantic and an average of about 1,824 across the Sahara. Changes in trade patterns would have resulted in the trans-Saharan trade absorbing more slaves from 1700–1709 and from 1770 onward. Both trades would have been near parity from 1760–69, and the Atlantic trade would have outnumbered the trans-Saharan from 1710–59 (cf. Webb 1995: 66).

3 One of the major flaws in the nevertheless exciting analysis of Patrick Manning (1990a, b) might be his assumption that the "number, age, and sex

composition of male and female captives were similar" (Manning 1990a: 189, note 8). As the author acknowledges, this most important factor in demographic model building is contested by other scholars. Manning's model is also insensitive to changes in the composition of the enslaved population. These were likely to result from different modes of enslavement driven by either a political or an economic rationale (cf. Curtin 1975a: 181ff.).

4 By the 1850s Timbuktu had ceased to play this important role due to political instability in the region. Caravans effectively by-passed the city (cf. McDougall 1992: 65).

5 This pattern of trade is revealed in the accounts of the French shipwrecked on the western Saharan coast (cf. Barbier 1984). By the end of the 19th century the bīẓān trade network had expanded and trade routes were re-structured in response to changing geo-political circumstances. In the Trarza salt mines were exploited to acquire slaves from the Niger bend. These were transported westwards along the desert-edge and the right bank of the river Senegal until reaching the Trarza, from where they were moved to Morocco (cf. McDougall 1992: 70).

6 Daniel J. Schroeter (1992), drawing on data concerning slave sales on Moroccan markets, estimates that the early 19th century witnessed a decline in the slave trade, because of insecurity in the desert, and later competition from eastern trade routes. Subsequent to the abolition of the Atlantic trade, a new climax in trade lasted from about 1840-56. A continuous high level in slave trading was reached from the 1870s to 1894. There the numbers of slaves traded between the western Sudan and Morocco, according to a conservative estimate, are likely to have ranged between 4,000 and 7,000 per year. This increase reflected the fact that all other Maghribi destinations for the many Sudanese slaves were already closed by this time.

7 The main interest of the Portuguese during the heyday of Arguin lay in the acquisition of gold, not slaves. They used to trade slaves along the West African coast from one region to the other, in order to exchange them for gold (cf. Lovejoy 1983: 35f.).

8 James Webb holds the view that enslavement within the region persisted, but was primarily related to the Sudanese kings' need (namely of Kajoor and Waalo) for a commodity they could barter for horses. These were crucial to maintain the region's most important military force, the cavalry, which suffered severely from the animal diseases of the humid zone. The Barbary horses the bīẓān bartered were either bred in the western Sahara or imported from the north and the trade continued well into the second half of the 19th century (cf. Webb 1995: 68ff.).

9 James Searing (1993: 75) portrays the exchanges with the desert-side as two distinct networks: "This trade exchanged animals for slaves, grain, dried fish, and other savannah commodities on the one hand, and gum for Atlantic imports such as cotton cloth, iron, and firearms on the other."

10 According to James Searing (1993: 196), the demand for grain produced by the slave traders having to feed their slaves while waiting for the middle passage and later on the trip, has been the pivotal moment behind the region's commercialisation of agricultural production, the emergence of

slavery as the primary means of organising economic production and political control, and the development of important urban centres. This may be to overemphasise this very special aspect within the vast Senegambian trade networks. It is equally difficult to assess the hypothesis according to which the trade with gum arabic in the context of overall increase in trade activities raised bīẓān demand for grain from the left bank (as stated by Searing 1993: 62).

11 The take-off in urban growth and trade in Saint-Louis took place only after the end of the legitimate Atlantic slave trade in the 1820s. It was an outcome of the trade in gum arabic rather than the slave trade (cf. Searing 1993: 165).

12 It might be argued that the trade in gum arabic was more profitable for the local bīẓān than joining into the east-west slave trade feeding the Atlantic markets. Martin A. Klein (1990: 237) has convincingly argued that slaves were rarely a commodity of a higher value than other competing commodities, but often of lower or equal value. This pattern of profitability seems to have altered by the end of legitimate slave trade, which witnessed a rapid expansion of salt and slave exchanges, now all destined for Morocco, throughout the whole western Sahara, including Trarza (cf. McDougall 1992).

13 Nāṣir al-Dīn claimed to be an Imām, a leader of the faithful in prayer, and took the title of ʿamīr al-muʾminīn (Commander of the Faithful). He also appointed a wazīr and four qāḍis in order to administer the state and collect taxes (cf. Gomez 1985: 550). His religious learning, praised on various occasions (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 841; Seiwert 1988: 70f.), remains contested however. No writings of Nāṣir al-Dīn are transmitted, but several of contemporary zwāya, who argued against him (cf. Oßwald 1986: 282).

14 John Ralph Willis (1985c: 16) has pointed to the "paradox" that the "jihad, in its effort to free men from unbelief, should become a device to deprive men of freedom." Although the ǧihād of Nāṣir al-Dīn in its initial phase opposed the illegitimate enslavement of Muslims by their own rulers, the logic of holy warfare soon became a means to redefine the boundary between the believers and unbelievers to be enslaved.

15 The decisive character of the impact this single event is supposed to have had for the evolution of antagonistic ḥassān and zwāya identities, and of the ḥassān emirates, has to be questioned. The recent analysis of the development of 19th century Gebla identities provided by Raymond Taylor (1997: 131f.) and fitting neatly into Barth's (1969a) approach to the evolution of ethnic groups demonstrates how group formation among the bīẓān relied on the nature of continued encounters in a socially and professionally highly heterogeneous setting. In a similar perspective the emergence of Saharan conceptions of "white and black" is seen by James Webb (1995: 16ff.) as result of the encounter Saharan and Sudanese groups had during trade, as well as in the context of political turbulence.

16 On right and left bank rulers' alliances cross-cutting the Senegal river see also Olivier Leservoisier (1994a) and Jean Schmitz (1994a: 430ff., and 1994b).

17 Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1997) recently criticised the theoretical paradigm underlying the conclusions of Raymond Taylor (1995), and

underscored that political power in bīẓān society did not remain subject to the patterns of fission and fusion typical to segmented societies, but that the emirates were able to build nuclei of institutionalised and centralised power.

18 This is why Claude Meillassoux, analysing West African slavery, develops the framework of a slave mode of reproduction, one by warfare and trade, rather than a slave mode of production (cf. Meillassoux 1986). While data on the demography of western Saharan slavery is lacking, demographic deficiency can be deduced from their desperate living conditions having been comparable to those of other African slaves. Reasons for high mortality and frequent diseases lay in a lack of food and clothing, maltreatment, mental stress, and the difficulty to adapt to a new and hostile environment (cf. Webb 1995: 25f.; Vincent 1860: 486, 492f.; Meyer 1959: 57).

19 The data is based on an estimate of Saharan population at the end of the 18th century considered to equal one quarter of today's total Mauritanian population. Of these two thirds, or 167,000 are estimated to have lived along the axis from the Adrar to the Tagant and further south and south-east, and one quarter to one third to have been slaves (cf. Webb 1995: 67).

20 The region's infestation with animal diseases like Trypanosomiasis made imported horses subject to an extremely high mortality rate. Over time interbreeding with Sahelian ponies succeeded, but these breeds could not match the equine qualities horses needed for military use: speed and height (cf. Webb 1995: 68).

21 These numbers are estimates. Neither were only pure breed horses imported, nor were all horses imported. Prices varied according to various factors, such as equine qualities, but also the slaves' age and sex (cf. Webb 1995: 89).

22 It is highly probable that from the beginning of the trade of salt for gold (usually cited as the only trade in the medieval era), grain was traded as well (cf. McDougall 1983: 266). Indeed medieval trade was likely to have already been diversified, and not solely reliant on salt (cf. Ruf 1995: 95). The volume of this trade, however, might have remained limited. A medieval source describes the camel caravans travelling to Timbuktu and ancient Mālī to change salt slabs for gold as having suffered terrible losses due to animal diseases affecting up to 75 percent of the camels (cf. Ca da Mosto 1967: 20f.).

23 Many sources covering the time-span from the medieval era to the early 20th century stress the central role salt held in Saharan commerce with the western Sudan, and the increasing relevance it gained in the slave trade (cf. McDougall 1992). This does not imply that the extensive trade networks run either by the bīẓān, or by Sudanese communities like the Juula and the Maraka, restricted themselves to only these commodities. Many goods, such as e.g. grain, which were traded to the north as well as slaves could be purchased not only with salt, but with horses, as well as other desert products like livestock or dates. James Webb (1995: chapter three) argues that during the 18th century western Saharan salt trade for Savanna grain increased to compensate shortfalls in local production induced by climatic changes. While empirical evidence remains scanty, it seems unlikely that the large populations of the Tagant and Adrar, who have a long experience of cultivation (cf. Toupet 1958, Bonte 1985a), became all too heavily dependent

on grain imports. Such modes of complementary production did develop, but needed a high specialisation into camel rearing and caravan trade not documented for the western Sahara. This is illustrated by the case of the highly specialised economy of the Kel Ewey Tuareg of the Aïr in the Republic of Niger (about 14,000 inhabitants in the early 1970s). Until today they combine camel and small ruminant rearing, and caravan trade to exchange desert salt for Sahelian millet, and oasis gardening (cf. Spittler 1989a, b).

24 Both Raymond Taylor and James Webb take the cases of the Ahel Ganār, the Ahel al-Gebla, Trarza al-Kiḥil, and the Idawalhağğ to underpin their argument. Initially the Ahel Ganār were constituted by a conglomerate of riverine populations having strong links to Wolof society, and being Wolof-speakers. During the 18th century, they integrated more and more closely into bīẓān society, and became the Ahel Ganār. The Idawalhağğ were bīẓān who for centuries controlled much of the trade with the Sudan, where they settled to build up trade outposts. When the tribe's influence in trade diminished, and the formerly strong relations between its various branches started to vanish, the southern communities increasingly dropped their Saharan links and customs, such as e.g. the use of ḥassāniyya as language, but maintained much of their religious prestige (cf. Taylor 1997: 68ff.; Webb 1995: 36f.).

25 Khalifa Ould Kebab, my research assistant, told me his grandfather five generations back had worked as a mason in the construction of Kasr el Barka, the now abandoned important Kunta settlement on the Tagant. He claimed his family had definitely never had another status than ḥarāṭīn, i.e. none of his forefathers to have been unfree or slaves.

26 Al-Hajj Umar, who had started his conquest in 1852, was unlucky, as his initial ambitions to control the Upper Senegal paralleled the rise of French interests in controlling this region. In 1857 both parties clashed and Umar was defeated. This led him to direct his movement to the east, and conquer the territory of the former Segu Bambara State situated on the Niger River up to Timbuktu (cf. Roberts 1987: 79ff.).

27 David Eltis has gathered data on the following points of embarkation: Upper Guinea, Windward Coast, Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra, Congo North, Angola, Southeast Africa. Of the slaves shipped from the Bight of Benin, 46 percent were men; 21 percent women, 22 percent boys, and 19 percent girls (cf. Eltis 1987: 256). These numbers are confirmed by French shipping and plantation records (cf. Geggus 1989).

28 The same set of data shows the price differential to be much less marked for older than for younger slaves of different sex (cf. Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 279).

29 This can be discerned by the different ethnic origins noted for male and female slaves entering the Atlantic world. In the late 18th century the largest group of male slaves was Hausa. Those slaves coming from the interior most often were "prime slaves", i.e. young male slaves, who had the lowest value in the interior, but the highest on the coast. Those women and children

shipped to the Americas most often came from the coastal regions (cf. Lovejoy/Richardson 1995: 282, 286, see as well Geggus 1989).

30 Admittedly, this argument seems to portray a rather simple distinction of supposed female/male virtues. The point here is not to decide whether men or women were more docile, but to hint at the perceptions slave raiders, traders, and masters developed of their slaves' minds. It was these ideologies that directed the masters' actions. For a discussion of masters' responses to problems of slave control see Martin A. Klein (1983: 77ff.).

31 Islamic jurisprudence provides a large set of rules defining the rights and obligations of slave traders and buyers. Within this framework it was commonly admitted that the slave's willingness to serve his new master, and hence his value to the latter, was difficult to assess. Sales therefore remained open to reversal within a distinct delay in case the buyer had not been satisfied (cf. Daumas 1883: 321ff.).

32 The notion of a plantation sector was introduced to the discussion of African slavery with regard to the east coast of Africa by Frederick Cooper (1977: 221f.). On these estates the sex ratios of slaves were relatively balanced. Paul Lovejoy (1983: 31), though cautious about drawing an analogy to the slave economy of the Americas, stresses the role plantations run by slaves had in the economic transformation of the "inner Niger valley into a heavily populated and productive region". John H. Hanson (1990: 212) notes that slave prices in Jomboxo rose considerably when Futanke settlers, who had come there in the course of the Umarian movement, started to invest in slave labour to expand agricultural production. Slave prices in the area became twice as high as in the Senegal valley.

33 Slave marketing in the interior was rarely a public affair. Slaves were commonly sold "in the house", and only in the most important trade towns were slaves sold on the public market (cf. Dunbar 1977: 161, note 7).

34 Martin Klein (1983: 82f.) reports interviewees both of slave and free origin stressed the point that masters were obliged to provide adult male slaves with a woman, i.e. a major means for social integration.

35 This conclusion has to be drawn from the data available on slave demography in Africa. On average, slave women had less than one child. The rate of reproduction thus was negative (cf. Klein 1983: 69, Meillassoux 1983: 51). Still in 1974 Claire Oxby (1978: 176, 200) recognised that the fertility of slave women among the Tuareg was markedly inferior to that of the freeborn; the former having an average of 2.65, and the latter of 3.26 children. The slave women also were more numerous than slave men in the camp.

36 This is most evident in those cases where slaves in the region of Achram-Diouk remember their ancestors. I met no case of a slave reclaiming his most far-reaching line of descent from a male ancestor. Instead all referred to a woman, e.g. a Bambara stolen by one of the ʿamīr Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed brothers at the turn of the century, or an enslaved Fulbe woman, whose ethnicity was recognisable due to her typical scars. Since socialisation into bīẓān society was important, only these first generation slave women were remembered as having spoken some other language than ḥassāniyya.

37 ANM (no registration number), Commandant de Cercle du Hodh, I.

Bastouil, Aioun el Atrouss, "étude sur la population noire dans la subdivision centrale d'Aioun-el-Atrouss" 25.5.1959: 2; document kindly passed on by Meskerem Brhane.

38 At this time 4,193 people of various black African ethnic groups were counted. The data presented by Munier arose from the official administrative census. It may underestimate the number of sūdān, because according to I. Bastouil, only sūdān registered together with their masters' tent were counted, while those living independently with their own tent and household were numerous too (cf. ANM (no registration number), Commandant de Cercle du Hodh, I. Bastouil, Aioun el Atrouss, "étude sur la population noire dans la subdivision centrale d'Aioun-el-Atrouss" 25.5.1959: 2; document kindly passed on by Meskerem Brhane).

39 The difficulty in drawing a sharp distinction between ḥassān and zwāya is a point stressed by Timothy Cleaveland (1995: 37) too. He cites a 1953 French administrator's "mémoire", which in contrast to the colonial-administrative mainstream criticises a dichotomy which he felt to be meaningless due to its having too many exceptions.

40 This document, entitled "Rapport politique, année 1950, Tableau de Population, TOM de la Mauritanie, Cercle du Tagant, Subdivision de Moudjéria" found in 1979 in the Tidjikja branch of the ANM (no system of cataloguing) was kindly passed on to me by Roger Botte. The original document distinguishes "Maures blancs" and "Maures noirs", i.e. white and black moors. This meant that znāga, maʿalimīn and iggāwen were subsumed under the category bīẓān. The layout of tribal fractions follows the colonial administrative design, which resulted occasionally in redrawing tribal boundaries. This is most evident in the case of the Kounta Haiballa I and II, divided by Commandant Frèrejean, to reward with his own chieftaincy a Kunta leader for his support during the French conquest of Tagant. To clearly mark these differences the French transcription of tribal names is maintained.

41 Unlike from the other colonies of French West Africa (A.O.F.), there was no poll tax in Mauritania, but only a tax on livestock. A tax on agricultural products, called ʿašūr, which was once introduced, was suspended in 1940 (cf. Toupet 1959: 103).

42 One other explanation for the unbalanced sex ratios among the sūdān might be selective infanticide (Prof. Dr. Günther Schlee, personal communication 25.6.1998), but up to now data allowing to investigate the scale and the rationale of such practices in the western Sahara are lacking.

43 A colonial administrative census of Oualâta's 1912 population presents bīẓān women as largely outnumbering men, and an even higher disproportion among the sūdān (cf. Cleaveland 1995: 315). This is characteristic for the small, ancient trade towns, where men were absent most of the year accompanying caravans, and travelling for trade. Today, small towns and villages which emerged subsequent to the drought of the early 1970s, are dominantly populated by women. In the big urban centres, focus of male wage labour migration, men outnumber women (cf. D'Hont 1985: 102).

44 This is a phenomenon still frequent in colonial times. One reason why "tribes" moved out of a given territory were conflicts. A major case in the

region of Achram-Diouk was the conflict between the Awlād Talḥa and the former ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. It was resolved in 1939 by detaching the Awlād Talḥa from the administrative region of Tagant, and registering them in Kaédi (cf. AT, anonymus, "Historique Abakaks", n.d., kindly passed on by Roger Botte). In other cases parts of tribes sought to establish themselves and become recognised as independent tribal fractions (cf. AT, J. Hornac, "Télégramme-Lettre", Subdivision de Moudjéria, apparently May 1940; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

45 Still in the 1960s, the evaluation of national demography was based on tribal membership and not on areas of residence (cf. Brenez 1971). Later studies, such as the 1977 census, adopted an approach taking coresidential units as the basic units of inquiry (cf. Paccou/Blanc 1979).

46 Besides my fieldwork data I have not come across this definition of šurva. The scholarly debate portrays them as zwāya, a description conforming well with the meaning of the term, which indicates direct descent from the prophet Muhammad via the sons of his daughter Khadija. The example of šurva among the emiral Ahel Swayd Aḥmed shows how prestigious strangers become integrated into the tribe and strengthen the intersections existing between the zwāya and ḥassān social world.

47 Of this total of 124 women heading a household alone, 57 were actually unmarried, i.e. divorced, and 45 had survived their husbands. Of the remaining 18 cases data concerning the current marital status is missing. Only three women were reported to be married, but nonetheless leading the household on their own, thus replacing their permanently absent husband.

48 This is the case in Hella, whereas the case of Achoueibir, where many of the znāga are closely integrated into the tribal community, presents a balanced distribution. As among the ḥarāṭīn, among the znāga different levels of subordinate status exist. The present thesis therefore rests on the assumption that subordination correlates with more fragile marital relations and male absenteeism. Further research on this topic is required, as some of the cases in question may be the result of marriages between old men of noble descent and women of subordinate status, likely to survive their husbands for a long time.

49 Achoueibir has a rate of 39, Téjal of 23, and Legned of 27 percent sūdān women leading a household without male support.

50 Most of the nine slave women in Hella leading their household on their own are described as closely attached to one influential bīẓān family. One woman was married to the actual (unofficial) ʿamīr of Tagant, but is now divorced (for this to take place she ought to be a ḥarṭāniyya). Besides her, only one other of these slave women was described as having ever been married. For the eleven unmarried women in Téjal data on former marital status is lacking except in two cases, one being that of a grandmother whose husband died long ago, and another, divorced mother.

51 Here only valid data is processed. The cases from Leqraye are excluded, because the missing data on women would have produced a strong bias.

CHAPTER 5

1 There is just one narrative with a male slave actor (and provided by a slave man). Alas, rather then telling of a slave's fate and ruses like the female narratives, he tells of one free enough to look for a job. The point of the story is that he denies knowing any of a slave's typical occupations, but insists on being a good worker (cf. Tauzin 1989b: 86f.).
2 Claude Meillassoux (1983: 50ff.), while stressing the role de-sexualisation played in producing the difference between masters and slaves, restricts its practice to women. While the emphasis is right, de-sexualising practices, well reflecting the actual slave condition, also applied to slave men (cf. Klein/Robertson 1983: 10). E.g. Alexander Scott, enslaved on the western Saharan coast in 1810, had to grind meal (cf. Scott in Barbier 1985: 82). His earlier fellow in suffering, Brisson, had to make faggots, churn butter, spin wool and pull up roots (cf. Brisson [1792] in Saugnier/Brisson 1969). Among the Tuareg slave men were assigned typical women's tasks whenever there was a lack of slave women (cf. Bourgeot (1975: 83).
3 Time and space are dimensions crucial to the analysis of social relations and the constitution of social structures (cf. Giddens 1992: 161-213). An analytical framework drawing on the links between space and the division of labour, and later also gender, has been developed in human geography and feminist theory within this domain (cf. McDowell 1993a, b). Today the differences produced by the gender differential are no longer perceived as bound to local arenas and the household. Rather global structures, like macroeconomics, which used to be portrayed as gender-neutral, appear to be gendered and their shape in time and space to be pervaded by shifting boundaries between male and female (cf. Lachenmann 1998: 312f.; Elson/McGee 1995).
4 Nehemia Levtzion (1987) assumes that the development of a distinctly rural Islam (a model opposing the common ideal of learned Muslims as urban traders) in West Africa was possible only because of the strong hierarchical structure of these societies. Slavery thus allowed the masters to develop a religious scholarship for which they otherwise would have lacked the material means – and the time.
5 In fact the abrupt end of slavery due to massive slave exoduses in some parts of West Africa shortly after the colonisation did not lead to the breakdown of the local economies, as the colonisers had feared. Instead the former masters quite quickly adapted to the new situation, and made their way without the former slave support (cf. Roberts 1988). The case of the bīẓān in this respect is different, for the longevity of slavery in this society may be regarded as exceptional. This, however, does not imply that there was no change in the bīẓān modes of production. Indeed the bīẓān, while maintaining relations of dependency, managed to adapt their pastoral economy quickly to the new circumstances provoked by colonisation (cf. e.g. the development of pheniculture in many parts of Mauritania pp. 161-165 and 222f.).
6 These considerations, focusing on the slave perspective, leave out two major

professional activities restricted to the bīẓān: Islamic scholarship and warfare. Neither are easily subjugated under a narrow definition of work, implying the means of direct production and reproduction. More important here, however, is the point that these occupations were inaccessible to slaves. Some exceptions were made for ḥarāṭīn. There are several narratives speaking of ḥarāṭīn forming distinct groupings of subordinate warriors (cf. Ba 1932: 118f., note 1; Bourrel 1861: 36f.; Taylor 1995: 427). Very few ḥarāṭīn ascended to being trustees of bīẓān, either in the caravan trade or among the ḥassān chieftains (cf. p. 165-170).

7 Gudrun Lachenmann criticises the social sciences for having contributed to making women's economic agency invisible (cf. Lachenmann 1992: 77f.). Today's bīẓāniyyāt are heavily involved in economic activities, above all trade. The sūdāniyyāt more often occupy niches of small scale production of textiles, take-away food and the like (cf. Simard 1996).

8 With the rise of feminism came the challenge to the masculinity of social sciences, and the development of women's and gender studies. With regard to slavery this track, in a nutshell, states that "The oppression of women antedates slavery and makes it possible." (Lerner 1983: 174) Many aspects of the complex thus raised still remain largely understudied. The major contributions with a focus on the Sahelian and African slavery are the unpublished dissertation of Claire Oxby (1978), and the contributions to the volume "Women and Slavery in Africa" edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (1983).

9 Few milk given to slaves was prevalent until the 1970s among some Tuareg (cf. Oxby 1978: 153), however, this could change if milk was abundant, or simply if the master was richer or more benign (cf. Robert Adam's report of captivity in 1816, reproduced in Barbier 1985: 35). Milk and millet when consumed together, as is normally the case with ʿaiš , yield more protein than when consumed separately (cf. Webb 1984: 155). This is apparent in popular traditions: ʿaiš was reported to me as a meal endowing the one who eats it with tremendous strength. Quite logically the former ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar was reported to have been one of the greatest lovers of ʿaiš.

10 By the end of the 18th century the Wolof state of Waalo was destroyed, and the Trarza warriors enslaved an unknown number of its inhabitants. Some were traded to the North African markets, but most remained within the desert society (cf. Webb 1984: 111; Barry 1988: 111).

11 Slave masters in the new world also profited from the skills African slaves had. Farming practices such as bush-fallow and hoe-and-hill agriculture proved to be best suited to the growing of plants such as tobacco and maize in certain circumstances, such as in Chesapeake (Virginia) during the early 18th century (cf. Walsh 1997: 93).

12 Among the Kel Ferwan Tuareg until the 1970s mistresses are reported to have claimed "at least one slave girl in every household (usually in the 10 to 14 year age-group) . . . in order to mind the latter's [the mistresses'] baby, and perform small tasks for her, such as sweeping; the free woman's own daughter would never be asked to do such things. This slave girl lives and sleeps in her owner's tent, not in her mother's." (Oxby 1978: 178)

13 The collection of ʿaz was reported several times to me, mainly by slave women. Although disliked for its inconvenience (three husks to be pounded off, "had to be accompanied by much milk"), it still is collected in considerable amounts on the Tagant, while in the plains of the Aftout it seems to have become rare. During the big drought in 1969 ʿaz was used as a relief foodstuff by many inhabitants of the Achram-Diouk region. At this time people even located colonies of ants in order to dig them up and get to their supply of ʿaz. A technique already described by Bourrel (1861: 41f.).

14 Louis Hunkanrin, although he entered history as one of the first and most fervent opponents of the French policy of laissez-faire vis-à-vis the practices of bīẓān slavery, had only a limited knowledge of bīẓān society. Those cases of slavery he referred to were drawn from his personal vicinity in the Mauritanian towns were he was held under arrest (cf. McDougall 1989).

15 Reproductive labour is defined by Margaret Strobel (1983: 111), as "the reproduction of new human beings, the daily restoration of human beings, and the reproduction of ideology or culture". The focus here is more restricted and lies on chores serving daily reproduction, as well as how female slave work was related to the reproduction of bīẓān ideology.

16 Loughaye Mint Driss, born around 1945, comes from a well-off zwāya family. At the time she was speaking of they lived only off their pastoral resources and did not engage in agriculture. Their animal possessions numbered 50-60 cows, and 150-200 sheep and goats, together with some riding camels and donkeys. She married a slightly less wealthy zwāya, but with a very good reputation and elaborate religious education.

17 Ideology persists despite, or perhaps just because of contrasting experiences. Khaite early in her life experienced her mother having to work on the fields because of the family's poverty, and her husband having died early. While the mother is described as working, Khaite does not mention having joined in. She stresses that her brother had completed his basic studies in the Qur'ān despite the difficult conditions the family was living in. The situation only changed when Khaite married a man wealthy enough to sustain the family.

18 Women in bīẓān society are not obliged to enter and constitute from the day of the wedding ceremony a household with their husband. The situation described hence may arise from the woman's will to continue to live with her parents despite being already married. Only about 40 or 45 days after the first child is born (childbirth has to take place with the woman's family), is the woman obliged to move to her husband (Khalifa Ould Kebab).

19 Brisson, one of the 18th century French castaways notes as a success that he was sometimes allowed to stay in the back of the tent (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 417).

20 Margaret Strobel (1983: 116ff., and note 7) has highlighted that work played a crucial role in determining slave women's conditions. Taking part in reproductive work was crucial for an increasing integration because tasks in and around the main house enabled the slave women to develop intimacy, to acculturate, or from the masters' point of view: to "become civilised". This step up meant also renouncing some of the slave subculture, was seen as

essential for a further career as a concubine, and eventually becoming manumitted.

21 Some bīẓāniyyāt related the end of the sūdāniyyāt's (sūdān women's) willingness to pound millet to the arrival of MENDEZ, the company constructing the asphalt road from Nouakchott to the east of the country in 1977 (Interview Khadijetou Mint Abdallah, zwāya, 11.2.1996).

22 Grinding one standard sack of cereals (50 kg) in a modern local small-scale mill costs between 150 and 180 UM (US$1.00). For a fee of only 2,000 UM (i.e. the equivalent of the supplemental monthly pay a housemaid receives for pounding millet) one can therefore grind more than 500 kg of cereals, a quantity even a large family couldn't consume.

23 While during pounding the bran is separated from the flour, the simple milling techniques are unable to do this. Couscous prepared with the locally ground flour therefore is considered to scratch the gullet when consumed. This annoying concomitant of modern times can be avoided by enveloping the couscous-grains in a final layer of white wheat flour.

24 Analysing bīẓān society as an entity one has to be aware of this multitude of slave men's occupations. There are several authors who have tried to distinguish too sharply between slave and freemen's occupations, e.g. by stating that male slave labour performed almost all the work of livestock rearing (cf. De Chassey 1977: 86; more differentiated: RAMS 1980: 74). Such statements fail to illuminate the interrelations between different branches of pastoral and agro-pastoral production and the wide range of male slave labour.

25 Caillié's report has been criticised for over-representing the importance of slave labour to the collection of gum arabic (cf. Ould Cheikh, personal communication in McDougall 1992: 85). Indeed this assertion relies on only second hand information, (a fact not obscured by Caillié). Apart from the exact number of slaves involved in the harvest and trade of gum arabic, what remains besides question is the great interest the bīẓān had in this business. Most importantly, the trade in gum arabic fuelled trade networks throughout the western Sahara, so that the exchange of cloth, millet and other goods increased (cf. McDougall 1992: 74; Ruf 1995: 116ff.).

26 Unfortunately Bourrel hardly ever distinguishes between male and female slaves. René Caillié (1830: 56, 92) too remarked that the zwāya were much better off than the ḥassān.

27 The development of bīẓān pheniculture originated in the Adrar region (perhaps on the remnants of wild palm trees) and later expanded to the south. Slaves were imported to meet the need for labour power (cf. Bonte 1985a,b: 329ff.).

28 Here Dubié's description lacks accuracy. It is not evident from his writing whether the herders get the use-right or the possession of the sheep. Neither is the number of sheep subject to the procedure mentioned.

29 There are doubts whether all these animals were the property of Weddou Ould Jiddou. He himself declared that he had been very close to the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. This might indicate that he had managed some of the latter's herds.

30 Charles Toupet (1958: 98), stating the same difficulties in ascertaining the average animal property, proposed the characterisation of four distinct lifestyles: 1) a pastoral nomad, not engaged in agriculture, with 30 cows and 140 small ruminants, 2) a ḥarṭāni who was well off and owned 15 cows, 50 small ruminants, 140 date palms and some fields with an annual harvest of about 140 mūd and an unknown quantity of ʿaz collected, 3) a noble bīẓān, owning a good riding camel and keeping 10 cows on loan, 4) a sedentarised trader.

31 Meskerem Brhane (1997b: 26) analyses these strategies as a "subtle entrapping". A slave man, having received this or a similar favour from his master (e.g. the latter also could buy the slave's mother, if the slave had changed his master), had much more to lose by leaving than one without family. Interpretations of these acts however differ among the slaves themselves. Some regard them as the charitable act of a generous man, others, often the subsequent generation portray it as a strategic option for better conditions of exploitation.

32 Michael Winter (1984), presents a rather different image of the cattle rearing Kel Agheris Tuareg in northern Mali. There slaves made up as much as 70 percent of the population, and the noble strata relied almost entirely on their slaves for livestock rearing. Dominance was maintained by prohibiting livestock ownership by slaves. This system broke down when the colonial administration interfered and decided the majority of cattle belonged to the Bella slaves, thus dispossessing the Tuareg.

33 Different strategies of herd management are likely to result from socio-economic transformation. Among the Kawāhla of Kordofan, the objectives of pastoral production have changed markedly since the 1930s and 1940s. Camels are no longer important as providers of milk and transport, but are kept primarily for sale for slaughter. Ecological degradation, as well as the main camps' increased cattle herding has produced almost independent movements of the cattle and camel herds and the redefinition of the herders' tasks (cf. Beck 1988: 226ff.).

34 Of course there were tasks besides the narrow range of "normality". One interviewee of slave origin stated that he had left his master during the big drought, because his work had increased to a level he could no longer manage. His master, trying to save his cattle, had told his slave to cut fodder for all the animals. Besides this task he had had to water them (cf. Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995).

35 René Caillié (1830: 98ff.) reports the cattle being led to the pasture by slaves, but does not specify whether the animals were continuously guarded or not. However, seeing the great danger from theft and predators in those times, animals might normally have been guarded.

36 Samba Ould Haroun told me that already in the times before the drought near to the well of Letfatar a camp existed, composed of people called anmāre, who were of various tribal origins. They herded cattle for other people for a monthly payment of 60 UM. This was meant to pay for the work of watering the animals. The use of the milk was included too. Obviously these people accompanied the cattle to pasture, for one reason

why people sent their precious lactating animals to these strange herders was the danger of wolves prevalent in the region at this time (Interview Samba Ould Haroun, ḥarṭāni, 7.11.1995).

37 A full-time herder receives about 5,000 UM (about US$32) per month. For cattle the average prices vary between 200 UM during the wet season and 250 UM during the dry season, when watering makes the job more labour intensive (Interview Maʿarouf Ould Eleyatt, ḥassān, 26.3.1995).

38 This I observed among former slaves of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed nobility living in Daber on the Tagant. Several interviewees stated that they herded some goats and cows belonging to a bīẓān among their own herd. While no remuneration was specified, many in the course of the interview said they had benefited from some aid in cereals or other goods offered to them in case of need by the noble bīẓān.

39 A whole variety of factors contribute to the well-being of the animals, e.g. camels have a considerable need for salt. If there is no especially salty pasture, the animals have to be led to salt deposits, or, as is nowadays common in the region of Achram-Diouk, provided with salt every two to four weeks (Interview Abdallahi Ould Briké, zwāya, 9.4.1995).

40 El Ghassem Ould Ahmedou (1994) in his novel entitled "Le dernier des nomades" gives a beautiful description of an outstanding camel herder's virtues.

41 Personal luck could increase or diminish animal property quite fast. Sīdī Muḥammad Wuld Habot, a 19th century Lāġlāl trader, who amassed a legendary fortune during his life, liberated a number of znāga from their obligation towards their ḥassān patrons. The experienced camel herders thus became his dependents and watched his supposed 400 camels (cf. Bonte 1985b: 330)

42 Sophie Caratini (1989: 100) emphasises that the distinction the Rgaybāt make between second generation slaves born in the camp, and slaves captured or bought, does not rely on different levels of affection but on more or less complete socialisation into Rgaybāt society. Only slave boys are believed to become skilled herders, knowing all animals in the master's possession extremely well; once this is achieved they are hardly ever exchanged. Saugnier, while enslaved in the western Sahara, consequently herded only camels in the vicinity of the camp (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 37).

43 As already stated, property in this camp was distributed highly unevenly. While Mohamed Ould Abass during his interview declared one close relative to have owned 100 camels, and his own nuclear family to have owned 50 to 60, he stressed that the number of poor people in the camp has been so high he now could not count them.

44 Most big herd owners I became aware of come from the local notability. However there are some "new rich" too, the modest origins of whom people increasingly dare to name (Interview Yahya Ould Heime, ḥassān, 12.12.1995).

45 Payment may vary according to the size of the herd; for herding about 20 to 50 head, recently about 5,000 UM were paid. Herds up to 100 animals, necessitating labour input exceeding at least during a part of a year one nuclear household's capacity, could be paid for with up to 10,000 UM (about

US$64) per month (Interview Mahmoud Ould Mnih, znāga, 4.2.1996). The sum of 60,000 UM approximately equals the price of an average riding camel. For past arrangements refer to Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun (1952: 56).

46 The great bīẓān traditions of brave herders, such as those of Deyloul, show these to be znāga (cf. Tauzin 1993: 13-20). Among my interviewees, commitment to pastoral activities was most marked among people likely to be of znāga origin (Interview Mahmoud Ould Mnih, 4.2.1996). Though slaves too could engage in camel herding, riding etc., they often did so only as a secondary occupation to cultivation (Interview Ghalim Ould Elkhair, ʿabd, 17.12.1995). Badeyn, too, in his long career of professional occupations once herded camels for a Kunta notable (cf. p. 57-59).

47 This is practised throughout the Sahel. Although moving around in one and the same herd, sheep and goats maintain different patterns of mobility, due to distinct fodder preferences and seasonal vegetation differences. In a mixed herd observed near Niono (Mali), sheep had an overall intake of 59 percent herbaceous plants and goats about 87 percent of shrubs (cf. Wilson/de Leeuw/de Haan 1983: 102).

48 The region of Achram-Diouk by and large has considerably cut down export of livestock. Nowadays sheep imported from the Hodh region are cheaper than local ones, and subsequently more competitive on the national and international level. Former sales to Senegal are replaced by the quick lorry transport to and subsequent sale in the capital Nouakchott. A few exceptions come from the northern meat markets in the mining centres. In this direction animals are still transported on the hoof until reaching the station of Choum at the iron ore railway linking Nouadhibou with Zouérat.

49 Sheep are not able to browse and digest wooden fibres, but in turn seem to use resources more efficiently than goats and have slightly fewer miscarriages (cf. Wilson/de Leeuw/de Haan 1983: 87).

50 Several such plants were reported to me, but I was unable to identify all of them. Whenever branches from a tree called tebnenna (this might be the species called titarek, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, by Ould Hamidoun 1952: 19), are laid into water to make ropes of it, the water is poisoned for animals. Residues of millet plants sprouting again some time after being cut for harvest become harmful to animals too (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 12.4.1995).

51 There are a lot of practices to cure animals of this and other diseases. Most prominent are treatments with a red-hot pole. Depending on the injury or disease, different areas are marked with burns (the same treatment applies to human beings). With regard to the inflation caused by tigengilit, several treatments were related to me. One is to grease with oil or butter or to wash with a large amount of soap the anus of the animal, another treatment is to penetrate the animal's belly with a sharp needle and hence let the pressure out, yet another is to make small incisions beneath the ears and the nostrils or to dilute sugar in water and make the animal breathe in this liquid.

52 During and for some months subsequent to the rainy season small stock can be watered from surface water. Good shepherds then are able to distinguish good from bad water infected e.g. by animal residues. Once this water

supply dwindles away, professional adult herders have to dig wells, a task they have to get an assistant for because of the amount of work entailed. On the Tagant such wells attained a depth of between 8 and 10 metres (Interview Mbarek Ould Koueriye, ʿabd, 21.12.1995).

53 This period, experienced on a big plantation of millet, like the large dam of Daber on the Tagant or Zemmal in the Aftout, is most impressive. All day long the fields virtually vibrate with the endless shouting of an infinite number of cultivators, reinforced by the cries of the chased birds, the sounds of pots, cans and other items hit or clapped together and the irregular rhythm of slapping slings. The omnipresent tension accompanies a deep fatigue on the part of the cultivators.

54 Here flood recession agriculture is described, where both sowing and harvesting takes place about two to three months later than in rainfed or recession farming behind dams.

55 This method entailed the danger that the location of the granary might be hard to recognise. Sometimes it could only be located after rain, when the stored grain started sprouting (Interview Ahmed Ould Aimar, ḥarṭāni 29.3.1995).

56 The submersion, either in the traditional walo-cultivation on the borders of the Senegal river, or behind dams, referred to in the following, has the advantage of suffocating vegetation. After the waters have retreated, the land is ready for cultivation without further input.

57 Gerd Spittler (1991: 4f.) has analysed the ethic and conception of work among Hausa cultivators. These draw a sharp distinction between places of work, identified with loneliness and sometimes the bush, and places of communication and social life. An interference of social life with work is perceived as spoiling the latter. A comparable conception is probable for the work ethic of both sūdān and bīẓān. Bīẓān interested in Islamic scholarship usually left the camp of their family to live with a teacher elsewhere, and only returned with the studies accomplished. Among the sūdān the spatial segregation of work places and social places follows a different pattern. Cultivating implied in many cases living by the fields, often in the close vicinity of other sūdān. As many slaves were sent cultivating, this was the time when many of the otherwise dispersed slaves met and families came to live together.

58 There is divergent information on the ecological impact of the modern type of large dams. A socio-economic study of the Tagant region, prospecting the region's potential for a development project (which later came into being as the project Achram-Diouk), noted an increased compacting of the soils due to the long-lasting flooding (cf. Grosser/Ibra Bra 1979: 49). Other scholars, such as the geographer Charles Toupet (1977: 264f.), too, remark on this phenomenon. Increased salinity of the soils seems not to be a major problem. I found just one case concerning some stretches of the large dam of Daber on the Tagant, constructed by the French administration in the early 1950s. Other large dams, e.g. the almost one hundred-year-old large dam of Zemmal (120 ha), modernised by the Achram-Diouk rural development project in 1991, do not reveal comparable problems.

59 Millet and niébé beans (in ḥassāniyya called adlagān) are sometimes cultivated in combination. This is advantageous, because the leguminous plants increase the nitrogen content of the ground (cf. Wüst 1989: 84).

60 There is a considerable number of women now living as household chiefs in the region of Achram-Diouk as well as other rural areas of Mauritania. Many teenagers dislike working on the fields, especially if a continued presence on the highly dispersed fields is required, far away from their friends in the nearby village. Therefore tasks needing constant presence, like guarding the fields and chasing birds, is done by the women and small children, while the teenage boys are obliged by their mothers to join in temporary activities like weeding and harvesting. To get this work done, the youngsters rely more or less successfully on reciprocal help from their friends (Interview Mahmoude Mint Ali; ḥarṭāniyya, 26.7.1995; Boua Ould Beydyali, hartani, 11.9.1995).

61 Male absenteeism due to migration has probably increased women's contribution to these tasks vis-à-vis former times (cf. Toupet 1977: 259).

62 Both beans and melons are important cereal substitutes, being able to grow successfully without too much rainfall. They were cultivated at the desert's edge to cope with the frequent shortfalls in sorghum supply and local production, but the bīẓān did not prize them. In good years with sufficient grain available, the consumption of vundi and adlagān, which when accompanying millet raises the dish's yield of proteins, was left to the slaves and ḥarāṭīn (cf. Webb 1984: 154f.; on the use of vundi see also Bonte 1985a: 36f.)

63 Pierre Bonte, who started research on the Adrar region of Mauritania in the early 1970s, recently finished a comprehensive thesis on the history and anthropology of the tribal society in this part of the western Sahara (cf. Bonte 1998c).

64 The case of Awdaghust has always fascinated people and raised discussion. Evidence is only to be drawn from excavations of a site lying in the Aouker, in the exact middle-point between Kiffa and Tîchît, most probably identified with the ancient Awdaghust. According to two divergent hypotheses, occupation of this site began either in the 7th or in the 8th century. An excellent discussion of the interrelations between the early trans-Saharan caravan trade, the Almoravid movement, ecological change and the emergence of the bīẓān society is provided by Ann McDougall (1985a).

65 A study of the Kunta trade network on the Tagant still needs to be done. The towns of Talmeust, Rachid, and Kasr el Barka appear in almost none of the descriptions of pre-colonial trans-Saharan trade, despite their considerable size and affluence. The ruins of Kasr el Barka, with its distinct flat stone architecture, are impressive, even one hundred years after the city was abandoned (due to the defeat of most Kunta fractions in a war with the Abakak Idaw'Īš). The extent of its former date palm grove once was estimated to be about 20,000 trees, and the number of inhabitants as many as 2,000 (cf. ANM E12-82, "rapport Lt. Fonde" 1936). In this Kasr el Barka is likely to have outdone the famous trading-towns of Ouadâne (supposed maximum inhabitants 1,500) and Chinguetti (supposed maximum inhabitants 1,200; cf. Mauny 1961: 484). Rachid, destroyed several times as well, was reconstructed during this century. The new town faces the ruins of the

old town on the opposite slope of the valley. To my eyes these cities are very likely to have performed as well as the illustrious old trade towns of Tidjikja and Tîchît. The most concise analysis of the economics of the Kunta trade in salt is provided by Ann McDougall (1980, 1987).

66 Tîchît, like Timbuktu for a long time out of reach of European travellers, seems to have been subject to much idealisation. While its central role in trade seems to be confirmed, much less so is the alleged fame of its date-palm groves. Du Puigaudeau (1993: 204) describes during the 1930s the ḥarāṭīn of Tîchît having to climb up the date-palms in order to wash off the salty deposits inflicted on the dates by the heavy winds charged with salt from the salt deposits. According to the former commandant de cercle du Tagant, Dubost (1924: 459ff.) this procedure was effected every three or four days during a period of about four months. Still then the Tîchît yield was much below the Tagant average (25-30 kilos versus 70-80 per date-palm). Given the high evaporation rates in the Saharan climate, this problem is likely to have antedated recent decrease in rainfall. The huge demand for labour for this type of cultivation also definitely limited the extension of the date-palm groves.

67 The intensity of agricultural use can be derived from the complexity of water management and irrigation systems. In this respect the Mauritanian oases did not match those of the northern Sahara (cf. Clancy-Smith 1994: 15-25; Ensel 1998: 70-72).

68 According to this interviewee, who for some time co-operated with the Mauritanian institute for research on pheniculture, throughout Mauritania only the people of the Adrar are real experts at date-palm cultivation.

69 Grosser and Ibra Bra (1979: 44) estimate the intensity with which the Tagant date-palm groves are put to use as follows: at maximum 10 percent meet the standards of intensive use, 40 percent follow an intermediate scheme, implying some fencing and the watering of the young plants, the remaining 50 percent rarely benefit from more care than pollination and harvest.

70 Ould Khalifa (1991: 253, 722) reports that the slaves and ḥarāṭīn (which he subsumes under the euphemism of ḥarāṭīn) in Tidjikja always remained directly attached to their master and subsequently lived in his household and had no segregated residence. This rather dogmatic statement, although very likely to describe accurately the case of most sūdān dependents, might be softened by supplemental characterisations. The masters often engaged in caravan trade, and the women were sent to nomadic camps to drink milk, the residences in town often were used more as a warehouse watched by the sūdān. In the early colonial period, the sūdān quickly started to sedentarise within the date-palm groves, transforming their huts into houses.

71 This very concern is expressed by Ould Khalifa (1991: 800f.), obviously trying to grasp his forefathers' action.

72 The occurrence of witchcraft and bīẓān society's ways of dealing with it are until today almost unstudied. Ann McDougall reports for the end of the 19th and early 20th century Tidjikja witchcraft trials involving slaves, performed by a bīẓān jury composed of a prominent cleric, witnesses and the supposed victim. The slave owners were in no way involved. Dealing with

sorcery was common enough to produce a whole set of procedures, the death penalty being only the ultima ratio. The French administration was still concerned with these practices in 1936, trying at least to eradicate the death penalty (cf. McDougall 1989: 289; Ould Khalifa 1991: 221). Witchcraft, ultimately contradicting Islamic belief, is a much obscured subject in bīẓān society.

73 It is probable that the two names represent the same group. During my fieldwork, although not working on the spot in the Wād Tidjikja, I became aware of the ʿaġzāzīr as a distinct group of specialists in date-palm cultivation living in social relations much like those of the ḥarāṭīn. Having come across the writings of Ould Khalifa (1991) only subsequently, I was not able to confirm the identity of the two terms. Another group with this name are the ʿaġzāzīr of Ijil, who exploit the salt mine there and live in a sort of tributary relation towards their Kunta overlords. Their origin is as mysterious as that of the ʿaġzāzīr of Tidjikja – and invokes similarly contradictory oral traditions ranging from bīẓān slave descent, mixed Berber and black African, and finally purely Berber descent. A further, not unlikely hypothesis is that the name might be derived from an ancient commercial language called "azayr" (cf. McDougall 1990: 248f.).

74 Abwayr, a settlement founded according various traditions during the 8th century, was the predecessor of Sinqīt, ore else Chinguetti, founded in 660 H/1261 AD (cf. Mauny 1955: 148f.).

75 A red phenotype is invoked frequently in the description of social categories. The blacksmiths (maʿalimīn), are similarly described as being of red phenotype. Another example is from the eastern regions of Mauritania. There the term ḥaḍāra, meaning greenish/dark, is frequently used to refer to ḥarāṭīn as people who descend from legally manumitted slaves (cf. Brhane 1997a: 59, and personal communication; Toupet 1977: 180).

76 Both authors develop the point of view that already before the 1960s the production in the Tagant oases relied predominantly on contractual relations between bīẓān and (in this case necessarily) sūdān of free status, i.e. ḥarāṭīn. This phenomenon is described as ancient, and the ḥarāṭīn status of many inhabitants of Tidjikja as coming from times immemorial. Other authors however stress that this "ḥarṭānisation" has contributed to a better performance of the workforce and has risen considerably since the begin of colonisation, i.e. since the first decade of the 20th century (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 284). From the 1950s on all men of servile estate are said to have been attributed freedom from their birth on (cf. Moussa/Ould Maouloud 1997). Similar trends during the first half of the 20th century have been derived from colonial documents of the Adrar by Ann McDougall (1988: 376, note 26).

77 This was thanks to the institution of muġarassa. This treaty, generally concluded between a bīẓān and a ḥarṭāni, obliges the former to provide the land to plant the palm trees, and the latter to provide the labour necessary to the development of the trees for about five years. This time being over, the trees should be divided among the ḥarṭāni and the bīẓān, while the land always remains the sole property of the bīẓān (cf. Dubost 1924: 464; Ould Abde 1989). The ease with which most bīẓān made use of Islamic jurispru-

dence, mechanisms of endebting and so forth, however, deprived most of the ḥarāṭīn of ever getting proprietorship of palm trees, and of course land. A second contract was musāqāt, defining a set of duties for the worker with regard to the land owner, and in return his right to one fifth of the harvest. This arrangement has been described as the most frequent in the Tagant until the 1970s by Ba B. Moussa and Mohamed Ould Maouloud (1997), and as common in the oases of the Maghrib too (there it is called ḫammās). Unlike muġarassa, it constitutes the ḥarāṭīn as a paid labourer without any means to acquire their own means of production.

78 I remain sceptical towards the interpretation James Webb offers of the interrelation of ecological degradation and social as well as economic change in the western Sahara both on theoretical and empirical grounds (cf. Ruf 1995: 50-70). Climatological data on the era is scarce and most interpretation has to rely on early travellers' accounts. These however, very frequently lack any accurate description of the severe seasonal variations the fauna and flora are subjugated to in arid and semi-arid environments. An evaluation of the Sahelian droughts from local chronicles and oral data (from the 16th to the 20th century) provides no direct evidence of a continuous degradation during this period (cf. Boureima 1993). Also desertification today is no longer conceptualised as an encroaching desert frontier, but as developing in niches and spots (cf. Mainguet 1991). Finally, an interpretation turning Webb's argument upside-down seems to fit the case at least equally well. After an initial crisis at the end of the 17th century, manifested in bīẓān chronicles and marked by segregation processes within, and southward migrations of some tribal groupings, the new mode of production characterised by increased trade activities developed. A dynamic economic development was induced, by which the plateau regions of the western Sahara (Adrar and Tagant) were able to import great numbers of slaves and hence to become the home of a population bigger than ever before (cf. Ech Chenguiti 1953: 115f.; Bonte 1985b: 329).

79 This was largely due to the French struggle to replace desert salt with imported sea-salt. While the Saharan salt was able to preserve its dominance in the trade over the decades preceding colonisation, railway transportation to Koulikoro (east of Bamako) available from 1904 brought about the breakthrough for French salt on the western Sahelian markets (cf. McDougall 1985b: 100; Roberts 1987: 161).

80 Donkeys could carry 50, oxen 100 kilograms of load over a daily distance of about 30 kilometres. Camels could load up to 200 kilograms, a load they could carry over 16 to 25 kilometres per day depending on their condition. A lighter load considerably increased the distances the camels could cross per day; up to 30 or 40 kilometres (cf. McDougall 1985b: 102). While within the Saharan climate camels were the beast of burden of choice, they suffered badly from animal diseases in more humid environments. Only a particular bīẓān breed of pack-camels resistant to Trypanosomiasis could overcome this limitation (cf. Féral 1983: 335).

81 The provisions of fodder naturally cannot fully cover the animals' needs. Rather they are intended to limit the deterioration of the animals' physical

condition during this period of extreme strain. These limits, however, are interpreted differently by different caravaners, an attitude largely determined by their dislike for the manual work of cutting fodder (cf. Spittler 1983: 70). Here one has to add that in former times, when the Kel Ewey Tuareg still had slaves to do this work in the place of the free men, the camels might have been better off.

82 Similar examples are reported from Tuareg traders, especially of the Kel Ewey and Kel Gress and their associates (cf. Baier/Lovejoy 1977; Lovejoy 1983: 211f.; Lovejoy 1986: 277f.).

83 Bourrel (1861: 66) in his mid-nineteenth century account from Brakna and Aftout reports the case of a tent-slave sent by his master with Bourrel's small caravan, in order to have the opportunity to gain some pieces of guinée-cloth.

84 This description particularly represents the situation of the eastern regions of bīẓān territory. In the south-west, the Gebla, caravan trade for a long time was on a minor scale, and implied shorter distances (cf. Stewart 1973: 118f.). Some caravans led by bīẓān were even constituted by oxen instead of camels, because of the region's infestation with Trypanosomiasis.

85 There were three tlāmīḍ associated with this Kunta family from the Azawad: "One organised and conducted the azalay [salt caravan], a second supervised the mining and preparation of the salt blocks, and the third attended to the livestock and camels. It is said that the one who managed the mining sector amassed a considerable fortune through his own private trade, which suggests that talamidh may have been given some sort of payment in kind for their services." (McDougall 1985b: 107)

86 Probably the best documented case is that of Šayḫ Sidyya al-Kabīr (1775-1868 AD), who set out for sixteen years of study among the Kunta of the Azawad at the age of thirty-four. Once he returned to his natal Gebla, he managed to gain both economic power and spiritual influence over diverse groupings within and beyond his own tribe. This enabled him to play an influential role in Gebla politics and make of these another source of symbolic and economic power (cf. Stewart 1973: 109, 112; Ould Cheikh 1991b; Taylor 1995: 430ff.).

87 The case of a ḥarāṭīn elite is reported from the Adrar region by Pierre Bonte (1991: 182).

88 This woman lives in a small hut at the back of the ʿamīr's present residence in Achram. She makes her living from drum-performances, a job she is engaged to do to enliven festivities. The iggāwen, traditionally the ones who did such jobs, have become rare in the rural areas due to their migration to Nouakchott where it is easier to make a living.

89 Ever since the ḥella of the ʿamīr ceased to mount the Tagant, the ṭbal played in Daber has changed. It is no longer the big drum of the tribe, but an old mortar transformed into a drum by stretching a hide onto it. It is now played with sticks instead of bare hands (Interview Doueige Mint Dvih, Daber, 21.12.1995). This instrument is often used among sūdān and called šenna (cf. Guignard 1975: 172).

90 This is confirmed in the case of Hammodi, a ḥarṭāni who was able to gather

great wealth in the early colonial Adrar, and subsequently was made paramount chief by the colonial administration (cf. McDougall 1988: 379ff.)

91 Abdi Ould Embarek, put into office in 1909 by the French after having joined their conquest of the Adrar, was deposed by the latter only a few years later in an attempt to give way to pressures from opposing bīẓān factions. Abdi's career ended when he was murdered on 26 June 1915 under circumstances never fully uncovered. For the next few decades local politics continued to involve much the same factional alliances that had been present in the days of Abdi (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 567, 581ff., 594f., 622, 648, 683).

92 This is of course an ideal-type description, and in everyday life these boundaries – as has been demonstrated in this chapter – were often less clear-cut. The herding of small stock, like many other tasks, was frequently done by children. However, speaking of child labour necessitates a definition of what it means to be a child in bīẓān society. Roughly the first initiation into the social world of the adults takes place around the age of five to seven, when bīẓān children are considered able to receive Qur'ānic education, and also could start to herd sheep and goats like the sūdān children. A next step was marked for the sūdān boys by their shift from herding to agriculture, which took place between the ages of fourteen to eighteen.

93 Norbert Elias (1990: 65-301) provides an authoritative study of how the evolution of feudal habits and this very social group were interrelated. The cultural practices thus developed do not constitute transcendental qualities but are signs and metaphors in struggles constituting sameness and difference; inclusion and exclusion.

94 Barbara Cooper (1994: 70f.) analysed female labour and the development of seclusion in the Maradi region of Niger. Recently the formerly servile female labour supporting the legitimate wives in the polygamous Hausa society has started to be replaced by that of now underprivileged junior wives. Similar developments can be observed in Mauritania. While polygamy is not at issue, the use of a household maid has become rather widespread. Millet, as I have noted already, is no longer pounded, but ground for money in motor-driven mills (cf. p. 147)

95 The equality of all (free) men is a central element in the bīẓān conception of their society. Therefore all members of a tribe are considered to share a common patrilineal ancestor, and thus to be equals who share a common solidarity. According to this model, it is the women, i.e. the uterine affiliation which marks difference (cf. Bonte 1987a, 1991).

96 Within the uniform ideal of femininity indeed some differences exist too. Women among the ḥassān used to accompany the men going to battle, as Benne Mint Ahmed told me (Interview, ḥassān, 29.10.1995). While she witnessed a battle of her tribe in which two men were killed, her veil was riddled with bullets. No such account from zwāya women has so far come to my knowledge.

97 Proverbs and tales are most informative about the cowardice attributed to blacksmiths (maʿalimīn) and musicians (iggāwen; cf. Tauzin 1993: 69).

98 Those ḥassān who for various reasons were no longer able to maintain their

status made the towba; they repented from their supposed immoral lifestyle and adopted zwāya status considered to be of lower esteem (cf. Bonte 1988).

99 Claude Meillassoux (1983: 49) describes slave women as being the only slaves experiencing what he calls de-sexualisation. As the term clearly relates to the domain of gender, and the present analysis is based on the distinction between sex and gender I prefer to avoid Meillassoux's terminology for the sake of clarity.

100 This is the case in narratives of noblemen who were taken and treated as slaves. This is usually discovered once the supposed slaves start behaving like people of noble descent. Mohammed Khairat is said to have been treated as a slave (like his mother) although his master knew him to descend from a zwāya. His real status became manifest once the master falsely accused Mohammed of drinking, i.e. stealing camels' milk while out on the pasture. Thereupon one of the young camels responded in his place and confessed having drunk the milk of his mother. This miracle made the master's eyes cross, his hand was paralyzed and his mouth deformed, while Mohammed Khairat became a saint of renown (cf. Brhane 1997a: 127ff.). Similar narratives from the Tuareg have been documented by Clare Oxby (1978: 150f.).

101 This was already observed by Saugnier a Frenchman shipwrecked on the western Saharan coast in the late 18th century (cf. Saugnier/Brisson [1792] 1969: 94).

102 Sūdān women not dressing correctly, i.e. not covering their hair, are an embarrassment for political activists struggling for the integration of sūdān on an equal footing into bīẓān society. Becoming an awakened ḥarṭāniyya, i.e. a ḥarāṭīn woman, also means learning to dress correctly and devoutly (cf. Brhane 1997a: 304).

103 Laura Fair (1998) analysed the gendered politics of dressing in post-abolition Zanzibar, which became much more for the former slave women than the men a field in which discriminating patterns had to be overcome. Crucial to this undertaking was wearing clothes in line with religious precepts.

104 Slave masters constructed an analogy between slave offspring and animal offspring. As in a herd of goats, only the relation between the she-goat and sucking kids is of interest.

105 This paragraph is strongly influenced by the approach to slavery as social death developed by Orlando Patterson (1979: 39, 1982: 35ff.) and recently taken up by Patrick Manning (1990a: 113). Both stress that slaves were excluded from society by its conceiving of them as socially unborn. This analysis, partly re-emerging in Claude Meillassoux's thesis of the slave as non-kin (Meillassoux 1986: 99ff.) is strongly criticised by Jonathon Glassman (1991: 281) for being a mere reconstruction of the masters' ideology, neglecting the entire "slave" conception of society and slave agency. While this argument is shared here, for it highlights major shortcomings in past analyses, it appears nevertheless imperative to also reconstruct the masters' ideology. This is essential to grasp the contradictory character of slaves' a gency, containing both submission and integration into the masters' world (as analysed here), and resistance and deviant ideology, which (besides the short overview of these aspects in chapter one) will be the subject of chapters

seven and eight. Finally the present case study aims to provide a glimpse of how social practice offered a means for slave women to overcome their fundamental exclusion from social motherhood even within the framework of the masters' ideology, as milk-kinship inserts slaves into precisely those collective social relations, i.e. a "civilisation", the denial of which is supposed to be constitutive of their very estate (cf. Meillassoux 1986: 113f.). The borders between inclusion in and exclusion from society are socially constructed, and hence are both maintained and contested in interaction.

106 The social configuration expressed by this Tuareg proverb in fact illustrates very well those aspects of slave men's mobility and slave women's immobility revealed by the narratives of Badeyn (with regard to his two, subsequent wives), and of Zeyneb and her husband (i.e. Brahim's father; cf. p. 57-59 and 62f.).

107 Among pastoral-nomadic Tuareg in the early 1970s many divorces among slave couples resulted from the camp splitting up, and the slave woman and man from that moment on belonging to different camps. While some ex-slave men, and slave men living in bad conditions left with their spouses, those slave men who had a good job and living, did not leave. Some of them, maintaining the marriage over great distance by temporary visiting, were reluctant to leave their work even for these visits, for they feared their masters might replace them with slaves present every day (cf. Oxby 1978: 196).

Chapter 6

1 This double meaning of sāḥil is present in the ḥassāniyya dialect until now. There are different terms for the cardinal points in the country. In the west, where the sea is close, sāḥil comes to mean "west", and represents the direction leading to the sea-coast. In the east of the country, the directions which the cardinal points represent shift. Sāḥil comes to mean "north" (with some tendency to north-west), i.e. the direction towards the shore constituted by the Sahara desert (cf. Frérot 1989: 110).

2 It should be noted that the nomads of the desert were hardly ever as predatory as commonly assumed. Much of the interrelations with the sedentary population developed on peaceful terms, as both depended on each other. This is especially true for the desert trade, which appears in the description of Ibn Baṭūṭa as well organised and safe (cf. Ibn Baṭūṭa in Levtzion/Hopkins 1981: 282ff.). Warfare did indeed occur, but in general only when one of the many parties involved in the business felt itself disadvantaged (cf. Clancy-Smith 1994: 18ff.) or went through a crisis.

3 The trade in salt from the desert mines, which was witnessed already from the 9th century, indeed could not have been managed without the participation of – and without profiting – the western Saharans. The history of Awdaġust shows that already from the 9th to the 12th century both short and long-distance trade co-existed, and that this trade helped develop and

maintain a trade in grain. The pastoralist diet of milk, blood and meat has always lacked carbohydrates and thus made relations of exchange with cultivators (either by trade or warfare) a necessity (cf. McDougall 1983; Bollig/Casimir 1993: 535f.). This reconsideration of small-scale trade and bartering, for long time underestimated in relation to the more prominent long-distance trade, is crucial to the understanding of the economy at the desert edge.

4 See also Valentin Ferdinand's report, where an annotation explicitly mentions the presence of North African (Tunisian) merchants at Ouadâne prior to the activities of the Portuguese at Arguin (cf. Valentin Ferdinand, report translated and edited by Kunstmann 1860: 260, note 59).

5 Such commodities were textiles, saddles, stirrups, metalwork, silver, spices, and wheat. The western Saharans sold slaves, gold, and gum arabic (cf. Valentin Ferdinand, report translated and edited by Kunstmann 1860: 264ff.).

6 The varieties of cotton cloth in this period were less standardised than the uniform pieces of indigo-dyed cloth – the famous guinée – which were later imported to the region from India by the European traders. Only Mauny (1961: 380), who bases his assumption on Leo Africanus, states that the cotton cloth imported by the Saharans from the Sudan during the 16th century was blue.

7 Cotton cloth production in the Sudan expanded in the course of the 18th century too. Richard Roberts (1987: 47ff.) describes the history of state formation in the Middle Niger valley as closely interwoven with the evolution of trade, local production, and political organisation. One aspect of this is that the Maraka responded to bīẓān demand for cloth and grain by expanding their production, and establishing slave plantations.

8 This was due to the development of the new cotton calico textile printing which relied on the use of gum arabic. These new fabrics provided an inexpensive substitute for tapestries, exotic silks, and expensive, imported chintzes, and unleashed a veritable consumer craze (cf. Webb 1995: 99).

9 From the West African coast, the gum was first shipped to France or Great Britain, from where a large part was re-exported to other countries, who themselves often re-exported the gum (cf. Webb 1985: 150).

10 Of course the advantages in the terms of trade calculated for the barter of gum and guinée, did not only result in a rise in the value of gum arabic, or the increased ability of the bīẓān traders to exploit their position of strength. During the period examined here, guinée cloth became less expensive. While in 1718, the price index for guinée imported to Senegambia was 100, it was only 66 in 1753, and 68 in 1838 (cf. Curtin 1975a: 321).

11 An evaluation of the reasons for the increase in grain demand is difficult. James Webb (1995: 118f.) argues that the terms of trade had become so favourable for the bīẓān, that the comparative cost of purchasing grain for gum was lower than producing it locally in the Gebla. This view is contested by James Searing (1993: 197), who holds an increase in the bīẓān dependent labour force (supposed to be great consumers of millet) responsible for the rise in demand. While both points remain difficult to prove, Webb's

argument is flawed by the fact that the demand for grain persisted, although from 1838 the terms of trade no longer developed in favour of the bīẓān, and the gum trade experienced several crises. There is also no proof of the bīẓān producing less grain than before; indeed, they were making use of a growing number of slaves, many of whom were settled in the south. An approach to this evolution considering it as an outcome of modes of production and exchange transformed by the gum trade appears more fruitful. Less grain may have been exchanged locally between pastoralists and sedentary cultivators in the framework of reciprocal relations of exchange, and more in commercial transactions. Once it had entered the trade networks, the trade in grain became likely to figure in the statistics.

12 Sources quoted and used by James Webb (1995: 114) to produce the present table: Gum prices for 1718 to 1823–27 are in pounds sterling from Curtin (1975a: 217, footnote 4). Gum prices for 1830-49 are estimated from Curtin (1975b, Table A15.14). Guinée prices before 1776 are rough estimates based upon Curtin (1975b, Table 15.11), which provides an import price index for the 1730s and is included only to estimate general magnitude. Guinée prices from 1776 to 1849 are from Table 5.8 in Webb (1995); see also Curtin (1975b, Table A15, 13). The guinée price for 1788 is unavailable: the 1787 price was used as a substitute. The guinée price for 1825 was used for an average gum price in 1823– 27.

13 Collecting gum could be done in addition to other activities like herding. Additionally it fell in the non-agricultural season, and therefore did not conflict with other major productive activities of the servile strata. In the 18th century about 2,000 individuals would have been able to collect all the gum harvested at this time. Despite the increased production of gum in the 19th century, the servile population of the Gebla still was large enough to make more workers unnecessary. Rather than being one-dimensional, the 19th century increase of the western Saharan slave population might have been driven by a complex set of various factors (cf. Webb 1995: 98).

14 Highlighting as it does the dynamic link between human action and natural environment, this is a strong case against an interpretation of western Saharan social and economic changes as being determined by ecological factors such as proposed by James Webb (1995).

15 While documents concerning trade with Mauritania in this era are lacking (cf. De Chassey (1984: 67; 84f.) there are strong arguments why the patterns of consumption developed in the course of the gum boom persisted. Early colonial accounts continue to report the bīẓān preference for guinée cloth of Indian origin, while at the same time an overall greater variety of commodities starts to be imported. How much the use of cloth had become indispensable to life at the desert's edge can be revealed from accounts of the great drought of 1940-43. Despite the severe famine in these years, this period is remembered above all as the time "where the people dressed in hides".

16 This was largely due to the Awlād Bū Sba, a tribe of the north who developed the trade in green tea "8147" from China, imported from Morocco together with other luxury merchandise and modern rifles (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 34).

17 Patterns of tea consumption have evolved significantly during the 20th century. Throughout my interviews I was told how in former times, i.e. between thirty and fifty years ago, the consumption of tea was still restricted to the most wealthy. Trade in tea was not well developed in the hinterland until the end of the 1940s. As many pastoralists lacked cash, they had nothing to exchange but animals (Interview Isselmou Ould Sidi, zwāya, 8.4.1995).

18 The ʿašūr is considered to have first reduced bīẓān interest in agricultural production (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 41). However, numerous agricultural and phenicultural undertakings can be traced in this period. These moreover are unlikely to have resulted from the few colonial incentives.

19 An evaluation of livestock exports from Mauritania is difficult due to the imprecision of data on both livestock numbers and animals traded. The colonial sources, which are likely to be the most exact, were based on assumptions too. E.g. the Commandant du cercle de l'Assaba noted in a report in March 1929 that the economic situation in the region was bad, and that its inhabitants had sold as many as 6,500 cattle and one thousand sheep to pay the colonial taxes (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 863).

20 The development of the early colonial peanut economy in Senegal is analysed by George E. Brooks (1975). Bernard Moitt (1989: 50f., 1993: 82f.) has shown that slaves imported from the east contributed significantly to the labour force in the peanut basin. These later sought emancipation by becoming followers of the Mouride brotherhoods, which managed to gain control of Senegal's peanut industry (cf. Diouf 1998). In the last decade of the slave trade Dagana on the left bank of the Senegal river was a major market for slaves, before Kaédi on the right bank took up this role for some years at the turn of the century. Here again the bīẓān appeared as slave dealers (cf. Klein 1993c: 176).

21 The whole Senegal valley functioned as a major labour reservoir, first for peanut production, and later for French industry, until the 1970s. Cash income in the area did not stimulate local agricultural production, but helped develop new patterns of nutrition, based on imported foodstuffs like rice, French style bread, coffee, pasta and others (cf. Bathily 1991: 61).

22 This description, essentially based on the work of Delaunay (1984), contradicts the view held by Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh and Pierre Bonte (1982) that the Senegal valley continued to be the "grain-basket" of the area until the drought of the late 1960s, though they acknowledge this role to have been in decline since the end of the Second World War. After the "pacification", as the French had named the installation of their colonial power, the local production, especially on the bīẓān-controlled right bank, is likely to have increased due to its resettlement both by black African ethnic groups and bīẓān. No information is available whether the grain imports of the valley, which took place during the 19th century (cf. Hanson 1992: 209), continued during the 20th century, and thus eased the accessibility of marketed grain for the bīẓān pastoralists. Francis De Chassey locates first signs of the valley no longer being able to meet the grain requirements from the interior in the year 1945, and supposes the surplus in the years before to have been moderate (De Chassey 1984: 67ff.).

23 While accurate data is lacking it seems likely that grain consumption in bīẓān society rose during the 20th century. The pastoral diet of former times was often described to me as having consisted only of milk during the rainy and cold season, with millet only complementing the decreasing amount of milk in the dry hot season. Eating in these times often was restricted to one or two meals a day. Later, eating a dish accompanied with millet twice a day became a sign of personal wealth (Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995).

24 During this famine, slaves are reported to have been re-sold, and children to have been pawned, because people did not have the means to acquire food or pay taxes. Among the purchasers, the bīẓān were reported to have been the most important group at Bundu and Gajaaga (cf. Clark 1994: 63). Various bīẓān groups buying slaves (among them the Idawʿīš) were also present in the upper Senegal valley (cf. Clark 1995: 213).

25 This high percentage did not only result from the deliberate will of the slaves. In many cases, the nobility responded to the French request for fixed quotas by sending their slaves instead of their own sons (cf. Clark 1994: 65).

26 A very good description of the repercussions the First World War had in West Africa is found in the autobiography of Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1992: 469ff.). The experiences the West African soldiers had on the European battlefields hastened the collapse of the stereotype of the white man as an almost supernatural being.

27 The French had already annexed the right bank of the Senegal valley to their colony of Senegal in 1891. From 1900 on the frontiers of the future colony of Mauritania were drawn and negotiated with other colonial powers, notably the Spanish, who claimed possession of the Seguiet el Hamra and Rio de Oro, which later became their colony and nowadays is known under the term "Western Sahara". In 1903 a protectorate over parts of today's Mauritania was established, and was declared "territoire civil" in 1904. Only in 1920 was Mauritania integrated as a colony into French West Africa (A.O.F.; cf. De Chassey 1984: 464f.).

28 The effects of the declining production and commercialisation of grain in the Senegal valley on bīẓān society are likely to have been tempered by the reoccupation and re-cultivation of the right bank subsequent to the colonisation (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 40).

29 In 1954 the Fulbe are reported to have reached the Tagant at Diouk and Djonâba, their expansion then continued eastwards, where they crossed the Assaba (cf. Santoir 1993: 138).

30 In some areas of the southern Gebla such as Trarza and Brakna, the right bank populations suffered severely from the establishment of French control on the left bank in the second half of the 19th century. The French quite effectively established a frontier, and prevented right bank populations from moving southwards. This hit the local populations hard and led to the pauperisation of many groups, as well as to northward migrations. In this process the right bank became less densely populated and exploited than in the first half of the century (cf. Taylor 1996: 216ff.). The beginning of the 20th century thus became somewhat a scramble for the reestablishment of

territorial claims that, both among the bīẓān and among left bank dwellers, had not been effective for a long time.

31 This was especially true for the Brakna region, where in the second half of the 19th century the emirate had been weakened and tribal control of land became fragmented. Additionally strong neighbouring tribal groups, among whom were the ʿamīr of Tagant, as well as the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd of the Assaba, intervened in local conflicts and thereby sought to maximise their influence (cf. Leservoisier 1994a).

32 The dam of Zemmal near Leklewa is an example of how this policy and the underlying evolution of the relations of production had an impact even within the remote area of the northern Aftout. Local tradition refers to the construction of the dam as having coincided with the first presence of the French. The dam, constructed and cultivated first of all by slaves, was registered as tribal territory, and hence gave the Legwāṭiṭ a secure claim over a large part of the fertile area of the Chelkhet Arkham. This is true for the dam of Achram too. According to interviewee Mohammed Yahya (zwāya, 21.9.1995), this dam was first constructed around 1915 by Tarkoz of the Leġwāreb fraction.

33 Tribal rights and tribal authority were difficult to eradicate by colonial decrees. Still in 1969, i.e. nine years after independence, and in the middle of the severe drought, the ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, prevented pastoralists who had no relations of affinity or affiliation with him from entering the Tagant plateau where the local animals were already dying in large numbers (AM, confidential letter from the préfet at Moudjéria, 15.4.1969).

34 Southward migrations as such were nothing peculiar in the western Sahara and frequently resulted from periods of economic crisis engendering social conflict. The foundation of Tidjikja goes back to a southward migration of Idawʿ Alī from Chinguetti in the Adrar. The Idawalhağğ are a zwāya group from Ouadâne in the Adrar, who during the late 16th or early 17th century migrated to the Trarza, where they developed the marketing of gum. Later in the 18th century many settled on the left bank of the Senegal, where their religious prestige attracted numerous black African students and provided them with considerable power. They successively adopted the Wolof language and intermarried. Today they are almost "Wolof", but still remember their noble bīẓān descent (cf. Webb 1984: 62ff.) An interpretation of bīẓān history as a continued southward migration fleeing from a desiccating environment is proposed by Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1995).

35 Especially the zwāya scholars felt a need to reduce mobility in order to obtain better conditions for teaching and learning. One zwāya woman remembered that in the past it were only their sūdān who tended the livestock, consisting of sheep, goats and cattle. While the sūdān were highly mobile, the bīẓān remained almost sedentary (Interview Loughaye Mint Driss, zwāya, 18.9.1995).

36 According to Loughaye Mint Driss (zwāya, 18.9.1995), who was born around 1945, her family (before their herds were destroyed in 1969) used to sell their animals "at all places", i.e. the traders came to meet the pastoralists

and buy the meat stock on the spot. Payment was either in cash, or on credit to be paid in tea or other commodities.

37 After independence the structure of the meat market was profoundly changed by the emergence of the mining town Zouérat in the north, Nouadhibou on the coast, and the capital Nouakchott. The capital for one of the now largest shops in Achram was generated by first bringing and selling sheep, and when the business had began to develop well, camels to Zouérat.

38 The trade of western Saharan desert salt for grain from the Senegal valley was still active in the first decades of this century – e.g. there were 1,000 camels loaded with grain passing through Tidjikja in 1907 (cf. Ould Cheikh/Bonte 1982: 35) – but then fell quickly into decline due to the import of French salt. Already before the great drought virtually no more salt caravans left the Adrar (cf. Ritter 1986), and the trade became limited to individual, small-scale exchanges e.g. between inhabitants of the Adrar who came to the Tagant, where they could exchange salt for grain with local sūdān (Interview Bâke Mint El Mokhtar, ḥarṭāniyya 2.11.1995).

39 D'Hont (1986: 157) notes that it was this monetisation of the commercial transactions that weakened the old trade elite's former privilege to create and maintain relations of dependency by providing credit.

40 The monetisation of the grain trade in the Senegal valley was effectively accomplished quite early this century. Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh and Pierre Bonte (1982: 43) locate the golden age of this trade in the years from 1931-48.

41 Speculating on the direct barter of grain for animals or other commodities was less reliable than accepting perhaps less favourable terms of trade, but gaining quick service in the trade towns. Isselmou Ould Sidi told me he had often failed to barter millet locally with sūdān because he arrived too late, when the latter had already sold off their surplus grain, e.g. to people from the Adrar, paying in cash. Still needing millet, Isselmou Ould Sidi then finished up travelling to Kaédi, where grain was always in supply. All this ended with the drought in 1969 (Interview Isselmou Ould Sidi, zwāya, 8.4.1995; Bake Mint Mokhtar, ḥarṭāniyya 2.11.1995). Information on the modes of exchanges was more detailed from women than men and it was the former who highlighted that animals were converted into money (Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995; Loughaye Mint Driss, zwāya, 18.9.1995).

42 These middlemen were at the heart of the spread of the large bīẓān trade diaspora, covering first of all West Africa, but later the rest of the continent too. E.g. some migrants from the region of Achram-Diouk are involved in the diamond business in central Africa.

43 Prices for small stock differed according to the species. Most prized were white sheep, which fetched a considerably higher price than the black sheep kept by the bīẓān to furnish wool for tent-making (Interview Isselmou Ould Sidi, zwāya, 8.4.1995).

44 Sugar, though necessary to the preparation of the typical green tea, was not among the goods Weddou Ould Jiddou imported. The profits to be drawn

from this bulky and heavy commodity, which was available at good prices in Kaédi too, were much too low.

45 Weddou Ould Jiddou, however, insisted that he had been a pastoralist above all. He undertook the journey only twice a year, while others, who according to his statement assembled the animals only on the basis of credit, kept coming and going throughout the year.

46 Kiffa, though passing through several periods of crisis, quickly developed into the most important trade town of east-central Mauritania. Already in 1917 a local market was declared open by the colonial administration, and in 1924 a branch of the French west-African trading company "Maison Maurel et Prom" was established. Droughts in 1926-27, and later economic depression led to an occasional breakdown of local trade business, and the reorientation of trade to the river Senegal. The sustained growth of Kiffa as a centre both for regional and export trade began in 1944, when the drought and recession of the early 1940s had ended (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 662f.).

47 Prostitution in the towns is documented in many colonial reports (cf. for the Adrar McDougall 1988 and for Kiffa ANM B1, anonymous, "La question des haratines et serviteurs dans l'Assaba" 1931; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

48 Some aspects of these liaisons were discussed on H-Net List for African History [H-Africa@H-Net.msu.edu], see e.g. Klein, Martin [mklein@chass.utoronto.ca] "Interracial Marriage & relationships: reply", in: [H-Africa@H-Net.msu.edu], 21 January 1998.

49 It was the presence of colonial administration that tempered depopulation of many of the old Mauritanian trading towns, which lost their former function as centres of trade and scholarship. E.g. Tîchît, which witnessed a net emigration not only of the sūdān; documented already in 1926 as leaving in large numbers for Oualâta, but of bīẓān too (cf. D'Hont 1986; ANM E1-20, Colonie de la Mauritanie, Cercle du Tagant, Subdivision de Tidjikdja, "Lettre du Capitaine Commandant du Cercle du Tagant à M. le Lieutnant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie à Saint-Louis" 14.8.1926; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

50 ANM E2-114, Cap. Gilles, Colonie de la Mauritanie, Cercle de Kiffa, "L'Aftout de Kiffa" 1936, p 3ff.; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

51 ANM série Tidjikja, dossier 33/1 "Compte rendu du conseil des notables, séance du 15 et 16 juillet 1921", cited in Ould Khalifa (1991: 777f.). It has to be noted that the French commandant at the time felt concerned about the sūdān leaving for the south less because he wanted to support the bīẓān claims, but because this endangered his ambitious projects of agricultural development of the Tagant (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 778).

52 AT, Vézy, Résident Moudjéria, "rapport Tribu Tarkoz" 30.9.1940; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

53 AM, Cercle du Tagant, "Procès verbal de la réunion du conseil des notables du Tagant" 29.6.1953.

54 The role of patronage in the acquisition of work is difficult to ascertain on the basis of individual narratives, which cannot be cross-checked. There are

good arguments for attributing credibility to the many sūdān claims to have looked for and found work without external (i.e. bīẓān) assistance and patronage. Some of the most menial jobs can be accessed directly. Also there are now some sūdān networks. This question, however deserves further exploration.

55 The valley is the locus of recession cultivation (waalo). Sowing and maturation here takes place later than with rainfed cultivation (dieri). The delay between the two harvests allows farmers from areas of rainfed cultivation to migrate to the locations of recession cultivation and work during harvest (cf. Grayzel 1988: 312; Leservoisier 1994a: 284).

56 Exploration began definitely in 1959, and mining in 1963. Only five percent of the MIFERMA, as the SNIM mining company was called prior to its nationalisation in 1974 and re-privatisation in 1978, was initially held by the Mauritanian state. All the remaining capital was held by French, British, Italian, and German investors (cf. Reichhold 1964: 71).

57 Above all watering was paid in cash, but wages seem to have varied strongly. Laghlave Ould Mahmoud (Interview, ḥarṭāni, 13.4.1995) claims to have earned 3,000 UM per month while watering cattle from different bīẓān in 1968, the year prior to the drought. This seems particularly much, for a medium cow then cost about 5,000 UM and a goat between 150 and 200 UM.

58 Many bīẓān owning only smaller herds put these together and thus had to pay only one herder instead of paying one for every herd or sustain a slave herder. While this trend created a certain amount of occasional job opportunities for sūdān seeking a greater autonomy, it also released the former masters and patrons from their obligation to assist their dependents in times of need (Interview Laghlave Ould Mahmoud, ḥarṭāni, 13.4.1995).

59 Among well-off bīẓān excessive mobility, i.e. submission to the needs of the livestock, was perceived as an expression of rudeness and lack of standing that had to be relayed to the sūdān or znāga (Interview Loughaye Mint Driss, zwāya, 18.9.1995).

60 There are numerous examples of herders who have a great knowledge of distant pastures and migrations. Such people, however, rarely appear in my sample, which is dominated by sedentarised sūdān and bīẓān now typical for the region. Most of the pastoral activity once located in the area has now moved south, namely to the region of Sélibabi and even further south beyond the Mauritanian border (cf. Interview Mohammed Ould Abass, znāga, 5.12.1995; Sidi Ould Gere, zwāya 19.4.1995).

61 The pastures of the north are supposed to be of higher nutritive content than those of the south. The latter are suspected by many to be "like water", and thus unable to give weakened animals their strength back. The case of the pastures of the east, i.e. the Hodh, is different. Here pastoralists from the Aftout and Tagant are reluctant to go. They state that their animals are accustomed to pastures of stony soils and therefore do not thrive in pastures of sandy soils (and vice versa). These conceptions of different pastures can be found not only in the Tagant and Aftout region, but throughout Mauritania (Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, personal communication).

62 According to Ahmed Ould Breik (ḥarṭāni, 11.4.1995), "One member of the family has to keep here [in the village, close to the land], not all [members of the family] can leave. All other brothers have left, therefore I have to take care of everything here. They [the brothers] have things here that one cannot leave just like that. One needs a brother who stays with these things."

63 On the practices of veil-dyeing, which is both an art and a big business, refer to Tauzin (1986). While bīẓān women are most frequently engaged in large scale manufacturing and especially trading of veils, sūdān women first of all dye small numbers of veils on an occasional basis, thus achieving far smaller profits. On Mauritanian women traders refer also to Simard (1996).

64 ANM B1, Colonie de la Mauritanie, Direction des Affaires Administratives, rapport "La question des haratines et serviteurs dans l'Assaba" 1931; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

65 Every year, shortly before the rainy season, the government initiates campaigns for the return to the rural area, and provides subsidised transport on lorries for the inhabitants of Nouakchott. Deprived populations who migrated from their rural home to the city thus are to be given a chance to restart cultivation and life in the rural area. These transports enable many who otherwise would be unable to get back home to start the trip. The sustainability of the measure, however, has to be questioned.

66 One ḥarṭāni told me how he recovered from coughing blood by permanently leaving Nouakchott and returning back home to his field, where he now lives almost exclusively on millet (Interview Ally Ould Mohammed Ghalle, ḥarṭāni, 12.12.1995).

67 One well established ḥarāṭīn employee of the Achram-Diouk rural development scheme helped his mother, who had lived in Nouakchott for more than a decade, to move to Achram. There he offered her a cow with the single purpose of improving her health and well-being with large quantities of fresh milk.

68 The central thesis in the most prominent bīẓān scholarly work on medicine can be summed up in the following words: "L'estomac est la demeure du mal". Consequently the main treatment for acute diseases was the laxative (Ould Ahmedou, E.G. 1990: 98).

69 Similar results are reported from other studies comparing sedentary and nomadic populations. The closer children lived to a modern, sedentary and urban environment, the worse was their nutritional state (cf. Oba 1990: 43).

CHAPTER 7

1 This overall discrepancy between local production and consumption of grain does not imply that no grain was exchanged locally. Until the big drought in 1969 pastoralists from the Adrar used to come to the Tagant to buy local grain, thus economising on the long journey to the Senegal valley. Caravans buying grain abundant on the Tagant are also reported by Bou el Moghdad from the second half of the 19th century, but doubts have to expressed about

his assumption that these were directed towards the black Africans of the šemāma (cf. commented and edited report of Bou El Moghdad from 1894 in: Ould Mohameden 1995: 94f.; see also the report of Bou El Moghdad issued in 1861).

2 Land that is to be "vivified" has previously to be identified as "dead land", i.e. it has to be proved that there has been no occupation or appropriation of any kind (Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 164). As a consequence legal regulations abound concerning the status of abandoned land (either by force or intention), land conquered by force, different modes of transmitting land involving different regulations concerning further alienability, etc., which allow for overlapping and conflicting claims to land ownership.

3 The nawāzil are a distinct kind of literature concerning juridical cases. In the western Sahara, the term often was used synonymously to fatwā (cf. Oßwald 1993: 23f.).

4 Wells can be constructed and owned collectively or individually. One can only claim ownership if they are located on one's own tribal land; in the case of wells built on foreign land, these will become the property of the collectivity holding ownership rights over this territory. Access to wells has to be granted to foreigners, as far as drinking is an essential need.

5 The definition of tribal territories depended also on pastoral specialisation. Bīẓān specialised in camel rearing, implying long and frequent migrations, had less well-defined tribal territories than bīẓān specialised in cattle, which depended on watering every, or every second day, and which followed patterns of transhumance rarely spanning more than one hundred kilometres (cf. Bonte 1987b: 196).

6 The desire to trace actual ownership back to the introduction of Islam highlights the zwāya preoccupation that their possession does not arise from illegitimate sources. This is documented by a special genre of legal documents, focusing on the supposedly illegitimate nature of most ḥassān (but also other groups') belongings. Many zwāya claimed to be (in a kind of a primordial definition) the only Muslims in the western Sahara and to be poor (thus entitling them to receive the zakāt, the Islamic tithe for the poor). Therefore they saw themselves legitimised in taking over possession of goods of illegitimate origin, i.e. goods whose legitimate possessor was no longer to be ascertained. This definition included the belongings of the ḥassān, who often were portrayed as evil beings, living only from theft and robbery (cf. Oßwald 1993: 190ff.; Brückner n.d.).

7 Among the Kunta of the Tamourt-en-Naaj, a few strangers were able to acquire land and palm trees. This, however, is inconceivable among the Idawʿalī of Tidjikja, among whom strangers may own palm trees, but would never be allowed to own the land on which they grow (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 402).

8 The central role distinct places can play in the constitution and maintenance of tribal or ethnic identity and cohesion among pastoral nomadic people, and the strong link between these processes and either practical and symbolical territorial hegemony has been highlighted by Günther Schlee (1990) with regard to the "holy grounds" of the Gabbra of northern Kenya.

9 Apparently the legal framework for the local land registers was introduced by laws in 1902 and 1932 (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 193).

10 This indeed brought about some problems, for there hardly ever was such a neatly defined hierarchy in tribal terms. However, as Colette Establet (1987) has shown for the case of the Algerian south, the indigenous population learned to express themselves in a way matching up with the colonisers' idea of a tribal hierarchy well organised into tribes, fractions and sub-fractions.

11 The mobility of tribal habitat was limited by the French practice of registering tribes in one administrative post, and of appointing them distinct areas of nomadisation, which in general were limited by the boundaries of the different administrative regions, called "cercles". This was rarely respected by the nomads, as administrative reports full of complaints on the issue show. The attempt to control bīẓān caravan transport and trade failed as well (cf. AM series of monthly reports by various local residents from 1937-1943).

12 These measures of course could not prevent a number of arbitrary decisions, and the registers reveal certain tribes to have profited much more from land entitlements than others. This reflects not only the arbitrary nature of colonial policy and its ability to make and unmake bīẓān tribes, but also the complex interaction between colonial and indigenous power. The good relations some bīẓān tribes and chiefs had with colonial officials enabled them to fuel the latter with well selected information and hence influence the administrators' decision making.

13 In the case of the lake R'Kiz the French undertook several inquiries into the history of land ownership, in order to deal competently with the many demands for attribution of land and facilitate arbitration with regard to disputes between tribes and fractions. The outcome of the case is revealing of the reluctance of the French to enmesh themselves too deeply in bīẓān affairs. In 1916, and again in 1920, the distribution of the precious land surrounding the lake is carried out by a local qāḍi – acting under the authority of two capitaines. Until today, this distribution, apart from some minor rectification, prevails. No authority, either of colonial or independent Mauritania has ever since dared to endanger this compromise (cf. Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 171f.).

14 In fact there are many means by which women can – legally – be excluded from their rights of inheritance. Declaring property ḥubs (synonym: waqf), i.e. a pious endowment which can be bound to different conditions, is one of the most prominent of such means. A detailed study of such practices (in use in Mauritania too), for Tunisia is presented by Sophie Ferchiou (1987), and Geneviève Bedoucha (1987).

15 These arrangements were defined as loans for use, and called ʿāriyya, according to the māliki jurist Ibn Abî Zayd Al-Qayrawânî (1983: 237). In general the beneficiary of the loan had to guarantee it would be returned intact.

16 The permanent installation of ḥarāṭīn in the Aftout, e.g. around Mbout, antedates the colonial period. The more permanent, and later sedentary

presence of the bīẓān began with the colonial presence in the region (cf. RIM 1986: 57).

17 There are strong regional variations in the access of ḥarāṭīn to ownership of land. Thomas K. Park (1988: 62, 64) witnessed the local qāḍi of Mbout stating that the ḥarāṭīn in this region all were legal owners of land, because they had initially cleared and cultivated it. This raised protest among the Mauritanian students in his research team. Coming all from the west of the country, they until then had never heard of ḥarāṭīn legally owning land. Still another picture is drawn by Olivier Leservoisier (1994a: 290f.). He saw the ownership rights of ḥarāṭīn were recognised only in so far as they could not be expropriated by bīẓān. The observation made in this context that land cannot be sold by ḥarāṭīn to people outside the tribe applies, however, to bīẓān too.

18 The limitation of the duration of a ḥubs causes many quarrels. Beneficiaries of a ḥubs are likely to raise claims that the ḥubs they profit from was made forever, or at least for the duration of their lifetime (Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi, 24.12.1995).

19 Viewed rigorously, these contracts involved not only the ḥarṭāni who concluded the agreement, but in the case of his death his successors too. These inherited the obligations, and consequently also the rights of their father (Interview Ahmed Ould Aly, qāḍi, 24.12.1995).

20 It is this difference drawn between ownership of trees and land that allowed the alienation of palm trees to foreigners, i.e. members of tribes who did not share the local collective rights of land ownership. Local bīẓān thus could contract ḥarāṭīn from other tribes, and not only ḥarāṭīn of their own tribe, as these were not allowed to become owners of land, but only owners of trees (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 404). In the Tamourt en-Naaj on the Tagant plateau, however, individual members of tribes alien to the area were allowed to buy individual plots.

21 Ahmed Ould Aly, the most respected traditional qāḍi of the region of Achram-Diouk (Interview 24.12.1995), insisted while describing the stipulation of the muġarassa-contract on the importance of concluding any such contract in written form, and not relying on witnesses. This is clearly because quarrels over muġarassa are among the most frequent. A ḥarṭāni originating from the Tamourt en-Naaj confirmed that he knew ḥarāṭīn who gained ownership of palm trees through muġarassa-contracts, but expressed serious doubts whether they had profited from the full number of palm trees (Interview ḥarṭāni, 22.3.1995). Still 72 percent of the palm tree groves in the Tamourt en-Naaj, and 54 percent in Tidjikja, continue to be exploited indirectly, i.e. by means like the muġarassa, with this rate being lower in other regions of date palm cultivation (cf. Ould Abde 1989: 39).

22 Grosser and Ibra Bra (1979: 178ff.) report that at El Mechra in the Tamourt en-Naaj, one of three date palm groves is entirely owned by ḥarāṭīn. This in turn may be a result of the znāga status attributed to the Kunta fraction living in El Mechra, which had a long history of conflict with the dominating Kunta groups of the region to ascertain its own territorial claims. Allowing ḥarāṭīn to appropriate contested "tribal" land in this respect could be viewed

as a bīẓān (or znāga) strategy first of all motivated by the wish to strengthen their own group's solidarity and territorial boundaries.

23 Jean Schmitz (1987: 12) in his study on the Gorgol Noir, does not mention this conflict over land between bīẓān and ḥarāṭīn of the Mbout region. According to him the significant proof of ḥarāṭīn independence in matters of land ownership is that they do not pay an agricultural rent. Paying the zakāt bears no analogy to the rent, it only symbolises the recognition of spiritual leadership and protection by local bīẓān (cf. Park 1985: 68f.).

24 This was ordinance nº 1983.127 of 5 June 1983, and decree nº 1984.009 of 19 January 1984. For a presentation in full detail refer to Park (1985: 69ff.). The 1990 decree was issued 31 January with the reference nº 90.020 and replaced the one of 1984 (cf. Crousse/Hessling 1994: 91).

25 Trying to erase all references to tribalism, the text of the law employs rather subtle prose: "les immatriculations foncières prises au nom des chefs ou notables sont réputées avoir été consenties à la collectivité traditionnelle de rattachement", i.e. the tribe (cited according to Ould al-Barra/Ould Cheikh 1996: 177f.).

26 This was how Colonel Ould Haidalla was reported to have circumscribed the official abolition of slavery (decreed in July 1980, legislation passed in November 1981) in a national radio broadcast condemning slavery firmly on 5 July 1983 (Mauritanie Nouvelles, nº 235, 23.1.1997: 8). On sūdān reactions refer to the narratives of Brahim and his mother Zeyneb, p. 63-66.

27 A narrative of the formation of this coalition between many tribes and fractions which over most of their history had been involved in inter-tribal conflicts is presented by Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1995: 593-595). Although resistance from the bīẓān to the French invaders was strong, this statement by a leading member of the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd fails to acknowledge the ongoing quarrels within the coalition, as well as the abstention of numerous tribes and fractions (cf. Frèrejean 1995: 193ff.)

28 Xavier Coppolani is an illustrious personality in Mauritanian history. Born as the son of poor peasants in Corsica, he chose to emigrate to Algeria, where he made a career as an administrator. Considering colonial policy unsuited to meeting the problems French rule raised in a Muslim country, he undertook studies of Islam to develop a both more sensitive and efficient policy. After promotion to the colonies of the "Soudan français", in 1898 he achieved the submission of several Tuareg and bīẓān tribes purely by negotiation. Thus encouraged he designed the plan for the constitution of a Mauritanian colony, which was initially met with adamant opposition by the Governor of Senegal representing the Saint-Louis establishment (cf. Désiré-Vuillemin 1997: 471-473).

29 The French troops were composed of about 30 Frenchmen and 800 men on foot, horse and camel (composed of tirailleurs from Senegal and bīẓān allies). Soon the food supply became a severe problem, and was tackled by the extensive slaughter of conquered bīẓān livestock (cf. Désiré-Vuillemin 1997: 481).

30 The death of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed in the battle of Bou Gadoum is contested, not in the literature on the period, but by oral tradition from the

later ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Soueid Ahmed. Bakkar is said to have died not in 1905, but a few years earlier in 1901 and some days after his leg had been wounded in battle with French troops. In his last days Bakkar was described as being so old he had to wear a sort of a blindfold to keep his eyelids open. It is believed that had the old ʿamīr not already been weakened by his age, and died before the invasion of Tidjikja, his potential for resistance would have pushed the French back from the Tagant (Interview Khattar, zwāya, 12.10.1995). While the circumstances of this battle are reminiscent of those of the battle at Bou Gadoum, and thus raise doubts justifying a rectification of the year of Bakkar's death, his almost biblical age is certain: born in around 1816, he replaced his brother as ʿamīr of the IdawʿĪš Abakak in 1836. Reigning for about 70 years (as later did his son Abderrahmane!), and reaching an age of about 90 years is indeed extraordinary (cf. Frèrejean 1995: 263, note 326 edited by Désiré-Vuillemin).

31 The occupation of Tidjikja was on the 4 May 1905, and followed by the submission of several tribes, such as a fraction of the IdawʿĪš Abakak led by Houssein Ould Bakkar, a son of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed. The IdawʿAlī, resident in Tidjikja, had already made their submission to the French, i.e. to Coppolani, on the 6 March 1905 in Kasr el Barka (they had already signalled their acquiescence to Coppolani's project in 1903). At this time large parts of the Kunta and the Taǧakānet had already sent emissaries to the French to negotiate peace (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 538ff.).

32 The small population of the town, about 2,000 people, had to provide 100 workers each day. About 700 animals per month were needed by the French for slaughter. This number was more than a heavy load for the sedentary people of the town who were not rich in animals, due to the scarce pastoral resources (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 542ff.).

33 This major exploit of bīẓān resistance to the French invaders is most vividly remembered up to the present day. While French historiography close to the sentiments of the colonial period continues to underline the treacherous and dirty nature of the ambush, and portrays Coppolani as a Frenchman who wanted nothing but to benefit the bīẓān (for such exploits see Désiré-Vuillemin 1962 and 1997), the latter today express their sentiments by calling their dogs "Coppolani".

34 The town of Smara was founded by Ma al-Aïnin, with the aim of developing a significant urban centre within the northern fringe of the Western Sahara (cf. Vergniot 1984: 138f.). What had remained of Smara after the death of Ma al-Aïnin (his house was reported to have comprised a vast library, and Ma al-Aïnin to have written more than 300 œuvres) was burnt to the ground on the 10 January 1913 by French troops led by Colonel Mouret. For further information on Smara refer to Aguirré (1988: 202) and Gaudio (1978: 81). A comprehensive study of the history of the former Spanish Western Sahara is provided by Barbier (1982).

35 The control of Bakel by Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, and the payment of "coutumes" by the French was confirmed in his treaty with the governor of Senegal Faidherbe in 1858 (cf. Amilhat 1937: 96).

36 The division of the IdawʿĪš into different major branches (the Abakak, the

Šrātīt, and the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd), each constituting large tribal confederations, took place around 1830. Conflict arose when the succession to the emirate was contested by different factions (cf. Ould Cheikh 1991a: 108f.).

37 This description fits well with accounts of the battle at Goumal, a pass in the Assaba mountains which took place 9 March 1904 and hit the Idawʿīš Abakak hard (cf. Désiré-Vuillemin 1962: 118).

38 The participation of the Idawʿīš Abakak in the resistance against the French invaders seems to have temporarily ceased after the battle of Bou Gadoum which lead to a terrible defeat for the emiral tribe, the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. While the Idawʿīš Abakak united some of the most powerful warrior fractions under the leadership of their ʿamīr, not all of the confederation's tribes supported the military resistance. E.g. Ethman Ould Bakkar and Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Bakkar, both leading the strongest ḥassān fractions within the emiral tribe of the Idawʿīš Abakak, the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, participated in resistance only two days after the battle of Niemelane, where the French experienced one of their heaviest defeats. Ethman kept up his resistance until 1910, and was part of the Ahel Kedia, the people of the hills, as the opponents to French rule operating from the north were called (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 605, 620).

39 Originally, Houssein Ould Bakkar had been considered ʿamīr by the French after the death of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed, as according to their information he received all the tributes his father had. The French deprived him of this title when he – after first having negotiated peace with the French – joined the bīẓān coalition of resistance. This, however, remained without consequences. Houssein continued to send letters of submission even during his stay in the Adrar, never fought the French, and was among the first to return from the Adrar. After the breakdown of bīẓān resistance he again became the prime intermediary of the French (cf. AT, "Projet de directives politiques" 13.4.1938: 2f.; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

40 Neither Ethman Ould Bakkar, who was at the heart of Idawʿīš military resistance to the French (and today is barely remembered), nor Houssein Ould Bakkar are remembered as having been ʿamīr of the Idawʿīš Abakak, but only paramount chiefs (Interview Khattar 12.10.1995).

41 Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, who led a "goum", a group of voluntary bīẓān camel riders, during the conquest of the Adrar, was awarded honours for his exploits in this undertaking (cf. AT, Résident Moudjéria, "Notice sur la subdivision, Satisfaction à circulaire nº 28/AP, du 20-2-32" 9.5.1932: 2).

42 Not only the bīẓān portray Abderrahmane as a most extraordinary personality (and the sūdān as one who shares his roots with them!). Gabriel Féral, who met Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar in 1942 as a young colonial administrator full of sympathy for great ḥassān personalities, described their encounter as follows:

"L'homme n'avait rien qui puisse retenir l'attention. Plutôt misérablement vêtu, noir de peau, les traits négroïdes, il se dégageait cependant de lui, je n'ose dire une aura, mais indubitablement quelque chose qui le plaçait hors du commun. Son geste pour ramener le pan de sa draâ sur son épaule trahissait l'aisance d'un homme bien dans sa peau. Le mousqueton que son

suivant venait de poser sur son illiouich soulignait, s'il en était besoin, que cet homme n'était pas n'importe qui." (Féral 1983: 64f.)

43 The instauration of the Tagant emirate by the colonial authorities took place at Saint-Louis on the 31 August 1918. The treaty guaranteeing also the tribal status quo comprised 11 articles, and gives a complete outline of the French conception of colonial rule in Mauritania. Under the condition of acting in agreement with the commandant of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar got the right to police his territory. Limitations arose from exceptions vis-à-vis some tribes, namely the Kunta and Ġūdv and by exempting questions of land rights from the authority of the ʿamīr (cf. ANM E2-16, "Convention avec l'Emir du Tagant" 31.7.1918).

44 The French had been well aware of this opposition, and built up Abderrahmane step by step. While the greatest opposition was observed among his brothers "more suitable to inherit [the office] by the nature of their birth", the zwāya should have been consoled that a new ʿamīr would not change their situation, and that they would continue to depend directly on the colonial administration. Rebuilding the emirate was also supposed to compensate for a lack the bīẓān were feeling and to help solve conflicts on this lower level (ANM E2-16, "Lettre lieutnant colonel Gaden, commissaire du gouvernement général en territoire civil de la Mauritanie à M. le commandant du cercle du Tagant" 30.5.1917; author's translation).

45 The demise of Houssein Ould Bakkar as general chief of the IdawʿĪš Abakak and his replacement by Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar in 1912 is mentioned in a document from 1913 by Lt. Moulet, Commandant du cercle du Tagant "Réponse au Rapport politique du 3° trimestre" (ANM E1-50). Already at this time, the opposition between Abderrahmane and the then young leader of the Awlād Talḥa, who maintained strong relations with Houssein Ould Bakkar, were evident.

46 There had been sites associated closely with the emirate and emiral power, but these did not correspond to a notion of property. In Tidjikja, the ʿamīr of Tagant owned a considerable number of palm trees, but not the land on which they grew (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 402, 582). In a later treaty concluded parallel to the installation of Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar as ʿamīr, Houssein Ould Bakkar resigns from all his aspirations to the office of ʿamīr, getting in turn the ownership right to Kehmeit on the Tagant, and an annual payment of 600 Francs (ANM E2-16, "Convention avec Houssein Ould Bakkar" 31.7.1918).

47 Recognition of superiority and leadership among the ḥassān was based less on descent than on the pursuit of a code of ḥassān values, among which strength, and courage, but also generosity, were most prominent (cf. Ould Cheikh 1985a: 368, 933ff.).

48 This was the case of the chief of the Ideybni. He had come to demand transfer to the region of Mbout from the commandant de cercle in 1917 because he had been exploited and beaten by Abderrahmane. The administration decided the chief had wanted to deceive them by false accusations and decided to firstly depose the chief, and secondly to condemn his collectivity to pay a fine of 1,000 Francs, thirdly to deprive them of all modern, French

guns, fourthly to evacuate from the region all the five leading opponents of Abderrahmane, among them those members of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed who were actually in jail. (ANM E2-16, "Lettre nº 154, résident de Moujéria au Commandant de Cercle Tidjikdja" 27.10.1917). The wish of the Ideybni to leave the region, however, was accepted in 1924 (cf. note 51, this chapter).

49 In general these "independent" tribal fractions, i.e. those not registered as being under the authority of the ʿamīr, and therefore able to deal autonomously with the administration, became reintegrated into the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, once their dissident leader died. The fission of the Ahel Muḥammad Swayd Aḥmed, regrouping the major opponents to Abderrahmane, however, was definitive. Today their area of residence is the vicinity of Guellaga on the north-eastern Tagant.

50 ANM E2-16, "Lettre nº 24, le résident de Moudjéria au Commandant de cercle du Tagant" 12 March 1918.

51 Other such cases are the Ideybni, who definitely left the region in 1923 for Mbout, and the Ahel Swayd, who left in 1940. Not in all cases had political dissent been decisive for this evolution, for many pastoralists sought to move further south. However, the emirate thus suffered a considerable drain of its population, as of originally seven tribes, constitutive of the Idawʿlš Abakak confederation and residing on the Tagant and in the northern Aftout, three had left by 1940.

52 AT, anonymous, "Historique Abakaks" ca. 1939; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte; ANM E1-50, Capitaine Allut, Commandant du Cercle du Tagant, "Rapport politique, 4ème trimestre 1914".

53 In 1913 the ʿamīr of Adrar started again to collect tributes from some of his Tagant dependents. This was regarded as completely legal by the French. In Trarza, some tributes on behalf of the emirate had then already been bought back, though by far not all (ANM E1-50, Capitaine Allut, Commandant du Cercle du Tagant, "Rapport politique, 4ème trimestre 1914"). Only in 1944 did the administration start a general policy aimed at ending the rights to tributes of the ḥassān tribes. This was first achieved in the Trarza, and only in 1952 in the Adrar (cf. Bonte 1989: 122; Ould Cheikh 1990: 91).

54 ANM E1-50, "Rapport trimestriel sur la politique générale de la Résidence, 2ème trimestre 1914", cercle du Tagant, résidence de Moudjéria.

55 ANM E2-16, anonymous, Direction des affaires politiques et administratives, "Confidentiel A.S. Emir du Tagant" 10.6.1933. Problems arose especially with the many tributes the ʿamīr of Tagant received from tribes residing far beyond the Tagant. The agreements queried by Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar were tributes bought up and negotiated in 1919 by his brothers Sidi Mohamed and Ely Ould Bakkar (his fiercest opponent; ANM E2-16, anonymous, Direction des affaires politiques et administratives, "Confidentiel A.S. Emir du Tagant" 10.6.1933). The conflict was handled by the central colonial authority in Saint-Louis, and settled by raising the pay of the ʿamīr considerably while stressing all treaties concluded so far were not to be revised (ANM E2-16, "Le lieutnant-gouverneur p.i. de la Mauritanie à M. le commandant de cercle du Tagant à Tidjjikja" 5.7.1933).

56 This description is reminiscent of the ḥurma, insofar as it means an individ-

ual tax due to the ʿamīr, but a difference is marked by the supposedly voluntary nature of this "gift", intended to circulate only within the tribe or confederation, and not implying protection. Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a: 377) describes the gabeẓ as a tax paid by ḥassān, znāga or ḥarāṭīn to great scholars. Thus calling tributes paid more recently by various tribes, ḥarāṭīn and slaves to the ʿamīr "gabeẓ", may hint at practices replacing oppressive forms of tributes with more lenient ones (Interview ḥassān 4.11.1995; Interview Ghalim Ould Elkheir, ʿabd, 17.12.1995). There has, however, always been a multitude of tributes in the western Sahara, commonly subsumed under the generic term of mudārāt, and ġarāma (cf. Oßwald 1993: 320ff., 327 note 65). Obligatory tributes (maġram) were opposed by my interviewees to gabeẓ, supposed to be voluntary.

57 Tributes are a delicate subject, not to be developed here in detail. The Ahel Swayd e.g. paid tribute to the ʿamīr, but no longer continually when Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar became old. The latter in turn could – and sometimes did – send somebody to the tribe, which had migrated out of the Tagant in the 1940s, to collect tribute. The ḥarāṭīn of the Aftout stressed their payments to have been of voluntary nature, and the amount defined individually. It goes without saying that support from the ʿamīr was crucial in questions of access to land, and his help with commodities like tea and sugar depended on giving the ʿamīr whatever he wanted.

58 Further research is needed to fully explore the French politics on the Tagant with regard to ḥassān rights to tributes. From 1910 on, governor Patey had developed a new policy more in favour of the ḥassān. He wished to maintain at least partly their dominant political role and thus stabilise the social order. Part of this engagement was the maintenance of tributes, and the instauration of the formerly dissolved emirates (cf. reproduction of Patey's directives in Ould Khalifa 1991: 663f.). Those documents I could consult, however, prove that in the Tagant region ḥurma and ġaver tributes were abolished between 1912-14. Some tributes nevertheless persisted. E.g. mudārāt, meaning an additional gift in agricultural products and livestock the IdawʿAlī of the Tagant paid to the IdawʿĪš (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 694), but also being a generic term for tribute, continued to be paid on the Tagant (cf. AT, commandant de cercle, "Confidentiel, droits coutumiers et tableau annexe" 27.2.1950, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

59 The major tributes of the IdawʿAlī later were formally bought up for an amount of 938 pieces of guinée (AT, anonymous "Projet de directives politiques à l'occasion d'un passage du commandement" 13.4.1938, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte). Their ḥurma was received by one of the most illustrious, and perhaps decisive personalities of Tagant history: Abdi Ould Embarek (cf. p. 168f.).

60 These tributaries were under the suzerainty of the IdawʿĪš Šrātīt. The IdawʿAlī, after long negotiations, were ready to pay once 24, and once more 4 pieces of guinée to compensate the former overlords (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 668).

61 AT, anonymous "Projet de directives politiques à l'occasion d'un passage du commandement" 13.4.1938, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

62 Interviewees with a Tarkoz affiliation did not "remember" these tributes, and neither did some of non-Tarkoz affiliation. However, there still are a number of people who remember the past set-up of tribal hierarchies and tributes, which while remaining unspoken, continue to shape the politics of the present. On tributes paid by zwāya and znāga on the Tagant see also the document ANM E1-50, "Rapport du capitaine commandant du cercle du Tagant au sujet de l'application de décret du 12 décembre 1905 relatif à la suppression de la traite" 2.11.1906.

63 ANM E1-50, "rapport politique 1er trimestre 1915", cercle du Tagant April 1915.

64 Data is derived from two maps established for the rural development of the Tagant: RIM, développement rural de la région du Tagant, SO.NA.DE.R/ GTZ, sheet "carte de la végétation" and "carte géologique", established for the GTZ by Arbeitsgemeinschaft IFP, Institut für Planungsdaten, Frankfurt, in cooperation with Zentralstelle für Geophotogrammetrie und Fernerkundung (ZGF), München, West Germany 1979.

65 It has to be remembered that the authority of the ʿamīr of Tagant had been limited by the French to the boundaries of the sub-district of Moudjéria, covering only the southern part of the Tagant region. Extending this region meant extending the territory on which Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar could exert direct political influence.

66 The focus of my research on the land register was on the area of Achram-Diouk. Unfortunately this area cuts across the borders of three administrative regions, each holding its own land register. Of these I was only able to consult the one in Moudjéria which has been revised essentially in 1950 by colonial administrator Fargette. Here I wish to thank the préfet of Moudjéria, who gave me free access to both the archives and the land register and Mr. Fargette for having done a thorough work.

67 In this respect the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, and thus IdawʿĪš Abakak leaders developed a different strategy to the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd of the Assaba region. While the registration of ownership rights in the latter district already began in 1914, the number of registered lands became significant only as late as 1934 and got a boost in 1949 at the conference of Galoula promoting the procedure. The outcome, however, resembles the case of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed: the family of the chief of the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd is noted as owner (representing the collectivity of the tribe's members) in about 76 percent of registered lands in their main area of residence (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 870ff.).

68 This is the case with the dam "Teidouma" (meaning Baobab in ḥassāniyya, bot. *Adansonia digitata*). Abderrahmane had built this dam together with the Legwāniṭ and the Lʿaweysyāt. Later the ownership of this dam (always comprising the land vivified, i.e. flooded by this construction) was restructured, and the ʿamīr remained the only proprietor, having bought up the two others' parts. The case of the rights for cultivation around the source of Garaouel is similar. These, but not the property in land, were granted by Abderrahmane to his brother Mohamed Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. Finally the group of dams registered under the name "Oulad Sneibe" falls

into this category too. While the name of the dam clearly refers to a lineage, the registered proprietor is Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar. The Ahel Sneibe, as they are actually referred to, are a family of ḥarāṭīn, who profited from patronage by the ʿamīr Abderrahmane, and were granted the rights to cultivate these lands, which according to the logic of French legislation, continued to be property of the whole tribe.

69 This influential family is considered to be šurva, close friends of the emiral family, and member of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. The family also profited from further attributions of land by the ʿamīr of Tagant, Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar.

70 All of the parents and grandparents of Mahmoud Ould Lella (ḥarṭāni), who was about fifty years old at the time of the interview (28.3.1995), were of the Tarkoz Awlād Tīki, and had cultivated at Mounhal. He himself had married a slave woman of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, but lived with the šurva family now possessing the land he continues to cultivate.

71 The reflux of tributaries who were under the domination of the IdawʿĪš prior to the French conquest of Tagant is revealed by a document from 1906. According to this, among the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd the tributaries had all become ḥassān, and the Kunta on the Tagant had reappropriated "their" znāga (ANM E1-50, Commandant du Cercle du Tagant, "Rapport du capitaine commandant du cercle du Tagant au sujet de l'application de décret du 12 décembre 1905 relatif à la suppression de la traite" 2.11.1906). For the case of znāga of the Šrātīt who had sought protection by the IdawʿAlī see p. 215. Another more practical reason why many znāga sought new overlords is that the IdawʿĪš, during the time of their armed resistance to the French occupation, were no longer able to provide undisturbed access to pastureland to "their" znāga (cf. AT, Résident de Moudjéria, "Notice sur la subdivision, Satisfaction à circulaire nº 28/AP, du 20-2-32" 9.5.1932; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

72 The "coutumes" various ḥassān leaders received from the French for their protection of the gum trade soon became a crucial resource for the establishment and maintenance of those inter-tribal and inner-tribal relations that allowed the comparatively small emiral tribes to control large territories. In turn these revenues also became a major reason for conflict, as many wanted to get hold of them (cf. Taylor 1996; Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, personal communication).

73 Colonial sources mention repeatedly the great number of "haratines" among the ḥassān, especially the IdawʿĪš. According to these sources, these tribes consisted of only a small nucleus of noble, i.e. bīẓān descent, around which were grouped ḥarāṭīn, slaves, and znāga, and with the ḥarāṭīn often having a remarkable freedom of action (cf. e.g. AT, Résident de Moudjéria, "Notice sur la subdivision, Satisfaction à circulaire nº 28/AP, du 20-2-32" 9.5.1932; document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

74 Traditions of a past in the vicinity of the ʿamīr, or as part of a distinct group of warriors could not be traced among those sūdān declared to be the ḥarāṭīn Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, i.e. a group of free people without a slave past. Nevertheless the existence of such groups is not altogether unlikely. Several

independent and reliable sources mention independently acting warrior groups called ḥarāṭīn. In Tidjikja a group of "old" ḥarāṭīn associated with the old ʿamīr Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed was reported to have lived almost independently and while carrying guns and to have been almost like ḥassān (cf. ANM E1-50, "Rapport du capitaine commandant du cercle du Tagant au sujet de l'application de décret du 12 décembre 1905 relatif à la suppression de la traite" 2.11.1906). One other group of ḥarāṭīn, the "Soucabe", issued from the Kunta and became famous as raiders, but later was annihilated by bīẓān for being a threat to local society (cf. Ba 1932: 117f.).

75 The Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd developed a similar strategy during colonial rule. They readily enlisted every sūdān settling in Kiffa as a member of their tribe, thus offering the numerous slaves and ḥarāṭīn who came to this city a new tribal affiliation (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1998: 88).

76 This was revealed to me by a zwāya interviewee, whom I asked to explain the meaning of tribe (qabīla) to me. Somewhat unsatisfactorily, in view of my expectations at that moment, he explained: "Here are the Legwāṭiṭ, we are limited to the east by the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, to the west by the Lemtūna, to the south by the Taǧakānet, and to the north by the Tarkoz Leġwāreb." (Interview Mohamed Lemine Ould Belkhair, zwāya 27.3.1995).

77 Further research, however, would be required to elucidate the question whether cultivation necessarily implies a two-dimensional perception and appropriation of space, as Ingold (1986) proposes. Cultivation in the sahelo-saharian climate even until today is dominated by the use of "sites and paths within a landscape" (153). A two-dimensional perception of space is prevalent whenever the appropriation of sites and the legitimacy of land ownership are concerned.

78 Not all villages are tribally homogeneous. Especially large villages located at the tarred road attract many migrants of rather diverse origins. Here there is a strong tendency for the formation of quarters that reproduce tribal segregation, but also social segregation among bīẓān and sūdān of one tribe (cf. Ruf 1993).

79 I rarely witnessed something like pride in ḥassān status in the form of remembering and glorifying warfare and battle. This was different among the Lʿaweysyāt, where several interviewees, both women and men, described how they had defeated their enemies, and everybody, including the women and the ḥarāṭīn, had taken part the in battles (Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995; Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma, ḥassān, 31.10.1995)

80 The origin of the Lʿaweysyāt is described by a ḥarṭāni freed by his master, a member of the chief's family: "We are Abakak, we are Yaḥya Ben Eṯmān and come from the Adrar, and the Ahel Aḥmed ʿAyda. In the times we were in the Adrar, then we could no longer endure the situation there. We are the part of the Yaḥya Ben Eṯmān who could not bear to stay in the Adrar. We came here in the times of Bakkar [Ould Soueid Ahmed]. It was our first chief, Bnein, who made relations with the Abakak." This description fits by and large the glimpse of the Lʿaweysyāt history provided by Pierre Bonte (1991: 190): "Les Li'waysyât descendent, eux, des Awlâd 'Abdallah du Brâkna. Il partagèrent, au XIX^{e} siècle, les intérêts politique des Awlâd

Quaylân avec lesquels ils entretinrent des relations matrimoniales étroites. Certaines lignées sont affiliées à la tribu, mais la plupart durent quitter l'Adrar sous des pressions politiques."

81 One such event aimed to impress the ʿamīr probably was the serious battle causing several deaths taking place in 1950 at Diénour between the Lʿaweysyāt and the Awlād Talḥa (who had left to settle beyond the sphere of influence of the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar). The fight still is remembered as one of the great and glorious battles of the Lʿaweysyāt. While the French judged the Lʿaweysyāt influence on the ʿamīr to be insignificant, Lʿaweysyāt traditions portray their old chief as the "first friend of Abderrahmane in Mauritania" (Interview Benne Mint Ahmed, ḥassān, 29.10.1995; Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma, ḥassān, 31.10.1995; AT, anonymous "fiche de renseignement et notes concernant le nommé: Mohamed Ould Sidi Ahmed dit Ould Mama, Chef de la fraction des Aoueissiat Mama" Subdivision de Moudjéria 1951, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

82 The French colonial documents reveal at least for the 1940s a will to get back to a single chief of all Lʿaweysyāt, and thus to undo the decision taken in 1939 to tackle the internal opposition by installing two fractions and chiefs. This example was considered to have been a bad example fuelling other tribes' factionalism (AT, various political reports concerning the "Aouissiat", documents kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

83 According to interviewee Benne Mint Ahmed (ḥassān, 29.10.1995), the Lʿaweysyāt moved onto the Tagant only once, when a French administrator in the valley had forbidden the sale of grain to tribes from the north. This year of "Vounsi", as it was called according to the bīẓān version of the name of the administrator concerned, was probably around 1954-1956.

84 This deal is reported to have been concluded subsequent to the arrival of the Lʿaweysyāt in the area, and their incorporation into the IdawʿĪš Abakak in the course of the 19th century. However, the attribution of this land might be more recent, as a written version of the treaty is said to exist. One copy of this remains with the Lʿaweysyāt and the other one is stored in Aleg (Interview Boueibou Ould Amar, ḥarṭāni, 1.11.1995).

85 AT, Alleman "rapport politique du 1er trimestre 1942", Subdivision de Moudjéria, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte. Some of the conflict arose from the question when and how the Tarkoz Ahel Sīdi Reyūg should let off water from their dam situated upriver, since this strongly influenced the submersion of the depression cultivated by the Lʿaweysyāt (ANM E2-109, Résidence de Moudjéria, "lieutnant René, Rapport de Tournée nº 112" 25.5.1935).

86 ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "culture en barrage, résidence de Moudjéria" 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

87 In 1924/25 the sale of formerly confiscated date palm gardens for about one fourth of their market value witnessed lively interest among the bīẓān notability, which then was able to increase their grip on the most fertile lands (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 728).

88 Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1991: 184) concludes with regard to the Assaba region that agricultural production is more likely to have decreased

than grown during the first decades of this century due to taxation and other unfavourable factors. However a different interpretation seems plausible as well, as the same author states that imposition of taxes in the Assaba and especially of the tax on agricultural production has rarely been applied. Furthermore the Ahel Sīdi Maḥmūd, the major tribe of the region, are described as having minimised their area of nomadisation since the end of the 19th century in response to increased cultivation (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 957). Finally there are colonial records from the Assaba region reporting a considerable increase of agricultural production in response to a changed economic environment, and hence an evolution comparable to that in the Tagant area (cf. ANM B1, anonymous, "Confidentiel, la question des haratines et serviteurs dans l'Assaba" ca. 1931, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

89 This aspect of risk minimisation is already prominent in the 1936 colonial report (ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "Culture en barrages", résidence Moudjéria 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte). In recent times this aspect has become a major concern of rural development policy aiming at securing, and making more sustainable, local food production (cf. Wüst 1989; Justen 1991; Seiler 1992; Davis 1997). An earlier, and critical assessment of the efficiency of agriculture behind large dams (*barrages*) in Mauritania is given by Charles Toupet (1977: 263ff.)

90 To complete this outline of agricultural history, a comparison with the state and evolution of agriculture in bīẓān society prior to colonisation would be of great interest. Agricultural production in this period seems to have depended heavily on a stable political environment. Kasr el Barka and Rachid, two great oases of the Kunta of Tagant, went into decline when their inhabitants got involved in the political conflicts dividing the people of the Tagant (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 415ff.). While the livestock of nomadic groups could be reestablished by counter-raids and negotiations, looted trade towns and destroyed date palm plantations were much more difficult to reconstitute.

91 A different date is mentioned by Wüst (1989: 75), who states that Zemmal was constructed in 1926. While many interviewees were unanimous about Zemmal being the very first dam of the Aftout, Charles Toupet (1958: 87) notes the dam of Tachott to be the eldest in the region and even to antedate French colonisation.

92 This view is confirmed by claims of Tarkoz Leġwāreb reproduced by Dubié (1953: 193), and stating that their first dam was built near the mountain of Akrerai in the Aftout, which is only a few kilometres east of Achram, in around 1900 (cf. Map 3). Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, a member of the Tarkoz Leġwāreb, stated that the dam of Achram was constructed in 1919 and had been the first in the area (Interview 5.9.1995).

93 ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "Culture en barrages", résidence Moudjéria 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

94 AM, anonymous "Bulletin de renseignement, subdivision de Moudjéria" 8/1945.

95 AM, various trimestrial and monthly reports 1935-1944 of the résident of Moudjéria.

The colonial reports I was able to study in the archive of Moudjéria for the period concerned are somewhat contradictory in this respect. In 1935 the résident of Moudjéria mentions that there had not been any budget to promote the construction of dams and wells, only to remark a little later that the indigenous population actually is building dams (Tachott Dakhna 1,100 meters, Achram 800 meters, Djonaba 400 meters) and is greatly interested in receiving the corresponding rewards (AM, "rapport trimestriel résidence de Moudjéria" 30.12.1935). Occasional exemption from the ʿašūr in this period is not mentioned in the reports but in the land register. In fact colonial administrators often achieved their ends by illegal gifts and bonuses (cf. De Chassey 1984: 81).

96 It has to be noted that the rapid expansion of dams was unique to the Tagant district. Colonial reports note the construction of 75 dams in the Tagant in the years 1934-36, but only of 10 in Brakna, and 7 in the Adrar (cf. Bonte 1986: 396, note 33). The number of Tagant dams was estimated to already represent the maximum of what could be realised without reducing their efficiency (too short distances between dams on one and the same watercourse; cf. Dubié 1953: 194). The concentration of dam building seems to be the result of an early policy using funds from the "société indigène de prévoyance" to promote agriculture and thus reduce food insecurity (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 834).

97 An administrative report from the Assaba region echoed in 1931 masters' complaints about slave flights and slave laziness. However, this was the way the slaves responded to the expansion of agriculture putting a heavy load on them (cf. ANM B1, anonymous, "Confidentiel, la question des haratines et serviteurs dans l'Assaba" ca. 1931, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

98 The French saw pacification and fixed ownership rights as the decisive factors for the economic renaissance, while the stubbornness of the indigenous population remained the main obstacle to economic growth (ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "Culture en barrages" résidence Moudjéria 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte).

99 AM, various trimestrial and monthly reports 1935-1944 of the résident of Moudjéria; ANM E2-82, lieutnant Fonde, "culture en barrage, résidence de Moudjéria" 1936, document kindly passed on by Roger Botte.

100 The population of the region of Achram-Diouk was estimated at 24,000 inhabitants in 1987. This number has increased ever since due to the attractiveness of the zone, the vicinity of the road, and the proliferation of services and wages due to the rural development project in Achram.

101 AM, various trimestrial and monthly reports 1935-1944 of the residents of Moudjéria.

102 This period, and its consequences on the administration of French West Africa subsequent to the Second World War is described by Gabriel Féral (1983: 77, 99).

103 Still during the war, the leader of "France libre", Général de Gaulle, had

declared at the conference at Brazzaville (January-February 1944) that the colonies should be given greater liberty in administration and economy. Besides this process, to be implemented step by step, the colonies were to be given a more powerful means to represent their interests in France. Another aspect of these reforms was the official end of forced labour (cf. Désiré-Vuillemin 1997: 566).

104 The anecdote reported by Gabriel Féral (1983), and taken up by Philippe Marchesin (1992), that the grand-father of Horma Ould Babana was implied in the assassination of Xavier Coppolani at Tidjikja, is obviously false (cf. Villasante-de Beauvais 1995: 799).

105 One of the major problems in the handling of these dams is caused by erosion. Rainwater run-off may damage the dam surface and water exceeding the maximum capacity has to be diverted to an overflow to protect the dam. Finally, erosive forces are high at the main outlet. This is especially true for traditional dams, where water is let off by digging a breach into the dam and thus weakening the soil on which the dam must be rebuilt in subsequent years.

106 This opposition, which was shared by the majority of the Kunta too, can be explained by the political rivalry between the Idawʿ Alī and the Idawʿ Īš Abakak. While the former benefited from colonisation, and strengthened their predominance in the course of the drought and economic crisis of the early 1940s, the Idawʿ Īš Abakak lost both influence and prestige (Ould Khalifa 1991: 898f., 939ff.). Quite a different perspective comes from people of the vicinity of Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar, describing the latter to have had good relations with Horma Ould Babana in the beginning. This changed only in response to a conversation the old ʿamīr had with Horma at Saint-Louis after the latter's success in the elections (at these times Abderrahmane still had quarrels with his brothers). Horma then disclosed to Abderrahmane that he now held all of Mauritania in his hands and asked what he could do for him. While this in the eyes of Horma should have been an offer, Abderrahmane experienced it as a serious offence, calling his authority into question. As a result Abderrahmane was on bad terms with Horma as long as he remained deputy (Interview Khattar, zwāya, 12.10.1995).

107 AM, report of the "conseil des notables du Tagant", première session 1956.

108 The project was funded by German development cooperation and executed by the German agency for technical cooperation (GTZ). The activities had two focuses: the initial PAD (Projét Achram-Diouk) had the aim of integrated rural development. Later a second branch, the PBT (Projet petit Barrages du Tagant) was launched, aimed solely at the development of dams, hand-driven pumps and well infrastructure.

109 Recently Timothy Cleaveland (1995) formulated a lively critique of the application of segmentary theory to bīẓān society, e.g. by Pierre Bonte (1991), a scholar who developed his own interpretation of this theoretical approach on the basis of the structures of bīẓān society, which in turn is critical of earlier proponents, such as e.g. Ernest Gellner (1969).

110 This is merely a descriptive glimpse of the various articulations of tribal structures in bīẓān society and necessarily cuts short on this most complex

issue (cf. Bonte/Conte/Hamès/Ould Cheikh 1991). The notion of tribe referred to here reflects a major level of identification manifest among the interviewees in particular circumstances.

111 Political authority did not follow a single model in traditional bīẓān society. While the centralisation of power in only one person was common, and in principle could be inherited among the ḥassān, many zwāya tribes never formed stable chieftaincies. They practised collective forms of decision-making with the ǧemāʿa as major forum (despite prolonged attempts, the French colonial administration was never able to establish powerful chiefs among the Tarkoz fractions). Charismatic religious leaders, however, could attract numerous followers and clients too, thus gaining a dominant role in their tribe, and revealing that the centralisation of power was not per se alien to the zwāya milieu (cf. Ould Cheikh 1991b).

112 The chief at the time made explicit references to the French colonial administrative practices whereby tribal land was registered under the respective chief's name. These formally individual entitlements later often led to the disputes described.

113 This dam, constructed for the first time probably around 1905, is of particular interest, as it probably is one of the first dams ever constructed in the area. All local traditions tell that the French colonialists, who at the time just had arrived in the region, already supported the project. Construction was carried out by slaves and other dependents, while the property of the plots remained with the bīẓān, and among these most probably those close to the family of the chief supported by the French in their attempt at indirect rule.

114 Many of the former masters were reported to now live at Zemmal, in Leqraye, or other villages inhabited by members of the Legwāṭiṭ, but about 40 km to the south, like El Ghabbra and Boulahradh. For the description of a similar case among the Tāgāṭ refer to Boubakar Ba (1986: 10).

115 This ambivalent situation the sūdān experience when they appropriate land has already been observed by Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a: 470f.) in the Gorgol Blanc region, which is part of the Aftout south of the region of Achram-Diouk. In order to appropriate land, the sūdān have to stress their tribal affiliation and solidarity instead of a solidarity of class. In the conflicts concerning the tribal territorial boundaries the sūdān have to present themselves as members of their respective tribe (refer also to note 152, this chapter).

116 "Proofs" of ownership are a sensitive topic in bīẓān society. They are far less simple testimonies of legitimate ownership than something which involves all of the tribe's history, i.e. genealogy, and thus goes right into the core of tribal ideology. Today, written accounts aiming to provide proof of legitimate ownership for generations are likely to abound whenever conflict over land begins to escalate (Interview Amadou Bâ, project leader SO.NA.DE.R, 30.1.1996).

117 In legal terms, there cannot be a due appropriation of land by slaves. Nevertheless, bīẓān in most cases had begun to tolerate such practices of their slaves already prior to the heavy drought in 1969. After the drought, with times getting harder, this aspect of slave autonomy, and thus slave

emancipation, became more and more a necessity for survival. The slaves, however, were only rarely able to develop claims on the most fertile land and thus created little space for conflict with former masters who, at least in theory, could claim land vivified by their slaves.

118 These relations are confirmed by a survey study of five villages of the region in Achram-Diouk. There sūdān referred to the small dams as their most important source of revenue (second come large dams). Among bīẓān this role is ascribed to the large dams too, but their much more diversified economic activities make them depend less heavily on agricultural revenues than the sūdān (cf. Ruf 1993: 18ff.; and unpublished results of this study).

119 By this time only a few slaves were still living side by sides with the family of their master, and worked only to receive food and clothing.

120 These rates of exchange can already be seen as gifts, and the aim of these arrangements is likely not to be direct profit from the agricultural rent, but the maintenance of relations of patronage, which might prove profitable in other respects. Not all bīẓān had relations of affinity to sūdān, for many of these had completely left the region, or had decided to break off relations with their former masters. Therefore, although limited in its extent, a market for sharecropping developed in which sūdān to some extent could negotiate the share they had to pay to the bīẓān.

121 This was largely practised. E.g. in the case of the dam at Achoueibir, which was the first construction supported by the local development project, influential members of the tribe, among them the chief, acquired up to five parcels.

122 Both a number of bīẓān and of sūdān finally refused to participate in the dam, though for different reasons. Of the initially 120 sūdān only 71 contributed to the dam. Those who left were reported to have done so because the surface of land to be developed by this measure was considered minimal. Some of these 49, however, today own land behind the dam, which they acquired from both sūdān and bīẓān, selling their land at considerable prices (a plot of 15 metres width costs about 35,000 UM, one of 25 metres about 45-50,000 UM (US$220-310); Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarāṭīn, 27.7.1995).

123 Some bīẓān had their slaves work for the construction of the first dam near Leklewa at Dharagouadir. The land these slaves vivified became the sole property of their masters. During an interview I met one of these slaves, a man who had become old and weak. His master, whom I came to know as a distinguished man of great knowledge, had assigned him a shed of about 1.5 by 1.5 metres, made of branches from the flimsy *Calotropis Procera*. This shelter in the court of the master's typical modest clay brick house barely protected the old man from the beating sun. The only comment my research assistant, Khalifa Ould Kebab, made on this situation was that the master was waiting for the old man to die.

124 The dams built by the project have a design aimed to make repairs and interventions on a level beyond the capabilities of the local population superfluous. Although considerable achievements were made in this respect,

in some cases erosive forces of water were stronger than calculated, and some dams had to be reinforced.

125 There are plans to reanimate the rural development project in Achram by extending dam-building activities to a larger area than before.

126 The definite character of these ownership rights is expressed very well by the name of these dams. While collectively owned dams get the name of the location, those of individuals are named according to their owner, e.g. the sed Ahel Jiddou, the wād Sid Mohamed Dey.

127 In fact, I was reproached for asking questions which only produced more questions with this expression.

128 Not everything is left to non-verbal communication. Services by the ḥarāṭīn cover a wide range, such as e.g. working as occasional driver, or assistance in construction projects. The actual, unofficial ʿamīr of Tagant, Ethman Ould Abderrahmane, e.g. asked for assistance to build a new dam. "He asked the people to help him, and nobody will ask him [for payment]." (Interview Mahmoude Mint Ali, ḥarāṭīn, 26.7.1995)

129 All the land is granted for only one season. Although the relations may persist over years, they are nevertheless revocable from one year to the other, and there is no doubt that people who disappoint the notables' expectations will encounter sanctions.

130 It has already been noted that bīẓān too depended on land granted by other bīẓān and notables. These arrangements, however, were concluded for much longer periods and implied much less heavy retributions than those concerning sūdān (cf. p. 204).

131 E.g. a ḥassān notable and large landowner asked the ḥarāṭīn community, which in the overwhelming majority profited from his grants in land, to thresh his millet (Interview Mahmoude Mint Benjik, ḥarāṭīn, 8.8.1995). Individual ḥarāṭīn, however, nevertheless stopped committing themselves to these rules of "good conduct", and now refuse to give the ḥassān notables anything (Interview Daouda Ould Harouna, ʿabd, 19.12.1995).

132 Among the Awlād ʿAlī Ntūnva, e.g. the current chief helped some sūdān to get land. These in turn insist that they do not give millet, but help the chief by other means, e.g. with some work on the fields, like threshing millet. In addition to this the chief also pays workers for distinct duties (Interview Moise Ould Emine, ʿabd, 10.2.1996). However, the resources these ḥassān have to distribute are far less important than those of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed .

133 These ḥarāṭīn claim to have had a distinct status that had no reference to a slave past, and thus to have formed a group within the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed. These claims are hard to prove or to dismiss. None of those concerned admitted to having had slave ancestors (while in other settings people did so, or at least this condition was deducible from other variables). Neither did any of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed bīẓān refer to these ḥarāṭīn as former slaves. The distinct collective status this group is likely to have achieved nevertheless depended strongly on the goodwill of the ʿamīr.

134 The village of Hella was established only subsequent to the death of the old ʿamīr in 1982. The redistribution of land therefore was not negotiated among

the ḥarāṭīn and this old, unchallenged authority, but under the auspices of his unofficial successor Ethman Ould Bakkar. While the redistribution of land within the tribe reproduced the old relations of hierarchy, the authority of the traditional elite is no longer uncontested. It is often said that the sons of the old ʿamīr do not match up to their father.

135 Information concerning this case was contradictory: According to a second informant some ḥarāṭīn sold their land to the ʿamīr, while another said that nobody left this site.

136 This outflow was constructed in the evaluation period of the rural development project at Achram, prior to the start of the large dam-building project PBT (Petit Barrages du Tagant). The dam itself is of about one and a half metres high, and was constructed by hand. Reconstruction after damage in the past was occasionally done by renting the project's caterpillar rather than by manual work.

137 It is quite common that individuals can obtain the right to cultivate for one season at collectively owned sites. The plots granted are deducted from the whole site. Either these plots are calculated like all other plots, i.e. they add to the total number of exploiters among whom the site is distributed, or the owners of the site define a fixed plot to be shared among all of these contractors.

138 It was one of the aims – and in a way a precondition for work – of the regional development project to "manage" the ʿamīr and other local notables. This goal was achieved, and the project became able to act largely independent of these instances of local politics (Interview Amadou Bâ, project leader SO.NA.DE.R, 30.1.1996). In the early 1990s, democratisation in Mauritania began to take on a new appearance. Multi-partyism was reintroduced in 1991/92, and an independent press that in the beginning was largely tolerated by the regime in power, was established (cf. Clausen 1993, 1994a). In the region of Achram-Diouk political opposition to the (unofficial) ʿamīr was strong, and successful in some elections that were the central arena for the political struggles in these years. At least since 1995, a counter-movement in national and local politics can be detected (Interview Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, zwāya, 1.8.1995).

139 With acknowledgements to Graham Greene.

140 Selling milk instead of sharing it generously is a most serious offence against the rules of good conduct in bīẓān society. It was repeatedly stressed to me that only people of the Idebussāṭ tribe used to sell their milk and nobody else would dare do so. In the cities and close to the road, the selling of milk has nevertheless increased. Small hand-written advertisements, or simply an empty Tetra-Pak carton of milk (great quantities of long-life milk are imported to Mauritania, but there is also a small dairy in Nouakchott selling fresh pasteurised cow's and camel's milk [http://www.tiviski.com]) nailed onto a stick, signal "fresh milk for sale" to the people passing by.

141 This may not only be interpreted as a measure by which the ʿamīr wanted to use his political authority for the sake of creating new alliances, but also as a quite modern economic policy aimed at establishing conditions allowing for increased local investment.

142 In the words of the Idebussāṭ leader "There is hardly anything to compensate for something good that was done to somebody." (Interview Mohamed Sid'Ahmed, zwāya, 13.9.1995)

143 This is a precondition for building a village. Cultivable land is concentrated in depressions, and depends on their becoming flooded. This characteristic is incompatible with perennial human occupation.

144 Unconditional access to water for their herds was a serious concern of the Idebussāṭ, who qualified a number of local wells as "wells of problem", i.e. wells where the owners made clear that they did not want alien users to come back. Having their own well of large capacity therefore was of a considerable interest for the Idebussāṭ, who despite their shop continued to be among the most important local owners of livestock (Interview Mohamed Sid'Ahmed, zwāya, 13.9.1995).

145 With these sūdān conceiving themselves as true ḥarāṭīn without a slave past and forming their own faction within the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, the integrity of the symbolic representation of a free men's status, e.g. the ownership of cattle and land, attains an exceptional importance. Any violation of this symbolic order directly calls into question their statuary identity.

146 This is true insofar as this is the family most interested in setting up their own village. The statement, however, downplays the significance of this settlement for several reasons. First the "family" concerned includes several nuclear families, and second, there are a number of further Idebussāṭ families in the region, likely to settle too, once there is a good opportunity. In early 1996, five houses were under construction.

147 Mohamed A. Ould Khalil left no doubt about the nature of territorial hegemony exercised by the ʿamīr. On my request he detailed his statement, saying that the ʿamīr could give the right to live on his territory to whoever he wants.

148 On the issue of land tenure, relations of domination and the conflict between the Tarkoz and the Tāgāṭ see Boubacar Ba (1986; esp. pp. 14ff.).

149 "It very frequently comes to conflict over land within the tribe, but these affairs are handled on the basis of this book [the land register] It happens that a field has been cultivated some time ago, but then was left uncultivated. According to our legislation, a field has to be cultivated, or else there have to be traces of this activity, to legitimise ownership. One is only allowed to leave for ten years, once these have passed all individual rights are void. Then there is an enormous amount of problems [that arise] with these cases. All this will be brought here to the tribunal. In some cases the préfet will be able to decide directly, but often everything remains pending. This is because there are no written documents, there is no proof. There are a great many of people around here who are quite sophisticated, who have assembled documents from the beginning, and are able to prove everything. Many do not have these means, like e.g. here the people of Moudjéria. *In most of the cases, where there is something unclear, we just forbid* [the use]." (Interview Khattar, zwāya, 12.10.1995; emphasis added)

150 The Ahel Swayd Aḥmed are renowned to have been among the most forceful

and frightening warriors of all ḥassān and their sūdān are supposed to share these characteristics (Interview ḥarṭāni, 5.2.1996)

151 Sūdān of the Lʿaweysyāt, living beyond their tribal territory, are to be found in several places of the Aftout, and not only at Téjal.

152 In these descriptions, as well as the one of similar configurations of conflict in the Gorgol Blanc area by Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a: 470f.), the tribal affiliation of the sūdān appears to be unambiguous. This is true insofar as most sūdān couples share the same tribal affiliation. In a significant number of cases, however, sūdān intermarried across tribal boundaries. In such cases their children, who today are able to claim their descent also from their father's side, gain the option to switch between two different tribal affiliations. They thus may profit from better access to land in one group, or may continue to be involved in both tribes' affairs (Interview Walid Ould Mbarek, ḥarṭāni, 7.2.1996).

153 These contacts developed in the course of an electoral campaign. Notables from the Tāgāṭ Ideyneb contacted the Lʿaweysyāt sūdān and asked for their support. As the Lʿaweysyāt bīẓān reside in a different administrative region than the sūdān at Téjal (Tagant and not Brakna), it was easy for the latter to side with the Tāgāṭ faction (Interview Ally Ould Mohamed Ghalle, ḥarṭāni, 12.12.1995).

154 Whether these accusations are right or not is difficult to discern. In fact many inhabitants of villages with a predominantly sūdān population complained about being disadvantaged with regard to project activities. Almost the same complaints, however, could be heard from bīẓān. Several points among the sūdān critics are nevertheless right. Their villages got fewer large dams (*barrages*) or hand-powered water pumps than the bīẓān. This resulted not so much from a deliberate will to act in favour of the bīẓān, as from the fact that in most cases, these villages are simply much bigger than the few and generally more recent sūdān settlements, and evidently most of the best land – where dams could be built – was in the hand of the bīẓān. All interventions focusing on a certain scale therefore automatically tended to benefit (some) bīẓān more than (some) sūdān.

In the case of Labde, the most vehement accusations against the project were that it had for a long time resisted any intervention. This situation, as described to me by the most prominent leader of the sūdān in Labde, changed only after he asked the national minister for agricultural development for help while on tour through the region in 1989 (Interview Yahya Ould Emine, ḥarāṭīn, 7.11.1995). This is one of the many cases in which sūdān, struggling for emancipation, portray their appeals to the (highest) state authorities as successful and these institutions as defending their civil rights.

155 The amount of 80,000 UM had to be paid to the project for its services. Calculating on a basis of 80 contributors, everybody was meant to pay 1,000 UM (about US$6). However, much less people than had been intended paid their share, and finally a few persons, among them a quite well-off migrant worker at the national iron ore mine (SNIM), subsidised the undertaking by paying higher contributions.

156 Local communities have the right to have their own school. As a precondi-

tion for the state to send (and pay) a teacher, the villagers, however, have to provide the building. In theory, anyway. The biggest problems in establishing local elementary schooling are witnessed in the most remote and deprived communities, many of which are dominated by sūdān (e.g. at Daber on the Tagant). Teachers (most of whom are bīẓān) do not want to live out in the bush among "ignorant" sūdān, and therefore resist, or simply leave employment there and the sūdān communities have few means to exercise pressure on the state authorities.

157 Olivier Leservoisier (1994a: 292f.) bases his conclusion that the land reform of 1983 and 1984 is not effective in the rural areas of Mauritania on the argument that attempts of ḥarāṭīn to sell land to people alien to their tribe failed. The ḥarāṭīn concerned are therefore supposed to have not yet acquired full control of their land, but to continue to be subjected to the tribal paradigm, i.e. the control by bīẓān elites. However, the tribal framework, and its restrictions with regard to land sales apply to bīẓān too (cf. p. 239-241). Within the tribe, land for cultivation today is marketed quite liberally, and sūdān buy land (e.g. plots behind dams) from bīẓān, but it hardly ever occurs that strangers not affiliated to the local tribe get the right to own or buy land.

158 Pierre Bonte (1994c: 85) too states that the sūdān effectively were attributed the right to private appropriation of land prior to the new legislation on land tenure in 1983 and 1984.

159 The zakāt makes up one tenth of the harvest, but has only to be paid if the harvest exceeds 180 mūd (a more restrictive rule declares 150 mūd to be the limiting value. i.e. either about 720 kg, or 600 kg). While harvests of full-time cultivators, ranging between 200 and 300 mūd in the area of Achram-Diouk, are likely to exceed this amount, and oblige the cultivator to pay the zakāt, no zakāt at all is due for the half of this amount. All in all, any such trick is illegal, for the zakāt has to be paid for all incomes of one domestic union – and this applied fully to master-slave households.

160 Land in these cases is sold to members of the same tribe. Exceptions are only made with regard to people who have affiliated themselves to the tribe, e.g. by marriage, and the tribal community thus remaining able to exert some control.

161 This is primarily the case for the former core locations of the emirate of Tagant, the area of Daber, Kehmeit and El Fouj. Despite a few bīẓān notables once constructing houses in this area, and one of them running a shop at El Fouj, today the locations are deserted by the bīẓān and only sūdān remain.

162 The dam at Djouengi has about 160 plots (3 m width, and 2-300 m length), and each plot was reported to cost about 120,000 UM. This price seems exaggerated given the prices at Leklewa, where plots of 25 m width and about 250-300 m length are sold for about 45,000 UM (Interview Abdel Wedoud Ould Mamma, ḥassān, 31.10.1995).

163 E.g. a study entirely devoted to the situation of women in Mauritania, and aware of almost all aspects of women's economic activities (among which is cultivation), is mute on all aspects of property rights exercised by women (cf.

Smale 1980). To my knowledge only one study focusing on women and rural development explicitly takes into account the question of land tenure and women (Blanchard de la Brosse 1986).

164 In the data collected on households in eleven villages and quarters of the region of Achram-Diouk (cf. p. 129f.) many women leading a household were reported at least to have land behind large dams (*barrages*), and/or small dams (*diguettes*). Women are also able to bequeath this land to their children, but when these are affiliated to a different tribe than their mother (as a result of their father being of a different tribe), the children only get a use-right, and are not allowed to sell the land to people other than members of their mother's tribe (Interview Mahmoude Mint Ali, ḥarāṭīn, 26.7.1995).

165 A recent study of pastoral households found 19 women out of 30 to own livestock, and 10 out of 30 to own houses or tents (cf. FAO 1990: 13)

166 This is the case e.g. when men are unable to bring land for cultivation into a marriage. I observed one such case, where a sūdān migrant from the Kunta married a sūdān woman from the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed near Hella. Naturally the man did not own land. Therefore he had to cultivate on rented and borrowed land, but also on land belonging to his wife. Later he was allowed to buy land from a member of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, because his marriage into the tribe had minimised his status as a stranger (Interview ḥarṭāni, 15.3.1995).

167 Women quite often fail to get their legitimate claims be recognised in matters of inheritance. Especially when husbands die young, the spouse and the children are likely to become dispossessed by relatives of the deceased. The women then have to defend not only their own rights, but also those of their children.

168 This contradicts a view held by Véronique Blanchard de la Brosse (1986: 181), according to which gender-specific property rights are not practised by sūdān. This might appear to be the case so far as very poor sūdān or ʿabīd are concerned, having no, or very little property. Among sūdān owning land, or animals, both marriage partners are well aware of who owns what. This division becomes effective in the case of divorce.

169 Major activities promoted were gardening, dyeing veils, sewing, trade and alphabetisation. Women organised themselves in women's co-operatives, deciding autonomously what activities were to be pursued.

170 The outcome of land attribution in the irrigated perimeters is different, as the case of Foum Gleita shows. There a considerable number women signed up for a parcel, but were only the front for local elites and other groups interested in speculating with this land. However, some women profited from this opportunity themselves. Together with their children they were able to cultivate the small plots (0.25 ha) and increase their autonomy with regard to grain or rice (cf. Blanchard de la Brosse 1986: 201).

Chapter 8

1 This still applies to very few cases, but today ḥarāṭīn – given a number of favourable circumstances – are able to marry bīẓān women, and thus achieve equality in a most sensitive field of bīẓān social and symbolic relations: matrimonial alliances. This is highlighted by an interview held by Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 249) with a ḥarāṭīn woman on the subject of the marriage of a wealthy and well educated ḥarāṭīn man to a bīẓān woman: "'don't you think he should have married a Haratine woman? . . .' The woman replied, 'No, I think it's a great thing because it means that Beidanes [bīẓān] are now accepting our men as their equals. It's a step up for all of us.'" The way in which matrimonial alliances continue to play a major role for the construction of social relations in India has recently been developed for the case of the Andhra Pradesh region by Rainer Merz (1998).

2 While the emergence of a distinct ex-slaves' political organisation is unique in the context of the West African Sahelian societies, it was preceded in the Sudan. There as early as 1938 a political organisation of slaves and ex-slaves was founded (cf. Sikainga 1996: 168).

3 This position is held by sympathisers with the radical movement for the liberation of the Mauritanian black Africans from oppression by the bīẓān (FLAM: Forces de Libération des Africains en Mauritanie). This latter organisation states that all "blacks" are subject to the same social and economic discrimination by the "white" Arab bīẓān, and thus have to unite (cf. Marchesin 1992: 211ff.; Ould Cheikh 1994a: 15; Al-Akhbar nº 1, 9.7.1995: 5).

4 The activists of the ḥarāṭīn cause in this respect are taking part in the creation of an ethnic dichotomy between bīẓān, including sūdān, and the black African ethnic groups (Toucouleur and Peul, who are part of the Halpulaar'en [speakers of Pulaar language], Soninké and Wolof), who are far from forming one uniform block (cf. Ould Cheikh 1994a: 14f.).

5 Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 212ff.) assumes the social relations ḥarāṭīn practise to depend on their affiliation with either radical or conservative ḥarāṭīn. This can be questioned, as political orientation is also influenced by one's social relations. It thus seems to better suit the argument to speak of multiple correlations rather than of a model comprising dependent and independent variables.

6 A similar dichotomous characterisation of ḥarāṭīn attitudes towards the bīẓān has already been developed by Chambon (1962; cited in Martín 1991: 31). Therefore the majority of the sūdān stuck to the following description: "mon maître est mon maître, celui que Dieu a mis sur moi, je lui obéis mais il me secourt quand je suis en difficulté.", and a minority to the statement "les Maures sont d'iniques oppresseurs; les redevances ne sont pas légales, on doit pouvoir se marier et être maître de ses enfants."

7 Only few speakers of ḥassāniyya are able to follow radio broadcasts in modern standard Arabic, and therefore remain dependent on the national, government-controlled "Radio Mauritanie". In addition radio stations remain scarce in many of the remote camps and adwaba, or there is no

money to buy new batteries. The most apparent, and almost total lack of radio stations I witnessed appeared among the sūdān living on the Tagant near Daber and El Fouj.

8 The opposition of hidden versus public transcripts has received substantial criticism from Susan Gal (1995), who states that the definition of "*public* used by Scott is unexamined and inadequate. The idea of public, far from being a simple question of audience, based on the model of witnessed face-to face interaction, is itself a deeply ideological construct in western thought, often linked exactly to the separation of language from a face-to-face situation and thus to the decontextualisation of language by print." (Gal 1995: 417, original emphasis)

9 Referring to two brothers to tell the difference between sūdān and bīẓān is a recurrent scheme. According to a popular myth in bīẓān society there were once two brothers, both holding a copy of the Qur'ān, and walking around. When it suddenly started to rain, one brother took his Qur'ān to shield it under his clothes, while the other one put it on his head to shelter himself from rain. The book got soaked with water and all of the ink ran, thus staining the second brother black. For this disrespect he was condemned to slavery by Allah (cf. Acloque 1995: 98ff.; Brhane 1997a: 121ff.).

10 This is the case for Mohamed Khairat, "the slave who made the camel talk" and thus proved himself to have been wrongly enslaved (cf. Brhane 1997a: 127-137). Similar narratives are reported from the Tuareg by Clare Oxby (1978: 150f.), and are part of Arab legends (cf. Brhane 1997a: 136, note 50). The pattern equally applies to the dark-skinned and enslaved brother. He does not address the members of his family, but these recognise his voice. Today, however, undue status ascription is hardly accepted, as the case of Brahim Ould Daddah shows. He successfully brought a paternity suit against his prominent bīẓān father, who refused to recognise his paternity of his son born by a ḥarāṭīn mother (cf. Brhane 1997a: 74).

11 Indeed the term ʿabd, and its female equivalent ḫādem developed a racist connotation, denouncing the blackness of the slaves, as 19th and 20th century proverbs about slaves circulating in the Arabic-speaking world show. This terminological shift reflects that by then almost all slaves in this cultural sphere were of Sudanese origin (cf. Sersen 1985). Although strong inter-ethnic relations among the bīẓān and neighbouring Sudanese ethnic groups in which both had equal power had always existed (cf. Schmitz 1996), those members of the Sudanese ethnic groups who came to the bīẓān scholars to get instruction in Islam were treated with disrespect and as if they were Muslims of secondary rank (cf. Caillié 1830: 112ff.). The racist attitude of the bīẓān vis-à-vis the Muslim black African ethnic groups was even denounced by bīẓān scholars such as Ṭālib al-Bašīr (dec. 1197/1783) from Oualâta (cf. Oßwald 1993: 124f.).

12 It is no longer possible to undertake a direct evaluation of the old ʿamīr's behaviour vis-à-vis the slaves in the ḥella. It is, however, without doubt that his style of rule – to put it mildly – was extremely authoritarian. This lasted until his last days (cf. personal communication with Roger Botte, who in 1978

spent two weeks in the emiral camp and on this occasion was able to have a discussion with the old ʿamīr).

13 Asked about the issue of the discord his mother Zeyneb mentioned once having had with her master's family (cf. p. 66), her son Brahim, reframed some aspects of the story. Instead of speaking of the major conflict Zeyneb had located at the time of the SEM, Brahim skipped back to a much earlier event, having taken place before independence. The master's wife wanted to have two servants, i.e. two daughters of Zeyneb, instead of the one it had formerly been. When the mistress visited the slave family in order to take with her a second girl, Zeyneb started an open dispute with her, and finally the two women started beating each other. This led Zeyneb to go to the ʿamīr Abderrahmane Ould Bakkar and complain about the unjustified demands of her master. This apparently was successful. Abderrahmane was reported to have admonished the master to be good to his slaves, and not to coerce them into anything, so that they would be able to stay with him. Otherwise, the old ʿamīr told the master, he would have to free the slave family.

14 Claude Meillassoux (1986: 101f.) underlines the decisive impact the development of slavery has on the elaboration of a master's ideology rationalising the difference between master and slave in the terms of a dichotomous opposition and developing distinct social norms regulating the society's reproduction.

15 Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a: 406ff.) states that complementary patterns of behaviour were common among several status groups. The maʿalimīn thus were alleged to portray the counter-image of ḥassān values, namely cowardice, greed and being demanding. The case of the iggāwen is similar.

16 To a zwāya having owned quite some livestock prior to the drought in 1969 it was wholly incomprehensible how I could have imagined him to have accompanied his slaves herding the animals out in the bush, for this would have meant doing the same work twice, and thus been just a waste of time (Interview zwāya, 13.7.1995). For the master this meant also delegating much of the pastoral decision-making and responsibility to his slaves. This view is confirmed by former slaves too. A ḥarṭāniyya (Interview 22.10.1995) described her former master as having laid the organisation of most work into the hands of his slaves and as remaining with nothing but the work of supervision.

17 Depicting slaves, especially newly imported ones, as "barbarian" and "ignorant" is a common feature of the masters' ideologies. Jonathon Glassman presents four overlapping occupational categories which slaves on the Swahili coast could struggle to attain and hence reduce their marginality (cf. Glassman 1991: 289ff.).

18 I am grateful to Jutta Bischoff, my wife, for having discussed this most sensitive issue with the young ḥassān woman, and thus to have enabled me to obtain these insights.

19 The depersonalisation of slave women can also be discerned from legal practices denying the possibility of their being raped, while this crime is recognised with regard to free women (cf. Al-Bayane nº 71, 21.4.1993).

20 The matter of descendants of slaves guiding prayers – among other similar topics – animated a long, lively and controversial discussion among Mauritanian intellectuals communicating on Mauritanie-Net in early 1997 (cf. among others Tandia, Sidi [smtandia@iastate.edu], "Re: Encore l'esclavage!", In Mauritanie-Net [mauritanie-net@bat710.univ-lyon1.fr], 28.1.1997, Cheikh Traore [cheikh.traore@lshtm.ac.uk], "Re: Encore l'esclavage !", In Mauritanie-Net [Mauritanie-Net@bat710.univ-lyon1.fr], 27.1.1997). The issue is also discussed in the independent press of Mauritania (cf. Al-Bayane nº 78, 16.6.1993: 9)

21 The songs presented by Aline Tauzin (1989b) were collected in the Hodh, around Ayoûn el-Atroûs. These eastern parts of Mauritania are known to be the ones where the grip of traditional hierarchy is still felt most strongly.

22 The topic was raised in the context of the narrative of M'Barke (cf. p. 66-69).

23 Performances of meddh are supposed to happen on Fridays, but this is no strict requirement, and they are much more likely to develop out of a spontaneous mood. They start in the late evening, and may last until the early morning.

24 The development of a distinct art of meddh in Nouakchott, implying also the specialisation of its performers, may indicate the emergence of a kind of emigrant culture and lead to a revival of what is perceived as tradition.

25 The shepherd living in symbiosis with his animals out in the bush is to some extent the archetype of the ignorant in bīẓān society (cf. Caratini 1989: 98), and much fun is made of these "men of the bush" and their supposed backwardness. In many jokes circulating these people commonly fail to manage the pitfalls of modern life, and act much like poor Don Quixote tilting at the windmills.

26 In bīẓān society religious learning is not limited to men. A number of bīẓāniyyāt, i.e. bīẓān women, acquired a respectable knowledge of Islam and related sciences and educated pupils themselves (cf. Simard 1996: 95; El Hamel 1999: 74-76; see also the narrative of Brahim p. 61). Most disadvantaged in this respect were of course the sūdān women.

27 In response to the increasing dissemination of colonial education, bīẓān scholars lifted former restrictions of access to their maḥaẓra (Qur'ān schools) and hence enabled members of all social strata to take part in traditional education (cf. Hirth 1994: 157).

28 Besides the claims of the sūdān interviewed, the failure of the bīẓān masters to meet the obligations arising from the precepts Islam, which describe under what conditions slavery is legitimate, are echoed in many publications; refer e.g. to RAMS (1980: 74)

29 René Caillié (1830: 150) already recognised that the (lack of) respect for Islam by slaves was a major argument by which the bīẓān legitimised their often cruel behaviour towards them. The supposed disrespect for and ignorance of Islam on the part of the slaves, however, was a matter of definition set up by the bīẓān, for Caillié recognised that there was no difference in the treatment of slaves who performed their prayers properly, and those who did not.

30 This issue was treated by zwāya scholars in legal judgements and expertises, who stress the obligation to pay zakāt for all Muslims, i.e. including the slaves who only are nominally Muslim, and thus bring to light the fact that many bīẓān did not comply with this obligation (cf. Oßwald 1993: 127).

31 Stating to have always paid the zakāt was a common means by which interviewees wished to generate legitimacy for their claim to have never been a slave.

32 Zakāt in precolonial bīẓān society in many cases came to be perceived as something of a religious tax, paid by ḥassān or znāga to zwāya in compensation for their spiritual services, while the zwāya had to pay other kinds of taxes for their military protection (cf. Oßwald 1993: 104f.).

33 One such option was the fishy argument according to which all zwāya had to be regarded as poor, and therefore were automatically entitled to receive the zakāt. However this point of view was declared to be "weak", i.e. to represent a minority opinion, by major zwāya (cf. Oßwald 1993: 120).

34 Tebiba Mint Salem (Interview ḥarāṭīn, 29.7.1995) reported her former master to have redistributed the zakāt payments of her family partly among his own family, and needy people.

35 The local qāḍi of the region of Achram-Diouk, Ahmed Ould Aly (Interview 24.12.1995) renowned for his in many respects orthodox interpretation of Islam offered a definition of zakāt payment by manumitted slaves that fits closely into the traditional framework. Here the zakāt is destined for the poor, but can also be given to a former master, who because of his nearness becomes like other closely affiliated poor. While poverty and nearness, according to this interpretation, are criteria of equivalent importance to qualify for the right to perceive zakāt, under certain circumstances, nearness outweighs poverty.

36 The development of an ethic based on the appropriation and revaluation of the former social stigma of physical power and work has also been noticed by Christine Hardung (1997: 133-135) among former Fulbe slaves in northern Benin.

37 Most valuable insights on the role of work as a means of identification among slaves are provided by Eugene Genovese's (1974: 310ff.) sensitive study on plantation slavery in the southern United States. The slaves' work was prominent in both how they were perceived by the free, and how they defined themselves. Common prejudices saw slaves either as wild and uncontrolled but strong workers, or valued attributes of their work like steadiness. Among slaves, the hardest work, like harvesting, was remembered as being the favourite. It was also subject to competition among the slaves themselves, who remembered this time of the year as the best. Then great numbers of slaves assembled and social life among the slaves was at its climax.

38 Indeed El Hor is campaigning for the spread of capitalist wage labour, which is to replace the unpaid work of slaves and ḥarāṭīn. According to the constitutive charter of the organisation, El Hor wants to cultivate among the sūdān the "spirit of work by inciting them to refuse all activities that are not remunerated in a just and equitable manner." (El Hor, constitutive charter,

cited and translated in Brhane 1997a: 307) While the question whether there can be a "just remuneration" of workers within a capitalist economy nowadays has been put aside under the predominance of neoliberal economic theory, the criticism vis-à-vis this ideology initiated by Karl Marx ([1863] 1983a) and Friedrich Engels ([1880] 1978) still is on the agenda. Some sūdān also refuse to mould their existence to fit the needs of the labour market, as the case of Hadama shows. This slave woman preferred to return to her master's brother rather than work for pay as a housemaid in Nouakchott (cf. Brhane 1997a: 306ff.).

39 The increase of livestock marketing in the course of this century, and the start of a wholesale market production of meat may have transformed the attitude of bīẓān pastoralists towards their livestock, by giving it a more instrumental touch. Today sarcastic comments on the bīẓān voracity for meat and the lack of respect for the animals slaughtered fills the columns of Nouakchott (bīẓān!) newspapers.

40 The largest herds of camels in today's Mauritania are owned by urban residents, who reinvest their capital gained in the modern sector in animal property. This has to some extent an economic rationale (cf. FAO 1990: 3f.), but is also driven by the high symbolic value the possession of camels and the link to the nomadic past still has in bīẓān society (RAMS 1980: 38), but also in other desert societies, like those of the Arabian peninsula.

41 Clare Oxby (1978: 155f.) in her study of slavery in a Tuareg community has already focused on the impact of generosity on master–slave relations. According to the masters only noble people are generous enough to maintain a slave's attachment, while slaves who became free men and slave holders are judged unable to attain this moral stance, and fail to be successful slave holders.

42 Colonel Dubost (1924: 463) noticed that the impact of the colonial policy in Tidjikja increased sedentarity not among the bīẓān, but definitely among the ḥarāṭīn.

43 Mohamed Ould Ahmed Meidah (1993) puts the distinction between adabay and vrīg in the following words: "Comme concrétisation de cette ségrégation basée sur la liberté échelonnée, on refusait de désigner par 'campement' l'agglomération constituée par ces Haratines. On lui préfère le terme 'Adabaï' à connotation primitive." Another perspective on how bīẓān perceive sūdān camps is developed in the narrative of Tourad (cf. p. 74).

44 A thorough discussion of the meanings and often contradictory use of attributes like nomadic, transhumant, etc. is given by Fred Scholz (1991). Günther Schlee (1991) discusses the multitude of pastoralist patterns of mobility and the paradox that a decrease in mobility in one animal sector becomes used by the same pastoralist group to increase mobility in another.

45 This is especially true of the adwaba in the remote areas of the Tagant. Living under a tent today is not in itself a sign of modest property, as tents can be anything from a costly luxury item to a piece of recycled cloth. Among the sūdān, most tents are of more or less modest quality.

46 For a discussion of different concepts of space among hunter-gatherer and

nomadic societies, as well as the influence of nomadism and sedentism on this issue refer to Ingold (1986: chapter six and seven) and Schlee (1992).

47 Here the logic of relativistic references to context-sensitive levels of segmentation, as developed by Clifford Geertz (1977: 487ff.) in his study of Sefrou/Morocco, comes to bear. Any reference to people depends on the proximity or distance between the actors. A camp of foreigners in the region of Achram-Diouk would be identified first of all by its tribal affiliation.

48 Achram e.g. is named after the nearby wād Achram (i.e. wadi Achram), Debissa is named after the neighbouring hill etc. Exceptions, however, exist: Hella, a large village directly neighbouring Achram, is the name the camp of the ʿamīr had in former times. Sedentarising beneath Achram, this community maintained this designation.

49 Members of different bīẓān tribes and fractions are likely to have separate land-rights, and thus to be not obliged to construct villages in direct proximity to one another. This is more frequent for sūdān whose claims over land are relayed to the periphery of tribal lands. Factions, constituted by dissension still internal to one tribal grouping, necessarily share the same tribal lands and agricultural plots.

50 This has been a common practice throughout the history of bīẓān society. Colours like black and white are sometimes connected with disputes over social status, but there is no universal and consistent use of blackness (Arabic/ḥassāniyya akḥal) in a pejorative sense (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1989a: 98ff.; Acloque 1995: 118-28). Distinctions by the attribution of colour (most often black, white and red, but green too) seem to be much more a general phenomenon in Sahelian societies and among other African ethnic groups. Among the Fulbe e.g. places are commonly attributed colour characteristics (Youssouf Diallo, personal communication). Colours (black white and red) are also used to distinguish ethnic groups and to qualify social and status groups as well as lineages among Fulbe of the Senegal valley (cf. Botte/Schmitz 1994: 15). Among the bīẓān e.g. the season of tiviski, lasting from the end of February until the end of May, is distinguished in a white and a black half (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 47; 97ff.). This does not inhibit that colour attributes are used in a pejorative sense. In bīẓān society the blacksmiths, i.e. the maʿalimīn, are often described as being of red phenotype. Among the Gabbra and Afar of East Africa attributes like white and red are used to distinguish between different strata, e.g. nobles and commoners. The association of colour with social status for these East African people is the opposite of the one common among the bīẓān, i.e. red means "noble", and white "commoner" (cf. Schlee 1989: 19; Lewis 1955: 155).

51 Topographical descriptions indeed still have to be clear in bīẓān society, where designations like "left" and "right" are still unknown, and directions in almost all contexts are referred to from the matrix of the four cardinal points. This is also a phenomenon common to many societies, who like pastoral nomadic peoples depend strongly on exact references to places and directions. In parts of East Africa, the native terms for "left" and "right" still remain related to the cardinal points, and can partly replace them. To properly reproduce the meaning of "left", as used e.g. in English, which

makes the body of the speaker the point of reference, one has to take the detour of the expression of "to your left side" (Prof. Günther Schlee, personal communication 16.10.1998).

52 One field in which French domination still is well remembered is school policy. Here, the focus of colonial policy lay on the spread and promotion of the French language. Accordingly, of thirty hours of schooling per week only three were dedicated to Arabic (cf. De Chassey 1984: 184). Or as Sid Mohamed Ould Dey (ḥassān, Interview 27.8.1995), who was already a teacher under French colonial rule, put it: "Arabic had a lean time then, and now it's the turn of French to have lean time."

53 Bīẓān decry the use of istʿammār as a synonym for slavery by sūdān as revealing an insufficient command of Arabic. The correct term, ʿabūdiya, however, is not adequate for the sūdān, for they not only want to name "slavery" as an institution that is recognised within certain limits by Islam, but the illegitimacy of enslavement too (cf. Brhane 1997a: 150f.).

54 In contrast to the reactions of several sūdān in the region of Achram-Diouk, an elderly slave woman living in the Trarza region displayed an indifferent attitude towards Ould Haidalla's speech: "[I feel just as I always have] – a member of the community and above all, the mother of all the young people, black or white."(Yellin n.d.)

55 The SEM thus were somewhere half way between political mass organisation and administrative structure. According to Mohamed Abderrahmane Ould Khalil (zwāya, Interview 1.8.1995) the SEM had to intervene in a great many local problems: conflict, disaster relief, the building of schools, and organisation.

56 Recent trends in the religious landscape of Mauritania, showing a declining significance of traditional authorities and the emergence of fundamentalist discourses, are discussed by Constant Hamès (1994), Diana Stone (1994) and Rahal Boubrik (1998, 1999).

57 The very first elections after the coup d'état in 1978 were the municipal elections in Nouakchott in 1986. From 1989 the electoral process was significantly amplified. In January 1989 the municipal councils and mayors of thirty-two administrative centres were elected. In December 1990 finally, elections were held in all 208 municipalities, thus finally reaching the capital of the "commune de Soudoud" Achram (cf. Ould Cheikh 1994b: 31f.).

58 This observation contradicts the findings presented by Philippe Marchesin (1992: 186ff.), according to which the SEM enabled a number of old notables to re–enter politics. This probably is true in many cases, but the outcome of the SEM was more ambivalent, for the strong influence of the state administration which Marchesin rightly noted also led to a noticeable weakening of many members of the old tribal notability. One such prominent victim was the son of the old ʿamīr of Tagant, Ethman Ould Abderrahmane. Within the SEM he became only a "chief of zone" (an area that by and large corresponded to the today's municipality of Achram, and thus much inferior to the sphere of influence of his father). Later his authority was cut down even further, when several villages were assigned to another zone (Interview Mohamed A. Ould Khalil, zwāya, 5.9.1995).

59 Sūdān still enjoy telling how they experienced this new attitude of the government and administration becoming effective.
SOS: There once was an assembly, together with the region's reviser, the latter explained that now there were no more slaves, i.e. he explained how to build up a cell, etc., how all this had to be organised.
Author: Did this man come from Nouakchott [the capital]? [Sidi Ould Salim laughs]
SOS: Yes, of course . . . There was a teacher here from the Legwāṭiṭ. When they began to explain everything with the SEM, that everybody was equal, one had to take ten families, and that bīẓān and sūdān could be mixed, then this man began to ask, and tell that he had not well understood what had been said. The reviser therefore told him that he now would explain it one more time for him that there are no more slaves. (Interview Sidi Ould Salim, ḥarṭāni, 30.1.1996)

60 This perspective complies with the argument developed by Susan Gal (1995: 412) that contradictory opinions which actors express in specific circumstances cannot be spoken of in terms of a dichotomy of genuine versus posed. Rather they reveal the presence and weight of contested discourses.

61 Eugene Genovese (1974: 4ff.), basing the analysis of plantation slavery in the US South on Gramsci too, highlights the contradictions inherent to paternalism. As a mode of domination it produces both affection *and* hatred.

62 Meskerem Brhane (1997a) is far from schematising sūdān (or ḥarāṭīn) attitudes, but by focusing on affiliations to two opposite identities she runs the risk of veiling the many contradictions underlying social practices in both camps. In this respect the activists campaigning for ḥarāṭīn identity resemble much the young women aspiring to initiation into Islamist subculture in Cairo described by Karin Werner (1997). This demands engagement in a permanent process of self-domestication, meaning the refinement of practices and attitudes which remain open-ended, because the ideals are never met. Rather than reflecting an incomplete, or else defective identity formation process, the incongruent nature of these identities is crucial to maintaining the competitive and hence dynamic nature of identification.

63 Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1985a: 505ff.) reports how in 1967 a metal box was found beneath a tomb. The enclosed document, written in traditional manner, made it possible to rewrite – and thus ennoble – the genealogy of the Ahel Šayḫ Sidyya. Their status had remained contested because the group's genealogy did not match the hegemonic position it had achieved during the 19th century.

64 The ideological nature of this concept becomes apparent by the fact that, of the Arab terms defining relations of parenthood, ʿamm is one of the ones with the most fluctuating meaning. It designates not only the father-brother, but also all male members of a group assembled by a common ancestry, and even the male members of the whole Arab nation. All these people can be treated as if patrilateral parallel cousins (cf. Conte 1991: 56).

65 Ibn Khaldun is famous for his distinction between urban and nomadic group solidarity (ʿaṣabiya). According to his vision consciousness of common ancestry vanishes and is no longer maintained once people settle in cities.

The once existing solidarity is weakened. Among the nomadic peoples, ancestry does not become blurred, and these groups are thus able to maintain strong ties of solidarity due to their purity (cf. Hamès 1987: 112).

66 This basic meaning is also referred to by Pierre Bonte (1987a: 77, note 28): "ʿaṣaba désigne le lien entre une chose et une autre, les relations entre un homme et ceux rassemblés autour de lui pour combattre ou se défendre; ʿaṣaba(t) désigne les gens ou les partisans d'un homme qui se liguent ensemble pour la défense, les relations du côté des hommes, les relations d'un homme du côté de son père parce qu'elles le soutiennent et le renforcent."

67 Tribal affiliation and sharing an ʿaṣabiya do not necessarily coincide. The solidarity of diyya payment may concern only parts of a tribe (cf. Bonte 1987a: 71), but can also cross cut these boundaries. Tribes may contract assistance in the payment of levies which can be called ties of ʿaṣabiya too. Narrow ties of ʿaṣabiya which are limited to those who share reciprocal rights of inheritance, i.e. common descent from an ancestor in the fifth or sixth generation, may also transcend tribal boundaries, several sūdān living in such circumstances insisted. This notion of a nucleus of solidarity is also used to portray tribes with a strong group solidarity (Interview Mohamed Ould Khassar, zwaya, 7.8.1995).

68 This interpretation, as Pierre Bonte (1987a: 71) remarks, stresses masculine relations of solidarity, created most often for reasons of defence, by referring only to patrilineal filiation. This downplays matrilineal ties which were and still are important in creating affinity and solidarity in bīẓān society.

69 This seems to be no specificity of bīẓān society, for aṣl has come to be used in quite the same way as nasab in other Arab tribal societies, like e.g. the Awlād Ali of western Egypt (cf. Lila Abu-Lughod 1986: 41).

70 The IdawʿĪš claim of an Arab origin is a recent phenomenon and contrasts their renowned descent from the Lemtūna. These were Berbers, who like the early IdawʿĪš spoke a now almost forgotten Berber dialect called znāga (derived from the ethnonym Ṣanhāǧa; cf. Amilhat 1937). While the supposed antagonism between "Arabs" and "Berbers" was taken first of all by colonial authors to explain conflict in Mauritanian tribal society, contemporary analyses have revealed the many weaknesses of this approach (cf. Ould Cheikh 1991a: 108f.). Nowadays the remnants of a Berber past in many bīẓān tribes is reconciled with the wish for an Arab ancestry by statements saying that there is no problem in having a Berber ancestry, for the Berbers concerned had Arab ancestors (Interview Cheikh M. Ould Jiddou, ḥassān, 7.12.1995).

71 For a short evaluation of the difficulties of many bīẓān tribes developing legitimate claims to an Arab descent refer to Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh (1991a: 11ff.)

72 For a comparative presentation of different traditions of bīẓān origins refer to Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (1997). Different versions of traditions telling of how Bou Bakkar ben Amar founded the tripartite bīẓān society are documented by Harry T. Norris (1972: 129-32, 152-54) and Rainer Oßwald (1986: 314-21, 342-54).

73 Times are changing, and thus new terminologies enter the discourse on

individual origins and actual social position. The local qāḍi Ahmed Ould Aly (Interview 24.12.1995) e.g. told me his origin was Liglāgma (i.e. his father's tribe), but as he had passed all his life among the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, these had become his "waṭane", i.e. his nationality, and he expressed this differentiation by referring to a classical Arabic term derived from a modern context, but now fitted back into the tribal framework. Others who could be suspected of being of znāga status were unable to detail their tribe's nasab beyond the most general claim that it was Arab.

74 These kinds of sūdān family genealogies could be classified as matrilineal, because only descent from free mothers and foremothers allows one to prove ḥarāṭīn status. It is a bitter irony that while becoming ḥarāṭīn is supposed to bring all the social rights a freeborn person has (right to kinship, and consequently to patrilineal filiation) to defend this status, ḥarāṭīn have to step back to the slaves' mode of filiation by uterine descent.

75 Having a free mother was indeed the only issue that mattered in achieving and maintaining the freedmen's status of descent, for as this interviewee explained to me, one did not need a ḥarāṭīn father to become ḥarāṭīn, but a ḥarāṭīn mother. Therefore there is little to gain from free male ancestors in a ḥarāṭīn family genealogy.

76 In fact the kwār, i.e. the members of the black African ethnic groups, were described by sūdān to be like the bīẓān, meaning that they were as much free men as the bīẓān, and only used to speak a different language.

77 An interesting parallel here is opened with works focusing on bīẓān representations of hierarchy. Pierre Bonte (1987a; 1991), in his critique of the theories of segmentary society, developed a model of bīẓān society according to which filiation can be interpreted to stress either equality or hierarchy. The production of equality thus is seen as part of the male domain, i.e. the patrilineage (which creates the solidarity of the awlād ʿamm, i.e. all members of the tribe), while statutory difference is created by the female domain, i.e. the matrilineal filiation. This fundamental difference is well anticipated by the bīẓān.

78 A similar distinction is drawn, however, in the terms purity versus impurity by Yūba, a ḥarṭāni living in Nouakchott (cited by Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais 1991: 189). Living in slavery therefore is associated with impurity, while manumission purifies the former slave.

79 The interview was held in the presence of two bīẓān, of whom one directly interjected that "ḥarāṭīn" could not be considered an origin (in this case the term aṣl was used by both interviewer and interviewee), for it designated only a status within bīẓān society.

80 These are alms handed out on the occasion of the celebration of the ʿaīd al-fiṭr, at the end of the Ramadan.

81 A similar view is expressed by a member of the ḥarāṭīn of the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed, who claim that their ancestors were never slaves. Therefore the relations of this distinct group of ḥarāṭīn with the ʿamīr of Tagant (which now is no longer an official title) are to be compared with a family among whose members the inheritance is still undivided.

82 In another section of the interview Brahim told me that slavery indeed has

no origin, i.e. in the beginning, all people were free. Similarly a slave once he is dead again becomes equal to those who have been considered free men before. A slave's estate ends with his death.

83 In fact Brahim knows very well of his kūri (matrilineal) ancestry. In another section of the interview he recalls that one of his grandmothers had been captured by Samori Ture, whom he described as a great ḥassān (i.e. warrior), who captured many sūdān and sold them to the bīẓān.

84 Speaking about a different conclusion on aspects of sūdān identity formation and sūdān aspirations, I first have to acknowledge how much the present line of arguments has profited from Meskerem Brhane's Ph.D. thesis (1997a), without which this book would not have taken its present shape. With regard to the different conclusions in our respective analyses, the major point – in my opinion – concerns the issue whether sūdān identify themselves as bīẓān or as distinct from bīẓān. A discussion of this divergence follows in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9

1 Well aware of this problem, Jeffrey Rubin (1995) opts for viewing only conscious acts as resistance. On the basis of the preceding analysis, it could be argued that consciousness too is laden with the very same ambiguities as resistance, and therefore is unlikely to make of resistance a rigid analytical category. Rather than undertake global definitions of resistance and subservience, I would plead for a detailed and differentiated analysis of what are *moments* of resistance and subservience in everyday acts. This paves the way for the appreciation of the many subtleties in everyday interaction, and the recognition of contradictory elements within gestures and discourses which fail to be either "resistant" or "subservient".

2 Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 122, 127, 133) herself reveals several of the difficulties these sūdān experience when trying to get their claims accepted. A large part of sūdān discourses reject not only traditions portraying the sūdān as an accursed group, but also traditions speaking of sūdān who turned white, i.e. became bīẓān or at least very close to them. Such status ascension is rejected because it means a bīẓān appropriation of what could be the nucleus of a sūdān elite. The very power of these doubts is revealed in an interview with a woman claiming descent from Mohamed Khairat, a slave who became a saint and thus bīẓān, after having made a camel talk. While this woman nominally, and according to bīẓān statements, should be regarded as a bīẓān, she refrains from stating her bīẓān-ness publicly. Living in an all-sūdān environment in a Nouakchott shantytown, she prefers instead to make evasive claims of a šurva origin. This is known to have become something of a safety-valve for all sūdān seeking a bīẓān status (cf. the Interview with Brahim, p. 281f.).

3 Morally, this argument raised by sūdān is certainly right, but it misses the point Islamic jurisprudence makes about the illegitimate acquisition of

slaves. According to this perspective, only the enslavement of pagans and other non-Muslims is legitimate, for it can be seen as a means of saving the unbelieving. This stipulation surely was one of the most blatantly violated in the many slave raids in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Willis 1985a; on the legal and ethical aspects of enslaving black Africans see especially Barbour/Jacobs 1985).

4 This is the goal Brahim (cf. p. 281f.) wants to achieve: to have a bīẓān providing evidence of him being a free man and full member of bīẓān society. This seems to work best when there is no more co-residence and master-slave relations can be relegated to past generations (see also the case of Ahmed presented by Meskerem Brhane 1997a: 142ff.).

5 Among others, Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 249f.) cites the case of Youba Ould Abdi, the son of Abdi Ould Embarek, who had been a former slave and right hand of Bakkar Ould Soueid Ahmed (ʿamīr of the Tagant until the French conquest). After colonisation both successively became very powerful and prominent figures in Tidjikja politics. However, the colonial records of this case, as well as the study of Ould Khalifa (1991), are more or less mute on the issue of how and whether the low-class origin of Youba and his father became a topic in their fights with the bīẓān notability. To my knowledge the slave past of Youba's father, which supposedly forbade him a leading position in political life, was put forward by a bīẓān delegation to the French administrators on the occasion of one major conflict at least (cf. Ould Khalifa 1991: 693; see also p. 168).

6 This can also be interpreted as being revealing of an increasing dichotomisation of bīẓān society into bīẓān, or here perhaps rather white Moors versus sūdān, i.e. black Moors, which Meskerem Brhane (1997a: 46) assumes.

7 Sūdān who manage to make a career are accused of forgetting about their past once they have attained a good post. Often having been supported by influential ḥarāṭīn themselves, they fail to haul up members of their own community, for fear of endangering their newly acquired position. Consequently they are accused of forgetting those whom they come from, and of not showing the same solidarity towards their brethren as bīẓān do.

8 Such definitions are used by bīẓān, who state that there is nothing different about the sūdān and bīẓān except their colour, for both speak Arabic, and thus are as Arab as residents of Egypt or Tunisia, where there are people of light and dark complexion too (Interview Tourad Ould Taleb Mokhtar, zwāya, 3.2.1996).

9 This is the view held by the present majority of ḥarāṭīn activists. While it seems to have a great support among the (many) sūdān living in the kébbé, the shanty towns of Nouakchott and the other few large cities of Mauritania, it has – as could be revealed in the present analysis – only a partial influence on sūdān practices in the rural hinterland.

10 Mokhtar Ould Daddah liked to portray Mauritania as a hyphen between black and white Africa, i.e. between sub-Saharan and North Africa (cf. Balans 1980: 523; De Chassey 1984: 291). In some respects the country still is perceived in this way, e.g. it is of concern to both scholars of North Africa and the Middle East and to scholars of sub-Saharan Africa. On the political

level, however, the northwards drift of Mauritania seems to be definitive. Already a member of the UMA (Union du Maghreb Arabe), uniting the Maghrib states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, Mauritania recently was even recognised as a border state of the Mediterranean Sea by the European Union (1995 Madrid conference on the economic integration of nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea).

11 Discrimination against black Africans occurred all over Mauritania, including remote rural areas such as the region of Achram-Diouk. However, it has to be noted that many bīẓān and sūdān also protected black Africans and people of Senegalese origin from persecution, sometimes facing considerable dangers themselves in the process.

12 The initial incident had taken place between Senegalese Soninké farmers and Fulbe herders from Mauritania. In the course of this conflict two Soninké were killed. In Senegal an estimated 15,000 to 40,000 bīẓān shops of a bīẓān community estimated between 300,000 and 500,000 people (thus controlling about 85 percent of the small retail trade), were looted. The later "repatriation" was managed by an airlift linking Dakar and Nouakchott (cf. Baduel 1989: 46ff; Magistro 1993: 203ff.). For further information on the 1989 conflict, euphemistically called "événements" in Mauritania, refer to: Santoir (1990a, b); Marchesin (1992: 210-25); Schmitz (1993, 1996); Clausen (1993, 1994b); Wegemund (1990); Park/Baro/Ngaido (1993).

13 John Magistro 1993: 203) reports that most ḥarāṭīn involved in the 1989 riots in Nouakchott were brought into the capital on trucks. Such accounts leave much room for speculation. First they are able to relieve the Nouakchott ḥarāṭīn at least partially of the charge of having performed and encouraged the killings. Second, the government is charged with having deliberately fuelled the riots instead of fighting them. And third, those having done the dirty job again are the most "ignorant" and "backward", i.e. the rural ḥarāṭīn. The rationale for the riots taking place in the Senegal valley was first of all an economic one. Landless ḥarāṭīn sought to appropriate black African land and belongings. This was supported by the state authorities, equipping groups of ḥarāṭīn with weapons supposed to be used for self-defence, but which were more likely to have served other ends, while groups of displaced black Africans started from Senegal raids on their homeland, to get back at least some of their property and herds (cf. Ould Cheikh 1994a: 36, note 12; Santoir 1990a)

14 Mauritania recruited teachers for the new Arabic branch of state education first of all from the traditional Qur'ān schools. Therefore the country did not import teachers from other Arab countries, such as Egypt, on a large scale. These people, for a number of reasons such as social antagonisms in their countries of origin, were likely to be adherents of ideologies such as Islamic fundamentalism and, as Werner Ruf (1997: 71ff.) showed for the case of Algeria, had a decisive impact on the spread of these new ideologies.

15 There continued to be two branches, a French and an Arabic one, in the Mauritanian educational system. Former reforms had minimised the amount of French in most classes, and closed down bilingual classes. The division into two distinct branches, a French one preferred by the black Africans, and

an Arabic one preferred by the bīẓān and sūdān, then lived on, especially on the level of secondary education and university teaching. This policy, however, hits only a part of the Mauritanian population. The poor quality of the state schools, as well as their failure to provide an adequate knowledge of foreign languages, made most members of the Mauritanian establishment send their children to private schools, thus escaping all attempts at Arabisation (cf. Taine-Cheikh 1994).

16 The Fulbe Aynaabe are a pastoral group within the Halpulaar'en community of Mauritania. They used to occupy the right bank of the Senegal river valley. During the conflict between Mauritania and Senegal in 1989, the Fulbe Aynaabe are reported to have been among the black African ethnic groups who suffered the most from persecution at this time (cf. Sall 1999). Commonly the Halpulaar'en in Mauritania are distinguished into three broad, and partly overlapping categories: the Fulbe (or else Peul) jeeri, who are principally pastoralists and practise some rainfed farming, the Fulbe waalo, who besides pastoral activities put a stronger emphasis on recession agriculture, and the Fulaabe, who mainly live in the Guidimaka region, and combine rainfed agriculture and pastoralism (cf. Santoir 1990b: 569f.). For further aspects of the Halpulaar'en in Mauritania refer to Santoir (1990a, 1993, 1994); Schmitz (1990a, b, 1993, 1996). Further aspects of Fulbe identity formation are e.g. elucidated by Botte/Schmitz (1994), Diallo (1997), and Guichard (1996).

17 The claim of the Fulbe to have an Arab origin is reported to have first occurred in the central Sudan in the early 19th century. According to this claim, the Fulbe descend from Uqba ben Nafi (cf. Braukämper 1992: 84). This interpretation of Fulbe origins, however, never gained broad acceptance, and is contradicted by anthropological evidence.

18 Parti Républicain Démocratique et Social

19 Hans-Dieter Evers and Günther Schlee (1995) provide a thoughtful analysis of how ethnicity and the production of difference comes to be a decisive factor shaping statehood in certain countries of the third world in the age of globalisation.

20 This concerned a violent conflict between large parts of the Tarkoz and the Ahel Swayd Aḥmed at Achram in 1983 which was – again – instigated mainly by sūdān. The clashes in these times were so violent that the army intervened and had to separate both parties.

21 A household servant in 1995 earned, in addition usually to sharing food and shelter with the employers, between 2-3,000 UM per month; the wage sometimes also depended on the amount of work.

22 Very sensitive discussions of how slaves and former slaves use distinct religious practices, most often derived from Sufi spiritualism, to create their own religious sphere are provided by Jonathon Glassman (1991) and G. Makris (1996).

23 Praying in a community and especially guided by a learned man is always to be preferred.

24 Some of these were hosted by sūdān and of course in the presence of such prestigious personalities there was no question of going to the mosque.

Instead the prayers were performed at home and guided by the guests, thus giving their sūdān hosts a renowned opportunity to experience the traditional bīẓān mode of prayer.

Transliteration of Arabic Characters

ā	ا	ṭ	ط
b	ب	ẓ	ظ
t	ت	ʿ	ع
ṯ	ث	ġ	غ
ǧ	ج	f (ḥassāniyya: v)	ف
ḥ	ح	q (ḥassāniyya: g)	ق
ḫ	خ	k	ك
d	د	l	ل
ḏ	ذ	m	م
r	ر	n	ن
z	ز	h	ه
s	س	w, ū	و
š	ش	y, ī	ي
ṣ	ص	ʾ	ء
ḍ	ض		

Transliteration of Arabic as suggested by the 19th conference of Orientalists in Rome in 1935 (cf. Krahl/Reuschel 1980: 31).

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