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# The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Societies of the Western Sudan

MARTIN A. KLEIN

STUDIES OF the history of the Atlantic slave trade in Africa have focused on demography and within it on the number of slaves exported from Africa (Curtin 1969; Lovejoy 1982, 1983; Manning 1981). Seen from the perspective of African history, the question of the number exported is a window on larger fields of inquiry and an area open to research, but it is only a small part of the larger question of the impact of the trade on Africa. Working out a reasonable estimate of the number exported does not give us the number lost, for we can only estimate the number killed in wars and raids or the number who died while being moved toward slave markets. Even if the demographic question were the most important one, the most crucial aspect of it would not be the raw statistics of exports but the question of reproduction (Gregory and Cordell 1987). Reproduction involves a host of variables: nutrition, disease, agricultural productivity, security, political stability, and quality of life among others. Most of these are not amenable to precise answers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the question of reproduction

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leads us to the larger questions of political, social, and economic relationships. This article examines the effects of the slave trade on the institutional structure of Senegambia and the western Sudan and the reproduction of the societies involved.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHY

The debate on the impact of the slave trade is the subject of what may be Philip Curtin's finest book, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa* (1975). Thorough, rigorous, and imaginative, this book places slavery and the slave trade in the context of the larger economy. Curtin reminds us that a minority of Africans raided and traded for slaves, and that even they often had to do other things in order to feed and clothe themselves. However, it is Curtin's discussion of the slave trade that has drawn the loudest reaction, in particular his effort to differentiate between political and economic models of enslavement.

Like Curtin's *Atlantic Slave Trade*, *Economic Change* has drawn a heated response from Senegalese and French historians. The most thorough and persistent of Curtin's critics have been Bou-bacar Barry and Charles Becker. Barry argues that the slave trade contributed to the creation of a more arbitrary and centralized warrior state, that it magnified social conflict and increased violence, and that it led to a loss of population, a decline in productivity, and increased exposure to famine.<sup>2</sup> Becker (1977) has charged that Curtin minimized the effects of war, instability, and militarization of society (see also Becker and Martin 1975). These positions have been supported by several recent theses. Writing on the Soninke of Gajaga, Abdoulaye Bathily (1986, 1989: 237-52), a former research assistant of Curtin, has described an increase in violence, the militarization of the state, and diminished food production. Oumar Kane (1986) argues similarly on the Futa Toro. The Atlantic slave trade, he writes, contributed to a quest for arms.

These arms were used less for defence against external aggression, though this was increasing, than for attacking and enslaving the innocent. . . . the social disequilibrium was accentuated because those charged with defending the people had become their principal oppressors. In addition, manual

labor depreciated; it was more and more debased in the popular mind because it tended to be reserved to slaves. [Ibid.: 360]

Similar lines of argument have been pursued by Mamadou Diouf and Jean Boulègue for the Wolof states.<sup>3</sup>

Many of Curtin's critics have seen in his work either an effort to minimize the importance of the slave trade or to apologize for it. In part, they have misread Curtin's agenda. Curtin was trying to be more scientifically rigorous, to place the slave trade within the context of both the South Atlantic system and the African trade networks and to see slaves as an item of trade much like any other. But Curtin has been insensitive to the agenda of Senegalese historians. Though no less anxious to be scientific, they want to understand Africa's backwardness and its continued exploitation. The debate often focuses on Curtin's conclusions; it does not always fully come to grips with some of his questions. In particular, Curtin asks two questions which force us to look at the nature of the societies we are examining. The first is why slave prices were so low. The second is whether slaves were captured for sale or were already enslaved. I would like to look at the second question first, largely because there is now a sizable body of literature that bears on it, and then to explore certain other effects of the slave trade.

#### ECONOMIC ENSLAVEMENT OR POLITICAL ENSLAVEMENT?

This question is basic to our understanding of societies that enslave others. Is slaving the basis of their economy and political structure, or is it marginal to other activities? Is it one of many activities, perhaps merely an effort to get rid of prisoners, or is it the way the society meets some of its fundamental needs? Curtin (1975, I: 156–68) answers this question by creating two models of enslavement, one political and one economic. Within the political model, slaves are made prisoner as a consequence of conflicts that always take place between states. Enslavement does not result from a conscious desire to enslave. Slaves are sold as an alternative to being killed or resettled. Within the economic model, slaving is a business. Slavers go raiding for no other reason

than to enslave people. Curtin argues that if the economic model predominates, there will be relatively little fluctuation in slave supply. If the political model predominates, there will be sharp fluctuations, the production of slaves being most extensive during periods of warfare. Curtin's analysis balances between the two models, but it does show sharp fluctuations, particularly during major wars.

Since Curtin's book came out, there has been a significant body of research on slaving societies in the western Sudan, some of it in the form of well-documented theses. One of the major themes of this research is that these societies were restructured to become more efficient slaving operations during the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries, that is to say, during or just after the development of sugar plantations in the West Indies sharply increased the demand for slaves. This restructuring almost always involved the development of a corps of professional soldiers, usually of slave origins, and the emergence of a more centralized and predatory state. For some, the process began earlier. Both Barry (1972, 1988) and Boulègue (1986) are convinced that the process of change began in the sixteenth century, when the exchange of horses for slaves contributed to the breakup of the fragile Jolof empire and the emergence of smaller but more centralized states. Barry (1988: 79–82) also links the Portuguese trade to the rise of Kaabu in the Guinea coast area (but for an opposing view see Elbl 1986).

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, more profound changes paralleled the increase in demand from American plantations. In Wolof Kajor, the *Damel Lat Sukaabe* (1695–1720) carried out a series of centralizing reforms, which included an increase in the number of slave warriors (Boulègue 1977, 1986, 2: 428–63). Bathily (1989: 307–52) describes an increase in violence and the militarization of political systems which followed the establishment of a French trading post in the upper Senegal River. S. M. Cissoko (1986) has described the emergence of the warlike kingdom of Khasso just northeast of Gajaga in the late seventeenth century. Emmanuel Terray (1974) describes Gyaman, founded about 1690. Kathryn Green (1984) describes the emergence of a warrior state in Kong about 1700 (see also Bernus 1960). The Wattara of Kong later created similar states in Bobo Dioulasso and Sikasso (Quimby 1972). The Bambara state of

Segu, founded about 1712, has been described by Bazin (1982: 362) as "an enormous machine to produce slaves" (see also Bazin 1975; Roberts 1980a, 1986). In each of these cases, slave raiding and trading were clearly crucial to the structure of the state.

The warrior states were closely linked to merchant cities. Often the major city was a juula community, while the ruling aristocracy lived in scattered villages, for example, in Kong (Bernus 1960), Bouna (Boutillier 1975), Bonduku (Handloff 1982; Terray 1974, 1975), and Bobo. In the Segu Bambara state, by contrast, there was a political capital, Segu, closely linked to a series of commercial cities, of which the most important were Nyamina and Sinsani (Roberts 1978, 1986: chap. 2). The merchants provided the horses and guns and marketed the slaves. Furthermore, though many juula towns claim distant origins, their traditions become concrete only from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century (Roberts 1978). It seems clear that the eighteenth century was a period of increasing economic activity for many of the juula and a period during which many of the major trading families established their wealth and power. They not only traded the slaves but put many of them to work producing commodities (Klein and Lovejoy 1979; Meillassoux 1986: 237–303).

I argue not that the economic model predominated over the political model but that by its very nature the slave trade shaped the structure of the participating state. Curtin's distinction between an economic and a political model explains some of the fluctuations in the slave supply, but it does not explain how the long-distance slave trade shaped the state itself. The slave trade was the way the state reproduced itself. Bazin and Terray (1982: 24) explain: "The stock of slaves must be constantly renewed, either because the slaves are bit by bit integrated and thus less exploitable, or because slaves must continually be sold for the state to provision itself with firearms and horses." In his discussion of Bambara warfare, Bazin (1982: 360) is more explicit: "A social formation like the state of Segu . . . involves the permanent interplay of two distinct and complementary relations: first, by warfare, Segu extends its imperium over an increasing group of communities. . . . But second, by warfare, the state produces its own dependents, constantly increases the mass of them, and permanently reproduces their dependence."

When we look at Senegal again, we find a curious phenome-

non. Having argued that the slave trade reshaped the structure of the Wolof states, Boulègue must confront the decline of slave exports from them after about 1730. He contrasts the large number of slaves taken and sold by the Moors from raids in northern Senegal and suggests that in spite of French efforts, the Wolof limited their slaving activities:

The Wolof trade . . . was not a predation without limits. The taking of slaves, both on the external margins and in the interior of the kingdoms, was the object of regulation by the kings. . . . The companies never succeeded in shaping the slave trade in the Wolof states as they wished, and when in 1763, the French government thought it would motivate the kings to sell more slaves by removing price restraints, the kings took advantage of the rise in prices to reduce the number of slaves sold. [Boulègue 1986, 2: 605; see also Klein 1968: 28]

Becker and Martin (1975) insist that there was increased use of slaves within the Wolof states. James Searing (1988) has suggested that this was because of increased food production for the middle passage and for the towns of St. Louis and Goree, which fits in with Bathily's (1989: 278–82) suggestion that recurrent famines were a serious constraint on the Senegal River trade. Slave dealers would not buy slaves if they could not feed them.

#### WHY WERE SLAVE PRICES SO LOW?

If this answers the question why slaves were taken, it leaves us with the question of slave prices. When Curtin asks about slave prices, he is asking a question so simple its answer seems self-evident, but at the same time it is fundamental to any understanding of the larger question. Curtin (1975, 1: xxi) suggests that the Americas looked to Africa as the preferred source of labor because slaves could be procured so cheaply there. During the fifteenth century, a good horse could be exchanged for 14 or 15 slaves (*ibid.*: 222). While this price went down, during most of the eighteenth century the price of a slave on the coast fluctuated between £10 and £20 (*ibid.*: 159). "The real value of the goods received by the enslaver," Curtin (*ibid.*: 154) writes, "in Senegambia, at least, was very low—so low that no rational person

with command over a slave's labor would give him up unless he showed genuine tendencies toward criminal activity or political 'trouble-making.' Most slaves came from the interior. That meant that the profit was divided between the slavers and the slave traders. It also meant that they had to be moved, fed, and guarded. Profits were probably very slim. In an ordinary year, the price of a slave was about four times the cost of his subsistence for a year (*ibid.*: 169).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the cost of doing business threatened the potential profits. Furthermore, the mortality rate was high both for slaves being moved and for slaves being held in cool coastal areas (*Bathily* 1986: 276–78).

The slave trade was only a small part of the larger economy. During the early seventeenth century, the hide trade was more important than the slave trade, and by the end of the eighteenth century the value of the gum the French bought was probably greater than that of the slaves.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the desertside trade, millet and cloth for salt and livestock, was in most years more important than either (*Curtin* 1975, 1: 197). And certainly, most productive activity went into subsistence. Why then was slaving so crucial to political and social organization? One answer could be different notions of value. A gun is of more value in a society where guns are rare or absent than in one where they are numerous.<sup>6</sup> Most purchases were so valuable that people were willing to make sacrifices for them. But this answer clearly does not go far enough. It does not explain the price of a slave measured in terms of subsistence. Even viewed by African measures of value, the price of slaves was very low. The answer to our question must be seen in the way slaving shaped and strengthened the power of the state.

Slaving was not an easy business to get into. Kidnapping was a constant risk. Only those who commanded significant numbers of men could successfully slave. Thus slaving was done largely by armies or by raiding forces of professional warriors. At the same time, rulers needed men who stood outside kinship structures and by their very lack of status would be dependent. Young male slaves best fit this definition. Thus, only politically significant bodies could enslave, and that process strengthened the power of the state and its ruler. Two of the themes of Boulègue's thesis are the state-village conflict and the king-aristocracy conflict. In both cases, the creation of a force of dependent warriors gave the



kings an advantage. Slaving also strengthened the state in other ways. First, slaves were exchanged for goods of value to the state. Weapons of war, metal goods, and luxurious textiles were all of value because they could be used to coerce or reward. The price of guns and horses was not as important as the power these scarce goods gave those who possessed them. The state also asserted itself through redistribution. Slaving enabled the state to redistribute prestigious goods that were available only from across the Atlantic or the Sahara and could be used to ensure the loyalty of warriors (Roberts 1986: 39).

If the state benefited, what was in it for the slave warrior? We know that slave warriors did not always act as expected. They could interfere with political processes and make or unmake rulers (*ibid.*: chap. 2; Diouf 1980). They generally did so not to undermine the system but to strengthen it and their position within it. And yet it is probable that they were poor. The low price of slaves meant that it was very difficult for slave warriors to feed and clothe themselves by their military activities. Wolof armies in the seventeenth century were estimated at 1,200 to 1,500 men, with forces up to 4,000 in the eighteenth century (Boulègue 1986, 2: 333–36).<sup>7</sup> This means that the number of warriors was many times the number of slaves marketed in any given year.<sup>8</sup> How did they live? Some accounts say they were supported by the lords they served (*ibid.*: 335). Others suggest they lived off pillage (Roberts 1986: 35). The most important kind of booty, however, was women. Slave warriors probably lived largely off the labor of their female slaves (M. Klein 1983), which freed them to pursue an adventurous life. They wore long hair and bright clothes and spent much time drinking. Their raids were not always successful. They often met resistance or retaliation. Sudanic walled villages were not easy to take (Bah 1985).

#### SLAVE USE

So far, my argument has dealt only with the slavers, but one-half of every slaving formation was the merchants who sold the slaves and provided the trade goods that rulers, aristocrats, and warriors wanted. “Newly captured war prisoners,” Curtin (1975, 1: 155) writes, “had little or no value at the point of capture.” For Meillassoux (1971: 55), “warfare and trade are complementary

and opposed. The former feeds the second, uses it as an outlet, yet withdraws men from production. Hence two classes develop which are both solidary and antagonistic—a class of warrior aristocrats and a class of merchants.” Solidly Muslim, the austere and puritanical merchants differed radically from the slave warriors in their values. They were, however, closely linked to the warrior states, for whom they marketed slaves and provided trade goods. The eighteenth-century expansion of their activities involved an extension of trade, capital from one kind of commerce being used for other kinds, and an increase in slave use. The networks noted by Curtin, which provided about 100,000 slaves a year on the coast, were capable of providing slaves for use within Africa. To do all this and to supply the Saharan trade, several times that number had to be enslaved in any given year. The endless files of slaves familiar to us from nineteenth-century explorer accounts were certainly also characteristic of the preceding century. These slaves did not necessarily move to the coast in one trip. Many were traded from place to place.<sup>9</sup> For each transaction there was always the choice of whether to keep the slave or sell him or her again.

There are several sources of evidence that many, probably most, slaves were kept within Africa. First, when the Atlantic trade ground to a halt in the nineteenth century, the drop in prices was not especially dramatic, though the number of slaves on the market was actually increasing. This clearly suggests that the capacity of Sudanic society to absorb and use slaves was quite high. Meillassoux (1971: 193) argues that in the nineteenth century a slave in the desertside town of Goumbou could earn the cost of his purchase in one to three years. An early-twentieth-century French administrator argued that a slave in the Senegal River region could earn for his master 40 to 50 francs a year and thus pay his purchase price in four to five years (Du Laurens 1904). We have no data about the profitability of slave labor in the eighteenth century, but its use was certainly increasing (Roberts 1986: 46–58).

There is another measure of the importance of slaves within Africa. Most slaves exported from West Africa were male, probably by a ratio of at least two to one, and probably higher in Senegambia (H. Klein 1983; Curtin 1975, 1: 175–77). Working from plantation data in Saint-Domingue, David Geggus (1989) found even higher ratios for peoples from the far interior; the

longer the voyage to the coast, the higher the percentage of males. There is no doubt that women and children were a majority of those enslaved. They were easier to capture and to move. The predominance of men in the Atlantic trade clearly resulted from an African preference for women and children (Curtin 1975, 1: 175–77; H. Klein 1983: 36–37). Furthermore, a contrast between the ratio of women to men among those enslaved and among those exported suggests that a majority of those enslaved were kept within Africa, a majority that consisted largely of women and children (Klein 1987).

The importance of this is that western Sudanic societies were heavily dependent on slavery in a variety of ways. The long-distance slave trade did not create slavery within Africa; Bathily (1989: 180–84) argues that the slavery existed before the coming of Arab traders and that most slaves were exploited within the region. But the availability of slaves increased their use and transformed the mode of exploitation. Slavery was widespread in human society; it was almost universal in societies similar to those we find in precolonial West Africa. It is unlikely, however, that many medieval or early-modern societies were completely dependent on slave labor. By the late nineteenth century, many African societies were as much as two-thirds slave. Slaves were especially numerous in and around major political and commercial centers. Furthermore, there seems to have been some change in the way they were used. In earlier centuries, many communities were simply relocated from their original homes to areas where they could be forced to provide food for the court and army. This was clearly the case in the warrior state (Roberts 1986: 38–39; Bazin 1975: 135–82). Increasingly, however, slaves were used in mercantile centers to produce commodities for trade and were themselves commoditized (Meillassoux 1975a, 1986: 237–303; Roberts 1986: 46–50; Boutillier 1975). The availability of slaves probably increased production in many sectors of African society. Slaves were valued not because they worked more efficiently than nonslaves but because more labor could be extracted from them. Nehemia Levtzion (1986a, 1986b) and Lamine Sanneh (1979) have also argued that the exploitation of slave labor made possible the emergence of the rural-based Muslim clerics who provided much of the leadership for the jihads of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Certainly, dependence on slave labor made study

possible. It also made possible the creation of an alternative elite not dependent on commerce and with limited links to the rulers.

#### ISLAM AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Sometimes events have a logic that can be understood only as part of a dialectical process. Such a sequence is the process of Islamization in West Africa. A little over 18 years ago, Barry (1972) and Klein (1969, 1972) arrived independently at an interpretation of Senegal's past which stressed the role of Islam in resisting and providing an alternative to slave-trading political formations. The broad lines of this analysis have been accepted by most recent writers on Senegambian history (Diouf 1980; Bathily 1989; Boulègue 1986; cf. Curtin 1981). Islam is not hostile to either slavery or slave trading (Willis 1985a, 1985b; Levtzion 1985). Almost all slave traders in the western Sudan were Muslim. Muslim societies were also the most systematic in the exploitation of slave labor. Islam afforded the slave some protection, but not against heavy work (Brunschwig 1960; Hunwick 1988). More important, it explicitly prohibited the enslavement of Muslims. In Africa, the prohibition against enslavement of Muslims was often turned around and used to justify slaving by Muslims among pagan peoples (Willis 1985b; Farias 1985). Thus little in Islam itself would make it an anti-slave trade force.

The importance of Islam lay in its role as an alternative source of political power. When the first Portuguese explorers moved along the Senegambian coast, they identified Muslim clerics as Moors (Boulègue 1986, 2: 342-44, 1987: 93-99; Ca da Mosto 1937: 50; Fernandes 1951: 9). By the seventeenth century, Muslim leadership was black and rooted in local cultures. Many Muslim clerics were given land in reward for their services. Thus, there was a gradual buildup of communities that enforced Muslim law, strictly followed Muslim religious practices, and lived separately from the larger society (Boulègue 1986, 2: 365-80). The larger society was also influenced by Islam. Muslim clerics produced amulets, provided legal advice, and acquired a reputation for sanctity. Some participated in the political system. Many aristocrats and warriors were Muslim, though often not strict practitioners, at least not until late in life.

In the 1670s, a reform movement led by Nasir al Din seized

power in southern Mauritania (Boulègue 1986, 2: 381–408; B. Barry 1971, 1972: 101–31; Curtin 1971; Ritchie 1968; Hamet 1911; Norris 1969). It quickly spread south of the Senegal River, where local Muslims joined the movement and briefly overturned ruling dynasties of the Futa Toro, Waalo, Jolof, and Kajoor. Nasir al Din called on rulers to practice Islam, to limit themselves to four wives, to dismiss their courtiers, and to cease to pillage and enslave their subjects. Undertaken at a time when the slave trade had only begun to increase, antislavery cannot be considered the basis of the movement, but opposition to enslavement was a key demand.<sup>10</sup> The reform movement threatened both the French and various warrior elites, who united in suppressing it. Nasir al Din was killed in 1673, and within four years the traditional rulers were back in power. The demands made by Nasir al Din were, however, to be important to later reformers.

The ideological core of the subsequent jihads was the obligation of a Muslim ruler to enforce the shari'a, the Quranic law. In a number of cases, it was the inroads of the slave trade which called forth a new and more militant leadership. Thus, the Poular-speaking areas on both sides of the Senegal River suffered deeply in the eighteenth century from raids, first by Moroccan soldiers called Ormankobe and then by Mauritians (Barry 1988: 154–64). Oumar Kane (1974, 1986: 510–43) sees the whole period from 1702 to 1776 as one of political crisis rooted in both internal conflict and foreign intervention, which eroded principles of legitimacy. The failure of the Denianke rulers to protect local peoples led many to turn to a Muslim reform movement under Suleiman Bal and Abdul Kader Kane, which effectively ended Mauritanian inroads and imposed a Muslim regime. Muslim policy in the Futa Toro was that no Futa Muslims could be enslaved or sold into the slave trade (Robinson 1975).

Barry argues that tensions between Muslims and the warrior elite led to Muslim revolts in Bundu (Senegal) in about 1690 and the Futa Jallon after 1725. Malik Sy, the founder of Bundu, had been a supporter of Nasir al Din. Barry (1988: 144) links the creation of a Muslim regime in Bundu to “a tendency for Muslim communities to try to consolidate themselves far from the coast to escape the oppression of warrior power” (see also Bathily 1989: 308–12; Curtin 1971). Barry (1988: 144–54) makes a similar argument for the Muslim coalition in the Futa Jalon.

There too, the new Muslim rulers prohibited the enslavement of Futanke Muslims (see also Robinson 1985: 63; Baldé 1975; Rodney 1968). During the nineteenth century, Islam provided an ideological basis for revolts, which rallied slaves and other oppressed groups against the rulers of the Futa (Barry 1978; I. Barry 1971; Botte 1988). The argument is even clearer for Masina, the fertile inner delta of the Niger. Masina was divided up among small pastoral polities, which were increasingly tied into the Bambara slave-producing machine and at the same time victimized by Tuareg slave raiders from the Sahara. Seku Amadu Lobbo rallied support from both slaves and Fulbe, received a flag from Usman dan Fodio, and threw off both the traditional Fulbe *ardos* and Bambara hegemony (Brown 1969).

Not every Muslim movement involved an anti-slave trade component. Most were open to recruits of slave origins, especially during the early years. Some jihad leaders, like Al Hajj Umar Tal, were careful not to offend the sensibilities of slave owners. As in the Futa Jallon and the Futa Toro, Umar prohibited enslavement of Muslims, but it was sometimes unclear who was a Muslim (Robinson 1985: 63). More important, even those jihads that started out with an anti-slave trade component were trapped in the conditions of their times. Thus, Masina, ruled by a small group of clerics, had to stabilize its population if it was to create a truly Muslim state. It did this by requiring all Fulbe to maintain a permanent residence. It also created a permanent army capable of striking north into the desert. Thus the herds could move north without the whole community moving with them. Sedentarization also meant increased reliance on slave labor. Masina under Seku Amadu and his successors was marked by a division between the pastoral Fulbe, who herded, ruled, and studied, and a mass of *rimaibe* agriculturalists, who produced the rice surpluses that made all other activity possible.

Jihad leaders elsewhere found themselves dependent on their ability to buy horses and firearms. Barry (1988: 151) argues that by the end of the eighteenth century "holy war . . . [has lost] its religious character and Islam serves as a pretext for a man-hunt against the infidels on the frontiers of the Futa Jallon. The predominance of slaves in exchange for European products explains the oppressive character of the new regimes toward non-Muslims, who, reduced massively into slavery, are sold on the coast or

simply gathered into slave villages.” During the nineteenth century, the cost of maintaining an army increased rapidly as newer and more sophisticated arms moved onto the market. Umar was a striking case in point (Robinson 1985: 329–34; Roberts 1980a, 1986: chap. 3). He failed to create the new Muslim commonwealth he sought, in part because his Futanke were alien to the areas they tried to rule. His sons and nephew were able to hold on only by maintaining their superiority in weapons. They thus had to keep open the strategic western corridor to Senegal; they needed goods that could be exchanged for weapons; and they needed booty, most notably slave women, with which to reward their soldiers. There was no item of trade that could bring as quick and sure a return as slaves. Thus, they had to slave to survive.

Other Muslims simply found slaving a way to bring in revenue. Like other jihad leaders, Ma Ba Jaxoo in Senegambia rallied his people against the slave-raiding warrior class. He was a deeply devout Muslim cleric determined to create a state where Muslims would be safe and the shari’a enforced (Klein 1968, 1977; Quinn 1972). After his death in 1867, many of his followers became slave raiders. No *raison d’état* explains the slaving activity of Biram Cissé in the upper Gambia and Fodé Kabba, the most successful of a series of raiders who operated on the fringes of the densely populated Diola communities on the South Bank in the 1880s. Just as Muslims were the most effective raiders in this period, so too were they the most systematic users of slave labor. This was particularly true in coastal areas, where they produced commodities for sale to Europeans and in the desertsides areas, where the booming trade absorbed several hundred thousand slaves during the last decades of the century.

The argument here, thus, is that under conditions of insecurity engendered by the slave trade, significant groups of people sought the protection of Muslim leadership (see also Barry 1978). This leadership eventually acted not against the slave trade but against its threat to their community. Furthermore, once in power, they found themselves caught up in the same economic and military pressures that shaped their predecessors. In this situation, Islamic law justified and the struggle for power left few alternatives to a continuation of slaving.<sup>11</sup>

#### ECONOMIC EFFECTS

There is a more complicated question. It is difficult for many studying the slave trade to imagine any kind of economic growth under the conditions of violence and insecurity that the trade promoted. Some have assumed that no good could come from such an evil. A closer examination of economic history often shows a more ambiguous picture. Certainly, in one area, the effect of the slave trade seems to have been negative. There was a decline in nonslave exports. The most important export from Senegambia during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was hides. These almost disappear from export data during the eighteenth century, only to reappear in the last years of the Atlantic trade, in the nineteenth century (Boulègue 1986, 2: 489–91; Curtin 1975, 1: 218–21). There was also a decline in exports of cotton cloth, but there are no data that clearly show that cloth production actually declined. Cotton cloth was used mostly for trade within Africa. There is also no clear evidence that the coastal trade did not continue to sell cotton textiles. Curtin (1975, 1: 211–14) suggests that a tripling of the cloth price in lower Senegal during the early eighteenth century made exports less profitable, but it also suggests strong demand within Africa (see also Boulègue 1986, 2: 491–92).

A more important question was food security. The eighteenth century was a period of endemic famine. During bad years, people often sold their children or themselves, and French slavers had difficulty feeding the slaves they bought. During the famine of 1757–58, the French commander turned about 500 slaves out of the fort to fend for themselves because he could no longer feed them (Curtin 1975, 1: 109–11, 168–73; Bathily 1989: 267–71; Barry 1972: 133). Charles Becker has argued that while these famines were caused by drought and locusts, the slave trade increased Senegambian vulnerability and eroded traditional mechanisms for dealing with natural disaster. Slave-raiding warriors pillaged and burned granaries; people moved to safer, though less productive, areas; and the young and strong were sold off (Becker and Martin 1975; Becker 1977, 1985, 1986). Bathily (1989: 278–83, 339–48) speaks of a general impoverishment of the upper Senegal River (see also Barry 1986: 161–68). Food supply was a constraint even on the French posts, which would not buy slaves if



they could not feed them (Boulègue 1986, 2: 482–88). The sale of food to France's island bases and slave ships undoubtedly cut into reserves, thus exposing agriculturalists to the threat of hunger during periods of drought and warfare.

Other products fared better. Gum exports increased dramatically in the late eighteenth century and replaced slaves as the major export of northern Senegambia. In fact, the Moors were large purchasers of slaves. Desertside production seems to have increased. If cotton cloth production maintained itself or increased, as it seems to have done, we can suggest that production grew in those areas where slaves could be efficiently put to use in production. It is also clear that African merchants learned to cope with insecurity, as Curtin's (1975, 1: chaps. 2, 3, 7) description of trade diaspora indicates (see also Roberts 1980b). African merchants not only thrived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but accumulated substantial amounts of capital. Regrettably, most of that capital accumulation took the form of slaves.

## CONCLUSION

The slave trade produced islands of growth and prosperity, but these contrasted sharply with the misery of areas victimized by slave raiders and the harsh conditions of the slave village. Slaves could be efficiently exploited, and thus slave labor contributed to the growth of a slave-exploiting class and, in key areas, to an increase in production. There was a low ceiling to this growth. Much of the population was servile, at least a third of the total population (Klein 1987). Slaves were constrained in their enterprise, frustrated in their desire for a normal family life and limited in their incomes. Though some slaves rose above their origins, the masses were tightly circumscribed. The insecurity of life in the Sudan stimulated the development of walled villages and dissuaded ordinary people from venturing far from home. Merchants found ways to guarantee their security. Ordinary agriculturalists could only build walls.

The most important effect of the slave trade was the way it shaped the nature of the state. The slave trade was important not because of the global value of slaves compared to that of some other product but because it strengthened the state and shaped its

nature. Dependence on slavery meant that the state had to constantly replenish the pool of slaves, both for trade and to staff itself with dependent servants. Ultimately, the great tragedy for those who lived in the area was that Sudanic political formations depended on slave labor and the slave trade. The inability of African states to move to other kinds of productive activity produced disaster in the late nineteenth century. The best measure of its effect is that during the earliest years of French rule, when slavery and the slave trade were still legal, slaves not only were a majority of the value traded but in many markets represented over 60–70% of what was being traded and probably most of the accumulated capital of the region.<sup>12</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Patrick Manning's efforts to use computer models to create hypotheses have been highly suggestive, though he makes some debatable guesses in order to construct his models (Manning 1981). Manning (in press) develops this approach further and links the question of demography to other questions. See also Thornton 1981, 1983.
- 2 Barry 1988 is an excellent synthesis of most recent research on Senegambia. It picks up many of the key themes of Barry 1972, which set the tone for much subsequent Senegalese historiography.
- 3 Boulègue's (1986) is the most thorough treatment of early-modern Wolof history. Its only serious flaw is his failure to address Curtin's analysis, even to cite Curtin's work. Boulègue's thesis is persuasive, however, because it is cautious and thorough. See also Diouf 1980, Boulègue 1977, and Colvin 1972.
- 4 Curtin goes on to explain that "the cost of holding slaves . . . must have been about half the purchase price per year, in an ordinary year." He then discusses the strategies of European and African traders. Europeans would often not buy slaves if they could not feed them and would sometimes release slaves they could not feed. Africans usually put slaves to work while they awaited shipment.
- 5 On hides, see Boulègue 1986, 2: 276–81, 489–91; Curtin 1975, 1: 218–21; on gum, see Boulègue 1986, 2: 494–95; Curtin 1975, 1: 215–18. Boulègue cites Golberry's (1802) estimate that for Senegambia as a whole, the gum trade was about two-thirds the value of the slave trade.
- 6 Curtin (1975, 1: 325) is critical of the guns-for-slaves stereotype, largely because the import of guns reached its maximum only in the 1730s, after the Senegambian slave trade had already hit its peak. Many other writers, however, have continued to place great stress on firearms. Boulègue (1986, 2: 506) presents a chronology similar to Curtin's but writes that "guns . . . were in the 18th century the principal article demanded by the kings in exchange for slaves." It is probable that horses were more important to

raiding because they made mobility possible, but with the introduction of guns there came an increment of power to those who procured them. Once again, Boulègue (*ibid.*: 438) writes of "the advantage provided by guns in the type of conflict which was most common among the Senegambian states. Progress was achieved with an increase in the number of guns and their use by cavalry, combining the advantages of the two major tools of war in the Africa of the time. Since all kingdoms got them, the equilibrium of Senegal was not broken."

- 7 In nineteenth-century Kajoor, there were 16 villages of slave warriors that belonged to the ruling *queej* matrilineage (Monteil 1966: 85).
- 8 I am not in a position to make any estimate of the warrior population of Senegambia or bordering regions, but a modest projection from the Wolof data suggests the possibility of 100,000 or more in the western Sudan. Even if the number of slaves absorbed by African economies was several times the number exported, the number of warriors was much greater than the number of persons enslaved in any given year.
- 9 Binger (1892, 1: 30–31) talks of a young man taken prisoner in the nineteenth century, moved first to Jenne, a trip of 700 to 800 kilometers, then to Bandiagara, where he was sold to a chief from Kong, another trip of about 600 kilometers. Curtin (1975, 1: 193) tells the story of a man who was enslaved twice, sold at least five times, and in the process moved to Freetown, to a village near Labé in the Futa Jalon, down to the lower Gambia, and then up the river. Both cases involved slaves moving in the opposite direction from most of the traffic.
- 10 Kane (1986: 456–59) has criticized Barry's interpretation as too materialistic. He stresses the religious roots. He does not see the revolt primarily as a response to the Atlantic trade, though he recognizes that Nasir al Din's criticism of the rulers for pillaging and enslaving Muslims was a major issue. In other respects, his analysis of the slave trade and its impact on the Futa Toro is similar to Barry's.
- 11 For some reflections on why Gajaga is different from the rest of Senegambia, see Bathily 1989: 334–36. For a discussion of the response of the upper Senegal River to Umar and the jihad led by Mamadu Lamine Drame, see Bathily 1986. The second half of this thesis dealing with the nineteenth century should be published soon. See also Bathily 1972.
- 12 This is clearly indicated in commercial reports for the 1880s that are preserved in the Archives nationales du Mali and the Archives de la République du Sénégal.

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