

Introduction

Child Slavery, Redemption, and “Adoption” in Senegal

This study is a social history of minors in Senegal who were once enslaved and who, upon the abolition of slavery in the French colonial empire in 1848, became wards of the colonial state. In essence, it is a study about children – eighteen years of age and younger – and institutional care, specifically guardianship. From 1848 to the first decade of the twentieth century when guardianship declined (it was never abolished), minors experienced a transition from slavery to freedom. At emancipation, French authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, backed by merchants, proprietors, and commercial enterprises in Senegal, among whom were those who vehemently opposed abolition, expressed the need to maintain the Senegalese economy, avoid chaos, and ensure a future source of labor. In the aftermath of emancipation, these were among the considerations that led the French colonial administration to create an institution called *tutelle* – a form of guardianship or wardship. With *tutelle* in place, the administration gave minors to Black and mixed-race Africans, Europeans, and institutions, including Catholic orders, and, later, to the military for “adoption.” As I have argued elsewhere, *tutelle* as a legal instrument existed in metropolitan France before French emancipation in 1848, but its purpose – to protect the patrimony of mostly middle and upper-class orphan minors – and the manner in which it was administered, were vastly different than the *tutelle* which emerged in colonial Senegal during the second half of the nineteenth century, as we shall see in Chapter 3.¹

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

¹ See Bernard Moitt, “Slavery and Guardianship in Postemancipation Senegal – Colonial Legislation and Minors in Tutelle, 1848–1905,” in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Child Slaves in the Modern World* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), p. 141.

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

Since the abolition law of 1848 applied only to areas where the French had sovereignty, this study focuses primarily on minors in urban areas of Senegal, the most important of which were Saint-Louis, located at the mouth of the Senegal River, and Gorée, an island adjacent to the Cape Verde peninsula.² But minors in Dakar, located at the tip of the Cape Verde peninsula, and Rufisque, south of Cape Verde, also merit attention because, along with Saint-Louis and Gorée, they became the most important commercial and political centers in Senegal. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, as G. Wesley Johnson indicates, they were known as the Four Communes or “municipalities whose citizens lived under the same privileges as communal residents in France itself.”³ Child slavery was

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5. See also Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, “African ‘Slavery’ as an Institution of Marginality,” in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 10.

⁶ Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, “The End of Slavery in Africa,” in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 27.

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

These slaveholders were mainly *habitants* – Europeans and Africans of various racial backgrounds, many of whom were mixed-race merchants and traders. Due to fears of a labor shortage at emancipation, the French colonial administration in Senegal yielded to the wishes of the *habitants* who wanted to maintain the status quo. Of the *habitants*, the *signares* – women of African and European ancestry, a significant number of whom engaged in commerce and owned many enslaved people, primarily minors – exerted considerable influence, which this study will highlight. The administration sought their support in making the transition from slavery to freedom for minors attainable, but the *signares*, who viewed abolition as an attack on their wellbeing, devised ways to maintain coercive labor instead. In spite of the fact that anti-slavery laws existed, the colonial administration was determined to limit their application as much as possible to guarantee labor. After 1848, other minors were bought out of slavery (in areas of Senegal where the institution was still legal) through a process called *rachat* (ransom or redemption) by institutions and individuals who “freed” them first, “adopted” them, and then exploited their labor under *tutelle*.⁷ Some of these individuals were bureaucrats in the colonial administration, including members of the judiciary. Roman Catholic orders, such as *Les Pères du Saint-Esprit* (the Holy Ghost Fathers) and the *Soeurs de Saint-Joseph de Cluny* (the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Cluny), were among the institutions that had minors in their care. The colonial state also placed minors in institutions, most notably the *École pénitentiaire de Thiès* (the Thiès Penitentiary School) – a correctional facility run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, the *École des Frères* (the School of the Fathers) – a school run by Catholic Fathers – and two orphanages, the *Orphelinat de Ndar Toute* (the Orphanage at Ndar Toute) and the *Orphelinat de Sor* (the Orphanage at Sor), near Saint-Louis. In some cases, minors were entrusted to parents (when they could be found), other relatives, or to themselves if they were considered of age, in which case they were left to their own devices.

⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of ransom and redemption in Africa, Europe, and Asia, see Jennifer Lofkrantz and Olatungi Ojo (eds.) *Ransoming, Captivity & Piracy in Africa and the Mediterranean* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2016).

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

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

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

⁸ Martin Klein believes that the terms which the French employed were designed to hide the fact that *tutelle* was a form of servitude. Another factor may have been a nineteenth-century notion of childhood that children were expected to serve, except those who came from privileged families (Martin Klein, personal communication, May 2017).

⁹ Bernard Moitt, “Slavery, Flight and Redemption in Senegal, 1819–1905,” *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 14, no. 2 (August 1993), p. 71.

¹⁰ Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 74.

¹¹ Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripits: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), p. 8.

indentured servants also had obligations. Though free, they had to work for their mother's employers until the age of 21. In return, they were fed."¹² While there has been some inquiry into *engagement à temps* among these adults, this has not been the case with children.¹³

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

Marie Rodet has produced solid work on children in foster care in Kayes, Mali, where fosterage expanded in the twentieth century and permitted women to draw upon additional labor. These women profited from their own family networks and from previous forms of bondage that persisted after abolition to control juvenile and female labor.¹⁴ Rodet also draws linkages between fosterage and child sex trafficking after fosterage came to an end in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ In southern Nigeria, where the palm oil industry created a

¹² Moitt, "Slavery, Flight and Redemption," p. 72.

¹³ See, for example, François Zuccarelli, "Le régime des engagés à temps au Sénégal (1817–1848)," *Cahiers d'études africaines*, vol. 7 (1962).

¹⁴ Marie Rodet, "Notes sur la captation de la main d'œuvre enfantine dans la région de Kayes, Mali (1904–1955)," *Journal des africanistes*, vol. 81–82 (2011), p. 49.

¹⁵ Marie Rodet, "Under the Guise of Guardianship and Marriage: Mobilizing Juvenile and Female Labor in the Aftermath of Slavery in Kayes, French Soudan, 1900–1939," in Benjamin N. Lawrence and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), *Trafficking in Slavery: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), pp. 86–100.

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

Martin Klein and Audra Diptee have highlighted the need to understand child slavery as a means of grasping fully the human experience and the slavery of adults. They state that “an historical analysis of children has the potential to shed light on the common priorities and values of any particular society. Furthermore, understanding childhood experiences provides greater context and a more holistic portrait of the human experience.”¹⁸ Diptee amplifies this position further. Indeed, she argues that

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

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

¹⁶ Robin Phylisia Chapdelaine, *The Persistence of Slavery: An Economic History of Child Trafficking in Nigeria* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), pp. 15–99.

¹⁷ Marie Rodet and Elodie Razy, “Child Migration in Africa: Key Issues & New Perspectives,” in Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet (eds.), *Children on the Move in Africa: Past and Present Experiences of Migration* (Woodbridge: James Curry, 2016), p. 3.

¹⁸ Audra Diptee and Martin A. Klein, “African Childhoods and the Colonial Project,” *Journal of Family History*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2010), p. 3.

¹⁹ Audra Diptee, “Notions of African Childhood in Abolitionist Discourses: Colonial and Post-Colonial Humanitarianism in the Fight against Child Slavery,” in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), *Child Slavery before & after Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 209.

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

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

²⁰ Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, “Women’s Importance in African Slave Systems,” in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.) *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1983), p. 3.

²¹ Robertson and Klein, “Women’s Importance in African Slave Systems,” p. 12.

²² Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 10.

²³ See for example, Richard H. Steckel, “Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States,” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 43–60; Cheryl Ann Cody, “Cycles of Work and of Childbearing,” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 61–78; Wilma King, “‘Suffer with Them Till Death’: Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America,” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 147–168.

²⁴ See Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Arlette Gautier, *Les Sœurs de Solitude: La condition féminine dans l’esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985); Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); and Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

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

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

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

²⁵ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²⁶ Renault, *L’abolition de l’esclavage*; Mohamed Mbodj, “The Abolition of Slavery in Senegal, 1820–1890: Crisis or the Rise of a New Entrepreneurial Class?,” in Martin A. Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 198–199; Martin A. Klein, “Slavery and Emancipation in French West Africa,” in Martin A. Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 174; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, pp. 72–73; Trevor Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens, OH: University Press, 2004), pp. 69–84; Bernard Moitt, “Slavery and Guardianship in Postemancipation Senegal: Colonial Legislation and Minors in *Tutelle*, 1848–1905,” in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Child Slaves in the Modern World* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 140–156.

²⁷ Kelly M. Duke Bryant, “Changing Childhood: ‘Liberated Minors’, Guardianship, and the Colonial State in Senegal, 1895–1911,” *Journal of African History*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2019), p. 209.

There is no doubt that scholars have focused mainly on the nature and dimensions of slavery in Africa, with particular emphasis on the Western Sudan which encompasses much of West Africa. While this emphasis can be justified given the dimensions of slavery in this region where the enslaved constituted 30 to 50 percent and, in some areas, up to 80 percent of the total population by the end of the nineteenth century, the neglect of child slavery and guardianship is still baffling.²⁸ Since children made up a significant part of the slave populations of the western Sudan, it seems reasonable to assume that they would feature prominently in studies dealing with the end of slavery and its aftermath. Guardianship deserves sustained historical inquiry because it will illuminate the process of liberation, thereby enabling us to get a better understanding of what this phenomenon entailed.²⁹

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

²⁸ See ANS K 14–K 27; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 191–194; Martin A. Klein, “Women and Slavery in the Western Sudan,” in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 67–78.

²⁹ On the transition from slavery to freedom, see Renault, *L’abolition de l’esclavage*; Roberts and Miers, “The End of Slavery in Africa”; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*. See also, Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); David Northrup, *Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865–1940* (Athens: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1988); Fred Morton, “Slaves, Fugitives, and Freeman on the Kenyan Coast, 1873–1907,” PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1976; Toyin Falolo, “The End of Slavery among the Yoruba,” in Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein (eds.), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 232–249; Paul Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Cause of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

stated that “In the British view, the apprenticeship was to be a period of adjustment, a time of learning for masters and for ex-slaves, in which both parties would accustom themselves to the new relationship of freedom and search out new ways toward mutual trust and accommodation.”³⁰ However, he argues that the primary concern of the Caribbean planters was labor supply. Indeed, William Green shows how coercive apprenticeship was when he highlighted the vulnerability of the young:

The Emancipation Act freed children under six years of age, but it permitted mothers who suffered destitution to indenture their free children on estates until they attained the age of 21. In colonies where apprentices produced their own food from provision grounds, the care and sustenance of small children was not a problem. The situation was dramatically different in Barbados where apprentices were sustained largely upon food distributed to them by their masters. Interpreting the Emancipation Act with self-serving rigidity, Barbados planters refused to supply customary allowances to the island’s 14,000 free children. . . . The apprentices were equally intransigent. Magnificently adamant, they refused to indenture their children, asserting that they would prefer to see them starve than to bind them for fifteen years or more to the estates.³¹

In Latin America, coercive systems of servitude, similar to *tutelle* in Senegal, existed in the post emancipation period, that is, from 1888. Indeed, Nara Milanich has argued convincingly that “tutelary servitude,” commonly known as *patrones*, under which poor and orphaned children raised in masters’ households primarily to provide present and future services in exchange for sustenance, thrived in Latin America after emancipation. Milanich concludes that tutelary servitude was “an unequivocally *modern* form of bondage.”³²

In the American South, former slaveholders disregarded laws designed to protect former bondpeople and the authority of the Freedmen’s Bureau and forced black children into apprenticeships

³⁰ Douglas Hall, *Five of the Leewards 1834–1870: The Major Problems of the Post-Emancipation Period in Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Nevis and St. Kitts* (Bridgetown: Caribbean Universities Press, 1971), p. 26.

³¹ William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 134.

³² The emphasis is the author’s. See Nara Milanich, “Degrees of Bondage: Children’s Tutelary Servitude in Modern Latin America,” in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Child Slavery in the Modern World* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 106–107.

after the end of slavery in 1865. In some areas, such as Maryland, they ignored the emancipation law, seized children, and subjugated them to apprenticeships. As Wilma King, noted, “more than 2,500 youngsters were apprenticed throughout the South within the first month of emancipation. Many of the persons binding apprentices did not keep them within their households, but hired them out elsewhere.”³³ Similarly, the hiring out of minors in *tutelle* in urban Senegal was a common practice among guardians, who thereby exploited their labor.

This study of minors will therefore give us a better appreciation of the labor that youngsters performed in colonial Senegal and enable us to assess its importance to the development of the colonial economy. Aside from domestic labor, minors worked at the ports, in commercial enterprises, as grain pounders, and as apprentices in many trades. They also cultivated gardens under the auspices of religious orders. Their labor was particularly important to the development of the colonial economy, which was integrated into the market economy based on the production and export of peanuts from the 1840s. From then onward, peanuts became a more important commodity than slaves and gum arabic, and the Senegalese economy became increasingly tied to that of France. Commercial activity, especially in Saint-Louis and Gorée, revolved around the peanut economy. After a period of wars between French imperialists and indigenous rulers from the 1860s to the 1880s, the peanut economy underwent unprecedented expansion, and Senegal became the world’s largest peanut producer. Indeed, Senegal’s dependence on the export of this single crop was a fact until recent decades.³⁴ What is worth emphasizing is that the evolution and development of *tutelle* coincided with the rise of the peanut economy to which minors contributed indirectly by the labor they performed.

The actions that the colonial administration in Senegal took in response to revelations of widespread abuses in *tutelle* that surfaced during the first years of the twentieth century provide valuable insights into the social condition of liberated minors.

³³ King, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 151.

³⁴ See Bernard Moitt, “Peanut Production and Social Change in the Dakar Hinterland: Kajor and Bawol, 1840–1940,” PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985; Bernard Moitt, “From Pack Animals to Railways: Transport and the Expansion of Peanut Production and Trade in Senegal,” in *Outre-Mers Revue d’Histoire*, no. 330–331, 1er semestre (2001), pp. 241–267.

The data show that a virtual scandal surrounded the institution at that time, for administrative records reveal that serious lapses by colonial officials and poor record-keeping put minors at risk and left them at the mercy of their guardians. The administration was well aware of the potential damage that these revelations could do at a time when public opinion in Europe had turned against slavery. The actions it took came in the form of legislative decrees for the most part. However, administrative action was marked by inconsistency and a lack of rigor.

As the chief legal officer in the colonial administration, the *Procureur général* was the official and legal guardian of minors and was, thus, fully responsible for their care. Governors of Senegal expected heads of the judiciary to take this responsibility seriously, even though they were well aware that French policy, though anti-slavery in general after 1817, was often contradictory, as the actions of French authorities revealed from the early nineteenth century. It is worth reiterating that the laws were clear. However, they were thwarted by the colonial administration. Thus, colonial officials and others, to whom minors were entrusted, disregarded the laws and regulations governing guardianship, often with impunity. Administrative attempts to regulate guardianship were also hampered by a lack of financial resources, insufficient personnel in the judiciary, and, most of all, sheer negligence. These factors resulted in legislative failure and left adopted minors in precarious positions that resembled slavery.

This study is based primarily on primary sources, mostly archival data. There are several good dossiers on slavery in the *Archives Nationales du Sénégal*, but files pertaining specifically to *tutelle* are limited. Even so, critical information about enslaved and liberated minors can be culled from them. In general, the data on *tutelle* are highly fragmented and contain large gaps. From the 1860s to the 1880s, for example, *tutelle* virtually disappeared from official correspondence, mainly because of administrative neglect. As a result, the scholarship on *tutelle* suffers from gaps in the chronology. For the conscientious researcher, the challenge to fill such gaps is daunting, though not insurmountable, because other data testify to the ongoing existence of guardianship.

The implications of heavy reliance on archival sources are real because they tell the story from the perspective of the colonial

administration, and from individuals – Whites, mixed-race, and Blacks – who benefited from the maintenance of guardianship. We have no first-hand accounts from the liberated children under study here, and must, therefore, narrate from silence while extrapolating from the data we have, all the while engaging in critical analysis of the sources, as was the case with my study of women and slavery in the French Antilles.³⁵ In a study aimed at bringing enslaved women in Bridgetown, Barbados, out of anonymity, Marisa Fuentes adopted a critical and unique methodical approach that challenges the biases of traditional archival sources, and the ways in which they have shaped our thinking, considering that these sources were “produced in a system of violence against racialized and gendered subjects.”³⁶ To give enslaved women their own voice, Fuentes conscientiously subverted the archival discourse that filtered the past only through the voices of Whites – mainly plantation owners and colonial authorities – while scrutinizing the archival fragments that criminalized them intensely, and drawing upon interdisciplinary sources to compensate for the lack of empirical data. The result is a work that demonstrates how new methodological approaches can be gainfully employed in reconstructing the history of people whose voices were usurped by those who held power over them. In this respect, her work is relevant to children in *tutelle*. Thus, methodologically challenging as it may be, narrating from silence, as this study demonstrates, is not insurmountable. Chronology notwithstanding, this study is the first of its kind and the most comprehensive to date.

It is probable that the most consulted archival sources on slavery have been the dossiers in the K series, which cover many aspects of slave trading and enslavement. This study draws significantly upon this series, especially the following: K7, which deals with slave trading, abolition, and indentureship; K17 and K18, where data on surveys on slavery in Senegal and French West Africa that the French conducted in 1904 can be found; K23, which focuses specifically on minors in *tutelle*; and K27, which contains much data on slavery and repression of the slave trade in Senegal. For the period from 1849 to 1852, the M3 dossier is indispensable because the census records in the official

³⁵ Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles*.

³⁶ Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, p. 123. See also, Bernard Moitt’s review of Fuentes’ book in *The New West Indian Guide*, vol 92, no. 3–4 (2018), pp. 293–296.

registers of liberated slaves in Senegal date from 1852 and no earlier. In the M3 dossier, we find minutes of the meetings and transactions of the newly established guardianship council from 1849 to about 1874. In addition, there are unclassified dossiers in the Annex section of the *Archives Nationales du Sénégal* that I have used to enrich this study.

Among the most important archival sources upon which this work draws, however, are ten of twenty administrative *Libérations* registers that contain data pertaining to the liberation of enslaved people in Senegal from 1857 to 1904. These registers, most of which are in poor condition, have been out of circulation for almost a century and a half, and have only been made available to researchers at the Archives Nationales du Sénégal in recent years. They are likely to be the most complete record of slavery in Senegal and may well force scholars to revise their previous findings. Indeed, they confirm that the dimension of slavery in Senegal and the Western Sudan was quite extensive. It is probable that they will likely show that slavery was even more widespread among children than studies have revealed thus far. The registers also contain valuable information about the nature of the slave trade, the origin of the enslaved, slave parentage, and adoptees. Digitized by Stanford University, the registers, which contain evidence of 28,930 liberations from 1857 to 1903, have been scrutinized by a team of researchers who have produced an extraordinarily detailed and sophisticated preliminary analysis of the evidence from 1894 to 1903 which this study draws upon.³⁷

Two of the registers contain records solely about liberated minors. One dates from June 4, 1892 to September 27, 1897; and the other from October 4, 1897 to May 16, 1904. However, minors, along with women, account for a significant portion of the liberated in all of them. The gaps in the data are glaring, and the risk of cross listings must be taken into consideration. Taken together, however, these registers provide substantial statistics that are used in this study to create censuses of liberated minors. They also tell us about the age range and sex of liberated minors, the majority of whom were female. The birthplace, age, and sex of minors, and the areas from which they came when ransomed, provide insights into slavery and the slave trade. Also,

³⁷ Joshua Goodwin, Erica Ivins, Richard Roberts, and Rebecca Wall, "The Registers of Slave Liberation in Colonial Senegal: Preliminary Analysis of the Evidence from 1894 to 1903," in *Open Edition Journals*, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/slaveries/5495> (last accessed October 25, 2021).

the people who adopted them and the professions in which they were engaged, provide valuable clues about the lives that minors in *tutelle* lived.

This study also draws upon research guides, secondary sources, and contemporary newspapers. In particular, it has benefited from the work of Fatoumata Cisse (now director of the *Archives Nationales du Sénégal*) whose thesis chronicles the archival sources on slavery housed in the archives. Cisse's work is the first comprehensive list of the major series pertinent to slavery in French West Africa, of which Senegal formed an important part. As such, it is a very important research tool. Because its chronological boundaries are about the same as those of this study, it served as a particularly useful instrument. Divided into three major sections, it examines the origins and development of slavery in French West Africa, offers a view of life in Saint-Louis during the second half of the nineteenth century, and chronicles the series in which documents on slavery can be found. But it does more; it highlights a select number of cases from the registers of liberated minors to illustrate the nature of record keeping and character of guardianship.³⁸

It is worth emphasizing that Cisse's study also catalogues the notary records of Saint-Louis that a researcher studying *tutelle* might well overlook. Since most of the adopted minors lived in Saint-Louis, such records may indicate whether minors in *tutelle* were still considered heritable property after 1848, or whether they inherited from their guardians. In essence, they may shed valuable light on the socio-cultural relationship between adopted minors and their guardians.

Like Cisse, Saliou Mbaye, former Director of the *Archives Nationales du Sénégal*, concurs that the notary records of Saint-Louis, and those of Gorée too, are of primary importance in writing about slavery in urban Senegal. He notes that a royal edict of 1776 required notaries to keep their original records in Senegal and send copies to France. Also, the activities of notaries in Saint-Louis began in 1786, but the uninterrupted flow of documents goes back to 1817 only. Aside from marriage contracts, wills, inventories after death, and the like, these records also contain acts of liberation and

³⁸ Fatoumata Cissé, "Les sources de l'histoire de l'esclavage conservées aux Archives Nationales du Sénégal, 1848–1904," thèse, Ecole des bibliothécaires archivistes et documentalistes de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1999–2000.

rachat. The notary records show that slaves were heritable property, as were indentured servants. Mbaye cites a case in December, 1847, a mere four months before the abolition act of April, 1848, in which Etienne Pierre left his concubine, Louison Porquet – a free black woman – and their two children, three slaves and two *engagés à temps*, estimated at 1,550 French Francs.³⁹ Mbaye's study ends at 1848 just at *tutelle* became instituted. Thus, one would have to consult the records after 1848 to determine whether the practice of passing on those who were indentured continued.

With regard to other secondary sources, François Renault's *L'abolition de l'esclavage au Sénégal* remains the best treatment of *tutelle*, however incomplete. Renault's concern was the abolition law of 1848 and the manner in which the French colonial administration in Senegal applied it down to the period 1904–1905. A critic of French policy on slavery, which he found inconsistent, Renault concentrated on breaches in the law and wrote about adopted minors from this perspective. In taking the administration to task for poor record-keeping in charting liberated minors, Renault throws light on the origin and development of *tutelle*, but his account does not go beyond the 1870s. Thus, his contribution with regard to *tutelle* can be confined mostly to the period before 1870.

In focusing on the initiatives of former slaveowners in the post-abolition period, Mohamed Mbodj enhances our understanding of *tutelle*. He paints a solid picture of entrepreneurship in Saint-Louis and Gorée in the second half of the nineteenth century. In doing so, he showed that former slaveowners maintained their control over artisanal crafts that were a linchpin of the slave system. In the period after 1848, they still held a quasi-monopoly over the training of craftworkers and were thus able to exploit adopted minors in *tutelle* in this way. With the gradual decline of these crafts, former slaveowners shifted to the control of salaried labor and “transformed themselves into intermediaries necessary to both employers and employees,” according to Mbodj.⁴⁰ As he noted, “This quasi monopoly over the training of craftworkers ended only toward the end of the [nineteenth] century,

³⁹ Saliou Mbaye, “L’esclavage domestique à Saint-Louis à travers les archives notariées (1817–1848),” in Djibril Samb (ed.), *Saint-Louis et L’esclavage (Initiations et Etudes Africaines*, no. 39) (Dakar: Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 2000), p. 154.

⁴⁰ Mbodj, “Abolition of Slavery in Senegal, 1820–1890,” p. 203.

when the development of peanut-trading networks increasingly transferred workers from one area to another.”⁴¹

This study is divided into an introduction, eight chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter 1 offers a brief historical overview of nineteenth-century urban Senegal, with particular emphasis on social and economic factors, including the evolution and development of the towns, the ethno-cultural populations that inhabited them, the religions they practiced, the institutions they developed, and the role of the French in the development of trade and commerce. G. Wesley Johnson’s treatment of what became known as the Four Communes, though heavily concentrated on political developments, remains unique and will serve as a useful starting point.⁴² With regard to commerce and trade, it is important to identify and highlight the major players, both local and international, in order to get a better understanding of the dynamics at work in urban Senegal that made coercive labor of youngsters attractive and desirable. Hilary Jones’ study of the *métis* of Saint-Louis, which complements and goes beyond G. Wesley Johnson’s study, has excellent material on what she refers to as *métis* society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although her study is confined to Saint-Louis, it contains references to Gorée. She does not focus on *tutelle*, but she uses Catholic baptismal records effectively and provides useful information about *métis* men and women who became guardians.⁴³

Chapter 2 focuses on the evolution and development of *tutelle* leading up to the creation of the *Conseil de Tutelle* – the guardianship council. It traces the antecedents of *tutelle* going back to the institution of *engagement à temps* – a system of indentureship that the French introduced after the end of the maritime slave trade in 1818 to fill labor needs both at the level of the state and local households. It shows how people were bought out of slavery through the process of *rachat* to become indentured workers for specific periods of time and illuminates the coercive nature of such a labor system. The chapter highlights the relationship between *engagement à temps* and *tutelle* to demonstrate

⁴¹ Mbodj, “Abolition of Slavery in Senegal, 1820–1890,” p. 204.

⁴² Johnson, *Emergence*.

⁴³ See Hilary Jones, “Citizens and Subjects: Métis Society, Identity and the Struggle over Colonial Politics in Saint Louis, Senegal, 1870–1920,” PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 2003. See also, Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

that the system of guardianship was most often a subterfuge for slavery. As this examination is carried out within the larger context of slavery and slave trading in the Western Sudan where women and children constituted the majority of slaves, the chapter sheds light on the peculiarity of bondage among the young, reveals their vulnerability at abolition, and shows how the establishment of an institution like *tutelle* could evolve.

The work of the *Conseil de Tutelle* which was created in 1849 in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of slavery is the subject of Chapter 3. The colonial administration granted the council broad authority to place minors – both formerly enslaved and free orphans – in households and institutions. The council also had to deal with reclamations by the families of liberated minors seeking to reclaim them, often on shaky grounds. It left detailed records of its meetings and undertakings in 1849, but virtually disappeared from the records after the 1850s, leaving a void that makes it difficult to trace and write about minors in *tutelle*.

Chapter 4 chronicles legislation governing *tutelle*, first introduced by Governor Louis Faidherbe in 1857. This was the first of other important legislative measures, which followed in 1858 and 1862, that the colonial administration adopted to regulate *tutelle*. The 1857 legislation was crucial because it provided a legal framework for the manner in which enslaved youths brought to Saint-Louis after 1848 should be liberated, and the role that the state was required to play in ensuring that the proper process be followed and executed. The legislation was timely because the *Conseil de tutelle*'s inactivity after the 1850s dealt a deadly blow to guardianship. Gone were the minutes of the meetings held from 1849 and, with them, the decisions the council rendered on the placement of liberated minors. Thereafter, no-one appears to have known for sure whether records of liberated minors were being kept on a constant basis or by whom. Worse, the heads of the judicial services, whom the state designated as the official guardians of minors in place of the wardship council, were negligent to a degree that Camille Guy, the French Governor of Senegal, considered scandalous in 1904 when he discovered the gravity of the damage that has been done for decades.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the working lives of minors, mostly as apprentices and domestics. The case studies upon which the chapter draws detail the ways in which their labor was exploited, and how they

responded to coercion. Bryant argues that “children’s cooperation with or rebellion against guardianship not only shaped the circumstances in which they lived and worked, but also influenced discourses about childhood, labor, and stigma in postemancipation Senegal.”⁴⁴ I contend that minors had few options aside from remaining within the confines of their placements, even when they were exploited. Minors were not considered to be regular workers. In the case of apprenticeships, however, the colonial administration thought it advisable to create bank accounts for minors into which guardians who worked minors as apprentices would deposit funds. But the case histories upon which this chapter draws show disputed claims by guardians and attempts to deny them a hedge against the future. The chapter tackles head-on the accusation leveled at guardians that they put female minors to work as prostitutes. These accusations have usually been made without supporting evidence. In spite of the paucity of data on this subject, however, it is possible to assert, as this chapter does, that prostitution did occur. Indeed, the testimony of a female minor in 1910 lends credence to this assertion. Overall, the working lives of minors, whether apprentices or domestics, was fraught with difficulty, which explains why flight was a most common response to their social condition.

Governor Guy’s legislation of 1903, which called for censuses of liberated minors, is taken up in Chapter 6, along with an assessment of the total number of liberated minors from the 1850s to 1904. A careful exploration of legislation governing *tutelle* reveals that the laws were not enforced; in fact, guardians generally ignored them. I argue that the difficulties surrounding the lack of enforcement were largely ideological, because the actions of those in authority, as well as the *habitants* in general, demonstrate that they did not accept the Abolition Act of 1848, and consequently viewed slavery as an ongoing phenomenon. Further, they were able to maintain this demeanor because the state did not destroy the elements that underpinned slavery, and this duplicity became increasingly evident after 1848.

Chapter 7 offers a glimpse of minors in institutions such as the *École pénitentiaire de Thiès*, the orphanages at Ndar Toute and at Sor near Saint-Louis, and the *École Pinet-Laprade* in Gorée and Dakar. The data are particularly fragmented in these areas, but they give us a sense

⁴⁴ Bryant, “Changing Childhood,” p. 211.

of what life must have been like for African youngsters away from domestic settings and supportive networks. Minors were required to perform manual labor in some institutions, but it was also possible for them to acquire a rudimentary education in some instances. The chapter ends with a brief treatment of minors sent to the colonial military.

Flight and other aspects of life in *tutelle*, such as travel with guardians, with and without the knowledge of the administration, marriage, and death, are explored in Chapter 8. The fact that minors of all ages fled, irrespective of their circumstances, the social standing of their guardians, and their abode, reveals a sense of displacement, dislocation, and general discontent with guardianship as a whole. It is possible that some minors lived what might be considered normal lives, but aspects of neglect and abuse were prevalent. With regard to travel (from Senegal to France in particular), the evidence shows that these sojourns – the ones we know of – were not joyful occasions for minors. Most were sent back to Senegal. But there may also have been some bliss among some minors. *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, in particular, sought to marry young girls in *tutelle*, and wrote appealing letters to their guardians seeking permission. They usually indicated how much dowry they could afford. Whether guardians found the amount of the dowry tantalizing and yielded to the *Tirailleurs* as a means of enriching themselves and thereby exploiting the sexuality of their female charges is also worth asking. The chapter ends with the deaths of minors in *tutelle*. Among the evidence it draws upon are death certificates which formed part of administrative reports. Guardians were required to report deaths, but not all of them did so. The circumstances under which they died are not clear, but details from the death certificates, including age and sex, assist us in determining how minors lived and died in *tutelle*.

This study ends with a conclusion about the end of *tutelle* and its aftermath. It posits that wardship declined after 1905 – the year that French law made the alienation of a person's labor illegal in French West Africa, thus bringing an end to slavery in areas of Senegal where its existence was still legal after 1848. In doing so, the conclusion reinforces the positions taken in this study about the relationship between *tutelle* and slavery. In essence, it argues that, had slavery continued beyond 1905, *tutelle* would likely have survived. As this study shows, *tutelle* was very much alive in 1906. In fact, this study draws upon references to the institution as late as 1910. It is no wonder

that vestiges of this phenomenon can still be observed in parts of West Africa to this day.

Although *tutelle* has not received sustained treatment in the historiography of slavery due largely to the fragmentation and paucity of the data in many cases, this study brings to the fore aspects of the experience of the children who endured the mistreatment that characterized the institution hitherto disregarded, out of anonymity. The assessment of *tutelle* is ongoing, and rightly so. Bryant concludes that liberated minors “sometimes challenged dominant expectations, linked to slavery, about their work lives, interactions with guardians, and sexuality,” and that *tutelle* “shaped post-emancipation society, but largely because some children used it as a vehicle to make their own change.”⁴⁵ The assessment of *tutelle* by Senegalese historians points in another direction for it amounts to an indictment of the colonial system, which it was. Ibra Sene stated that “A large majority of these children who could not keep up with the new social order in which they were trapped would rebel and flee their masters. Others were just thrown in the streets of Saint-Louis by their ‘masters’ returning to France.”⁴⁶ Likewise, Dior Konaté contends that “The tutelage system was a subterfuge for imprisonment because the tutors’ abusive use of their power turned the whole system into a nightmare for the recipients.”⁴⁷ Lastly, Ibrahima Thioub offers that the “expansion of urban areas widened the social field that harbored groups considered marginal by the public authorities.”⁴⁸

The assessments of *tutelle* by these scholars provide insights into an institution that deserves serious intellectual pursuit. What must not be lost sight of, however, is that the experience of children in *tutelle* was nuanced. To be sure, imprisonment, however troubling and disconcerting, was only one dimension of the children’s experience, as this study shows. Also, not all of the children who became state wards were

⁴⁵ Bryant, “Changing Childhood,” p. 228.

⁴⁶ Ibra Sene, “Crime, Punishment, and Colonization: A History of the Prison of Saint-Louis and the Development of the Penitentiary System in Senegal, CA. 1830–CA. 1940,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2010, p. 152.

⁴⁷ Dior Konaté, *Prison Architecture and Punishment in Colonial Senegal* (New York: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 56.

⁴⁸ Ibrahima Thioub, “Juvenile Marginality and Incarceration during the Colonial Period: The First Penitentiary Schools in Senegal, 1888–1927,” in Florence Bernault (ed.), *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), p. 82.

liberated slaves – an aspect of guardianship that these assessments ignored. This study reveals that a very significant number of young orphans – males and females, liberated and free – fell into the hands of state authorities who assigned guardians to them. The state made no distinction between slaves and orphans irrespective of their status. Orphans were processed in the same manner as liberated slaves, and they received no preferential treatment. A worthy scholarly pursuit, orphans have not been the object of scholarly investigation. In their preliminary analysis of the liberation registers, the authors deliberated on the use of the term “orphan,” deciding in the end that the term was “inappropriate for the condition in which many of these children found themselves.”⁴⁹ They opted for the term “unaccompanied minors,” to define children who were separated from their parents through kidnapping and were therefore not orphans as such. The uncertainties surrounding the status of orphans – an issue that will be taken up in this study – demonstrates that there is much we do not know about guardianship in Senegal. However, this study offers a window into a world that has been hidden from view for far too long.

⁴⁹ Goodwin et al., “Registers of Slave Liberation in Colonial Senegal,” p. 12.