The Texture of Change: Cloth, Commerce and History in Western Africa 1700-1850

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The Texture of Change:
Cloth Commerce and History in West Africa, 1700-1850

A dissertation presented
by
Jody A. Benjamin

to
The Department of African and African American Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
African and African American Studies

Harvard University
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Abstract

This study re-examines historical change in western Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the lens of cotton textiles; that is by focusing on the production, exchange and consumption of cotton cloth, including the evolution of clothing practices, through which the region interacted with other parts of the world. It advances a recent scholarly emphasis to re-assert the centrality of African societies to the history of the early modern trade diasporas that shaped developments around the Atlantic Ocean. However, this study argues that Atlantic exchanges in western Africa relied significantly upon Indian Ocean and trans-Saharan commercial networks as well. By analyzing a wide range of European travel accounts, commercial records and correspondence, visual images, maps, and oral narratives, this study breaks with well-rehearsed Atlantic conceptual frameworks for this period of African history to instead emphasize the global historical context in which Africans made decisions that impacted their communities and the larger world. The geographic focus of this study covers a large part of western Africa: from the Sahara desert in the north, northeast to the Niger bend, southeast to coastal Sierra Leone and west to the Senegal river valley and Atlantic coast. Its main findings emphasize the diversity of western African engagements with global commerce via textile production and consumption across time and space. In a comparison of two African-imposed trade embargoes on Europeans, it suggests that conflicts over slave trading did not extend to the arena of textile exchanges as African consumption of imported textiles grew throughout the period. The study suggests the importance of changing environmental and political alliances to patterns of consumption and has highlighted the centrality women’s indigo cloth dyeing as the
face of local industry intersecting directly with Indian indigo cloth imported from the Atlantic in the 18th and early 19th centuries.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... vii
Dedication ....................................................................................................................... ix
List of Maps .................................................................................................................... x
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xi
List of Charts .................................................................................................................. xii

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1
Evidence and use of sources .......................................................................................... 7
Visual and Material sources ........................................................................................... 9
Historiography ............................................................................................................... 10
Chapter Outline ............................................................................................................. 19

Chapter One. ‘Which should be the staple commoditie [sic], to pitch the price upon?’:
Cotton and Cloth in Western Africa, 1700-1730 ........................................................... 23
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 23
The Carrying Trade to Western Africa ........................................................................... 34
Reading West African Consumption Patterns from Internal Regional Dynamics ........... 58
Commercial agriculture for export .............................................................................. 69
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 74

Chapter Two. View from the Savannah (1740-1780) .................................................... 76
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 76
Kaarta, Segu and the Savannah polities ......................................................................... 82
‘Twelve meters of new cloth’ ....................................................................................... 87
‘A Magnificent Bubu’ .................................................................................................. 93
Parsing silences and elision in Kouyate’s narration ....................................................... 96
Political transformations and the reconfiguration of commercial patterns over the long duree... 98
French merchants seek to expand into the Faleme River ............................................. 104
Niger river Valley and Sahara-oriented networks ....................................................... 110

Chapter three. Contextualizing Global Exchanges, Part 1: Cloth and Consumers in
Northern Senegambia, 1776-1815 ............................................................................... 114
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 114
Embargoes Compared: A Halt to Slave Caravans Across Futa Toro in the 1780s .......... 120
Environmental factors ................................................................................................. 123
Guinee cloths ............................................................................................................... 129
Women’s Indigo Cloth Dyeing Industry ...................................................................... 131
Islamic reform movement of the late 18th century ..................................................... 137
Soldiers and Slaves ..................................................................................................... 163
Eur-African Habittants ................................................................................................. 168
Dressing Habittants ..................................................................................................... 171
Unraveling European discourses of ‘regeneration' and ‘civilization' in 18th century sources... 173
Chapter Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 192

Chapter four. Contextualizing Global Exchanges Part 2: Cloth and Consumers in the
Guinea riverine coast: Merchants, Migrants, Slaves and Speculators, 1780-1815 .......... 196
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 196
African merchants on the coast ............................................................................... 219
The Market On One’s Own Terms: Rebel Slaves and Muslim reformers ..................... 235
Black settlers, Eur-Africans and Elite African consumption .......................................................... 238
European speculators, visionaries and opportunists ........................................................................ 248
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 252

Chapter five. Western African Exports Shift to Groundnuts, not Cotton or Cotton Textiles
......................................................................................................................................................... 260
   Dressing the Part: From La Rochelle to the Rio Nunez................................................................. 262
   A new way of doing business? ....................................................................................................... 265
   Transition to Groundnut cultivation ............................................................................................ 269

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 272
   Bibliography ................................................................................................................................. 276
Acknowledgments

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especially sweet and enjoyable with the love and support of my wife, Dr. Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi.
Dedication

To my mother, Carolyn Idalia Bryant (who raised me right)
To my father, James Benjamin (who inspired me to think outside the lines)
   To family, extended family, and friends
   To our ancestors on all sides of the water
List of Maps

Map 1. 1707 Map of West Africa Guillaume de l'Isle ....................................................... 41
Map 2. Detail from 1727 Carte de l'Afrique Francaise ou du Senegal by Guillaume de l'Isle ... 100
Map 3. Locator Map: Futa Toro in Regional context [map by author] ..................................... 121
Map 4. Ecological change across western Africa from Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel 1600-1850................................................................. 125
Map 5. Locator Map: Bundu, Bambuk, Jakha ...................................................................... 142
Map 8. Locator map Upper Guinea coastline ...................................................................... 233
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Images from Anne Raffenel, <em>Voyage Dans l’Afrique Occidentale Comprendant L’exploration Du Sénégal Exécuté, En 1843 et 1844</em>.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1669 Painting by Pieter de Wit &quot;Dirck Dirckz Wilre in Elmina&quot;</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Image of Diai Boukari, a Tukulor marabout who guided French explorer Gaspard Mollien through the Futa Toro and Bundu in the early 19th century</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Images of 18th century sample textile prints of Favre, Petitpierre published in <em>La Marie Seraphique: Navire negrier</em> by Bertrand Guillet</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18th Century European Images of Senegambian soldiers</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Continued, 18th Century European Images of Senegambian soldiers</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18th century European Images of Signares</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Author Photo of Defensive wall from abandoned Wasulu settlement possibly dating from 18th century</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Excerpt from Diary of EL Parfitt Supercargo aboard the Sierra Leone Company ship <em>Calypso</em>, 1796</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18th Century Alderman’s Gown</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Image from FB Spilsbury <em>Voyage to Western Africa</em> 1805</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Charts


It was a hot September morning in 1843 when the French vessels carrying Anne Raffenel and his crew docked on the muddy banks of the Senegal river below the high walls of a military and commercial garrison fort at Bakel. It had been a tougher than expected sixteen-day voyage upriver from Saint Louis to this eastern port for Raffenel who was accompanied by his Eur-African secretary Leopold Panet, a native of Goree Island and cousin to a co-founder of a major trading
At Bakel, the men had arrived at the fulcrum point of the river’s long southeastward arc toward its source hundreds of miles away in the Futa Jallon mountains dividing as it ran between desert-side and savannah-side economies and peoples. Sent on an official mission by the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies and the Geographical Society of Paris, Raffenel and Panet were only at the beginning of what was supposed to be an extensive trip that was to take them across the breadth of the African continent to the Indian Ocean. Raffenel and his crew were to fall far short of that goal because, as it turned out, they were detained by Bamana officials in Kaarta, only a few hundred miles east of Bakel, and forced to abandon further travel plans. Raffenel’s detailed two-volume account of this abbreviated mission nonetheless has represented a significant source for historians of early French colonial West Africa.

The fort at Bakel, protected by ten cannon, was reoccupied by the French after they regained control of Saint Louis in 1818. It had been staffed by white French soldiers dispatched from the coast. But after they complained of unhealthy conditions leading to serious illness, French officials replaced the Europeans with West African soldiers commanded often by a mixed-race Eur-African or “metis” officer. Such a crew met Raffenel and Panet and hosted them during this stopover of a few days in the trading post and neighboring village before continuing upriver. At Bakel, Raffenel was struck by the unusual combination of sartorial styles that he observed among its residents that seemed to speak of the town’s location at a convergence of Saharan, savannah and Atlantic commercial flows. He found the residents of Bakel to be wearing “a bizarre melange of indigenous clothing and European clothing.”

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Here, as in Saint Louis, and as in many parts of the globe, the madder-colored pants are what dominates [among men] with a vibrancy that adds more than a little to a multi-colored regalia. The gray hood of our infantry uniforms and the little round hat, with its silk showing signs of long wear, these things also occupy a high place in the outfits of elegant people of this area.³

He goes on to note that the women of Bakel were mostly dressed in locally woven, dyed and tailored wrappers. The local indigo dyers were of such reputation that Saint-Louis-based female merchants, known as signares, and other buyers sent plain cloth to be Bakel to be dyed and returned, where women wore them as a sign of respect and mourning when someone died.⁴ During the period between 1820 and 1850, a convergence of the needs of metropolitan French industrialists and the needs of European, Eur-African and African merchants in western Africa to find a profitable replacement for slave trading resulted in expanding commerce in groundnuts across coastal west Africa between Saint Louis and Freetown. In particular after French soap makers at Marseille and Bordeaux learned that their customers preferred soap made of blended groundnut (peanut) oil and olive oil over the soap made from palm oil, groundnuts quickly emerged as a dominant focus of European and African commerce in the region during the period leading up to colonial conquest. In that later process, the fort at Bakel would play a role as a military and administrative center for the colonial government. Yet this gradual shift underway in the 1840s was but the most recent in a centuries-long process of interactions between African producers, consumers and a global market that they accessed through Europeans who began to sail to their Atlantic coast regularly in the mid-15th century. What Raffenel described as the sartorial eccentricity of the local population at Bakel was but one indication of a substantive effect of these commercial interactions: people demonstrated a certain engagement with global markets by what

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
they wore on their persons and by the basic material culture of their everyday lives.

This study re-examines historical change in western Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the lens of cotton textiles; that is by focusing on the production, exchange and consumption of cotton cloth, including the evolution of clothing practices, through which the region interacted with other parts of the world. It advances a recent scholarly emphasis to re-assert the centrality of African societies to the history of the early modern trade diasporas that shaped developments around the Atlantic Ocean that, as this study argues, relied upon Indian Ocean commercial networks as well. By analyzing a wide range of European travel accounts, commercial records and correspondence, visual images, maps, and oral narratives, this study breaks with well-rehearsed Atlantic conceptual frameworks for this period of African history to instead emphasize the global historical context in which Africans made decisions that impacted their communities and the larger world. The geographic focus of this study covers a large part of western Africa: from the Sahara desert in the north, northeast to the Niger bend, southeast to the Akan forests and west to the Senegal river valley and Atlantic coast. The region is largely associated with Mande-language speakers whose trade networks and political units dominated it for centuries preceding the period, but who depended upon alliances and relations with a range of other groups, especially pastoralist Pulaar-speakers who, among other things, produced textiles in wool.5 Linguistic and archeological evidence suggest that this region, where three major rivers of West Africa find their source, was an early center for the development of textile production in West Africa; the other area being around Lake Chad.6 The Guinean historian Boubacar Barry has

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5 Renée Recherche sur l'histoire des textiles traditionnel tissés et teints de l'Afrique occidentale Boser-Sarivaxévanis et al., West African textiles and garments : from the Museum für Völkerkunde Basel (Minneapolis, Minn.): University of Minnesota, 1980). They advance a diffusionist theory that weaving technology first appeared in the region among Fulani weavers of wool whose tools the Mande adapted for weaving cotton.

described the region as having a natural geographical coherence flanked as it is by the desert to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west and anchored in the southeast by the Futa Jallon plateau. He argued that the centuries long interplay of diverse linguistic, religious and cultural practices produced “a profound cultural cohesiveness” across the region as well.

In Mali, archaeologists located fragments of woven cotton tunics and caps dating from the 11th century in caves along the Bandiagara escarpment east of Jenne. In 1068, Abu Ubayd Al-Bakri, the Cordoba-based geographer, drawing on reports from traveling merchants, produced the first written evidence of regional cotton production near Takrur in the Senegal river valley where he noted strips of cloth were already in use as a form of currency. This study departs from an awareness of the long historical trajectory of cotton textile production, commerce and consumption in West Africa to attempt to chart its particularities during a period widely associated with the rise and collapse Atlantic slave trade and the transformation of a global commerce that became increasingly dominated throughout the period by European capitalists. Deploying an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates archival research with fieldwork, close readings of oral traditional narratives, image analysis, and database analysis, this study aims to produce a clearer picture of the economics and social dynamics of the savannah region immediately prior to colonization, and to lend additional specificity to broader discussions about how Africans engaged the changing circumstances of this period associated with the rise of global exchanges dominated by capitalism. It is my intent to show that bringing the scattered, multiple and varied references to cotton and cloth into a single frame of analysis can inform historians a great deal about the evolving social relations of the period.

What does a focus on textiles add to historians’ understanding of the “Transatlantic Slave trade era” in western Africa? In choosing to analyze the region’s history of this period through the
lens of cloth trading and consumption, this study approaches the large historiography of the Atlantic slave trade in western Africa by focusing on Africans as producers and consumers making active choices within specific temporal, spatial and environmental contexts. By doing so, the analysis offered here extends a concern to move beyond macrostructural and quantitative approaches that have been prevalent in earlier historiographies of the Atlantic slave trade in Africa. At the same time, it situates the dominant economy of slave trading in a broader context, showing the relationships of slave trading to other commodity exchanges and broader social patterns within western Africa, while focusing attention on individuals, specific social groups, and sub-regional dynamics whenever possible.

Rather than conceiving of this period primarily in terms of “triangular” trans-Atlantic relationships, this study is concerned with the interplay of local, regional and trans-regional processes that are not spatially fixed. The scope of the project is informed by the evolving trajectory and direction of the commodities exchanged, and in that sense becomes “global.” This study thus necessarily foregrounds the interactions between the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean perimeters, as both were critical to exchanges in western Africa. Fifteenth century Portuguese voyages to sub-Saharan Africa began in a quest for gold and grain, and after 1450 woolen cloths and garments from North Africa dominated the goods they sold in West African markets in exchange for gold. This market only diversified after the Portuguese were able to navigate to reach Asian markets. Over the period of this study, European commercial exchanges in Africa came to depend critically on goods (mostly cotton and silk textiles) purchased in Asia, often with gold and silver bullion mined by enslaved Africans and indigenous people of the Americas. Throughout this period, South Asia remained important as a source of goods desirable to West African consumers whose preferences shaped commercial patterns outside their own region. This study advances
scholarship on the importance of Indian textiles to European commercial aspirations in Africa and to the development of industrial textile manufacturing in Britain which occurred in a competitive global market for cotton goods.

By focusing on cotton textiles, this study aims to advance efforts among Africanist historians to expand the range of sources relied upon for information about the past to include African manufactures, both as physical objects of analysis and, as is mostly offered here, as an analytical point of departure for interpreting written, visual and oral sources about Africa. Asking questions about what people made, how they made them, what they used them for, in what contexts, etc., grounds the analysis in historical and regional specificity and makes possible readings of the organization of social life and its transformations across time and space. It also helped to broaden the discussion of 18th century western African beyond elite figureheads to consider other segments of African societies such as women, peasant farmers, soldiers and enslaved people as actors whose mundane choices had implications for the world beyond themselves. Reading sources for cloth, for example, has revealed women as important actors in the economy as (sometimes enslaved) producers, merchants, artisans and consumers. It has also been useful for thinking about both the global provenance of the commodities circulating in western Africa and the global resonances of the consumer choices of 18th century West Africans.

**Evidence and use of sources**

This study has drawn on a broad range of source evidence for its argument and conclusions. These include original documents studied from the National Archives of Britain (London and Liverpool), France (Aix-en-Provence, Nantes and Paris) and Senegal (Dakar and Saint Louis). Documents of the British Royal Africa Company, the French India Company, Compagnie du Senegal, the Sierra Leone Company such as account ledgers, correspondence and customs payments and shipping records provide the basis for discussion of cloth trading between Europeans
and Africans, as well as patterns of consumption, social, political and economic dynamics over time. For example, a 1702 memorandum by Andre Brue provided a detailed survey of French commercial activity with Wolof rulers at Cayor, Moorish chiefs north of the Senegal river, the Tukulor of Futa Toro and Soninke in the east at Galam. Among other things the document shows how the French delivered European and Indian textiles throughout this region, but how the French “flipped” locally produced cloths purchased on the Senegal river by reselling them to a different group of African consumers at Bissau in Upper Guinea, and that these exchanges were perhaps critical layers in a multi-lateral system of exchange that included enslaved people sold into the Atlantic trade but was not limited to them.

In addition to archival records, I have created a database of over 200 European travel accounts of this region of western Africa published between 1460 and 1905, and have drawn on a reading of dozens of these texts to supplement and perhaps, contrast with, data and observations gleaned from the archival documents. An attempt was made to extract place names from several of these sources in order to map them spatially within a Geographic Information Systems context. This preliminary mapping provides some indication of the variety of place names for which there is at least some first-hand written account, and for parts of the 18th century, and certainly by the early 19th century, these go beyond observations from the coast or riverbank, presenting the possibility to construct a fairly broad regional picture of cotton production and consumption, by at least establishing a point of reference.

This study has drawn on oral traditional sources from the region which present a potentially vast oral historical “archive” that is also a lived and dynamic practice. During six months of fieldwork in the Republic of Guinea (Conakry), where I was based at the Julius Nyerere University of Kankan, I conducted interviews with a number of djeliw or “griots” as well as local historians
in several parts of the country including at Kankan, Faralako, Labe, Forecaria and Boke. In their respective narrations, these stories were striking for the ways in which they established connections between places within the region, such as between Kankan and Timbo when in the 18th century Kankan’s Maninka-Mori elites fled to the protection of their Muslim co-religionists at Timbo under attack from Wasulu-based armies. Or, in another example, they described the migration of people between the Konya region southeast of Kankan and Forecaria an Atlantic coastal settlement founded during the 18th century and controlled by Maninka-Mori populations from the eastern savannah. These sources agree that cloth was an important commodity traded from the savannah to the coast where it was exchanged often for salt sent back on returning caravans. In addition this oral evidence from the Guinea region, this study also draws on the text of an oral narration of the establishment of Kaarta, a centralized polity created in the northern savannah by an off-shoot of the Bamana Kulibali clan that ruled Segu on the Niger river provided to the author by the historian David Conrad. Chapter 2 of this study (which will be described further below) analyzes the narration of the textile weaver Sonsan Kulibali as the founder and ruler of Kaarta in the context of data available from 18th century European documentary sources on Kaarta.

**Visual and Material sources**

Research for this study has also included the compilation of visual images of Africans from the Senegambia and Upper Guinea regions produced between the 17th and 19th centuries. These include images published in travel narratives, as well as from such sources as the database of the Image of the Black in Western Art, the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, a database of the University of Virginia, The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record, and the 1795 Encyclopedie des Voyages published by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur which
contains extensive visual depictions of Africans. In integrating visual, oral, documentary sources, this study has found useful the growing body of literature on material culture history that has drawn on interdisciplinary collaborations between historians, art historians, anthropologists and museum curators. Historians working with material culture have been concerned with expanding the range of sources to include objects, not only as they were deployed for specific uses in particular contexts, but also for the meaning people attributed to objects over time and space. Historians’ embrace of material culture sources is relatively new and follows the lead established by archeologists, anthropologists and museum studies scholars in analysis of the ways in which objects construct social worlds, as people deploy them to express meaning, identification and relations within their own lived context.  

**Historiography**

This dissertation study situates itself primarily within the field of African history where it engages with debates about the development and transformation of African societies in social, political and economic terms during a period dominated by the Atlantic slave trade. It also addresses other historical fields of inquiry, such as Atlantic history, which has generally been slow to integrate 17th and 18th century African Atlantic societies into trans-Atlantic comparative histories and global history, whose approach this study seeks to deploy as a possible alternative to an Atlantic framework that frequently devolves into more narrow imperial studies of the “French Atlantic,” the “Dutch Atlantic,” etc., or into even more restrictive national historiographies. In its attempt to critically re-center Africans as historical actors making choices in specific contexts, this study draws on recent work by anthropologists on commodity consumption and by historians working on material culture. This study engages with a series of debates within the historiography,

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each of which will be addressed in the section below. The first of these debates is on the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa and the related debate on slavery in Africa. The next debate addressed concerns the historiography of cotton textiles in West Africa, which centers more on questions that scholars have not been able to fully answer about the antiquity and origins of cotton weaving in the region. The final historiographical debates addressed concern historical state formation and gender in West African history. The study is a contribution to a growing scholarship that seeks to understand the specificity of Africa’s slave trades in different regions of the continent.

The 1950s and 1960s development of African history as an academic discipline, with investments made to support scholarship in European, US and in African colonial universities, occurred as much of the African continent (with the notable exceptions of Portuguese and southern African settler colonies) decolonized. For a variety of reasons specific to the mid-20th century context, the period became known, as the historian Richard Reid has noted, as “a time when African history was precolonial history.” Imbued with a positivist ethos, these early historians of Africa dedicated themselves to investigating the continent’s “pre-colonial” past, as a response to many colonial apologists who asserted that the African past was either unknowable or not likely to be of much value to know. However, their work was often vulnerable to manipulation by interested parties seeking to produce historical narratives of the past to legitimate contemporary political relations or desired outcomes in the present. They were also influenced by a generation of British structural-functionalist anthropologists whose work tended to view African “societies” in synchronic terms.8 Economic and environmental crises of the early 1970s, along with disillusionment with the early years of African independence, supported the emergence of alternate approaches to the African past. Marxist historians, focusing on economically structured

relationships, advanced a periodization model that viewed the development of capitalism as even more critical to explaining the African past than the presence or absence of formal colonialism per se. Other responses to the disillusionment with political and economic outcomes of the post-independence period prompted a shift in focus to studies of the colonial period for clues to the roots of contemporary problems—a trend that has since become so dominant as to prompt recent calls by Reid and others that historians not abandon the study of earlier periods in Africa altogether.9

Beginning in the late 1960s, Africanists began to focus on the Atlantic slave trade in concert with scholarly commitments to African American history with a “view from below” focus on the experience of American slaves. Among Africanists, debates about Atlantic slaving led in the 1970s and 1980s to a burst of scholarship on slavery in Africa itself that did much to lend complexity to the study of slavery as an durable institutional feature of human history—leading to much rethinking of history in Africa and eventually to the emergence of “Second Slavery” studies10 and helping to contextualize the reappearance of abolitionist movements in contemporary times.

Debates about slavery in Africa are nestled within even broader questions about the overall “impact” of Atlantic slavery on Africa. These questions have been pursued by Africanist historians but also by sociologists, political scientists and economic historians seeking to explain poverty and underdevelopment in Africa today.11 The early development of this impact literature featured debates over the basic demographics of the Atlantic slave trade, beginning with Philip Curtin’s 1969 “The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census” and the subsequent debates between Walter Rodney

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11 See Nathan Nunn, "The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades*," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 1 (2008). for a recent example of this literature; also Robinson.
and Jonathan Fage over whether slavery as an institution on the Upper Guinea Coast predated or was significantly expanded by centuries of European commercial contact. These were followed by debates between David Eltis, Paul Lovejoy, Patrick Manning and others over the significance of four centuries of European slave trading in Africa based on attempts to quantify the value of exported goods over time or to estimate the demographic impact of human capital on the subsequent growth of Africa’s population and economy. Philip Curtin, in an important study of pre-colonial Senegambia and Anthony Hopkins, the British economic historian, were among those who argued that economic institutions in Africa were stronger and more adaptive than some scholars had acknowledged. Meanwhile, in francophone countries, the study of precolonial Africa pursued a different line of inquiry, shaped as it was largely by anthropologists, rather than historians, who were interested less in the demographic impact of the slave trade on Africa than on the internal development of slavery in African societies. Emmanuel Terray, Jean Bazin, Roger Botte, Claude Meillassoux and Jean-Loupe Amselle were among those who produced major studies influenced by Marxist theory on the structure, function and reproduction of slavery and identity in Africa. As early as 1955, the Senegalese historian Abdoulaye Ly published an early monograph, based on his thesis at the Universite de Bordeaux, on the 17th century operations of La Compagnie du Senegal. The work argued a central role for West Africa in global commerce of the period, and influenced subsequent generations of West Africans such as the Senegalese Abdoulaye Bathily and the Malian Sekene-Mody Cissoko who published monographs on regions within Senegambia during the Atlantic slave trade.

In thinking of the long arc of this “impact” literature in English, one might chart a long arc from Walter Rodney’s History of the Upper Guinea Coast (1966) to John Thornton’s Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World (1998). Although not fully elaborated in Upper
Guinea Coast, Rodney’s work went on to advance Marxist structuralist historical arguments influenced by the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Ranger, among others in the “Dar es Salaam school” of African history. Thornton, by contrast, fundamentally rejected these “dependency theory” approaches that he argued underplayed African agency and voluntary participation in the Atlantic slave trade. He also separately challenged Paul Lovejoy’s slavery “transformation thesis” by arguing that the growth of slavery in Africa was independent of the Atlantic slave trade and that little empirical evidence existed to establish how many slaves were in Africa circa 1500 to establish a baseline for comparison.12 Focused nevertheless on economics, Thornton argued in the 1990s that African economic productivity was generally higher and more efficient than earlier historiographical approaches had allowed, despite relatively unsophisticated technology. Patrick Manning was among those who countered that problems of insufficient data could not support such a thesis. Ann MacDougall, a scholar of the trans-Saharan trade networks, responded that Thornton’s conceptual model of historical change failed to integrate multiple variables such as space, gender and class into notions of “technology” and “productivity.”13

The challenge of balancing (or perhaps displacing) the conceptual and research priorities of western academic historians with those emerging from within the region of Africa being studied has been an important feature of these debates. The Guinean scholar Boubacar Barry was largely critical of anglophone scholars such as Philip Curtin whose work he viewed had the effect of diminishing the importance of the Atlantic slave trade for the history of Senegambia, which he argued in his own work, Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade (1998), contributed to the

contemporary political balkanization of the region weakening its prospects for development.\textsuperscript{14}

Separately from the debate between Barry and Curtin, Ray Kea deployed a Marxist analytical approach to identify the structures of everyday life in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Gold Coast as they were transformed by the rise of the Asante state. Kea made use of voluminous European sources for the period, including those that showed the stockpiling of imported textiles as a strategy some Gold Coast elites pursued storing, redistributing and transferring wealth.\textsuperscript{15} Also, a cohort of North American historians working across Senegambia and Upper Guinea has produced monographs of particular sub-regions such as James Searing’s work on the 18\textsuperscript{th} century Senegal river valley, George Brooks on Senegambia, Bruce Mouser on the Guinea coast, Donald Wright on the Gambia and others focused on African initiatives within the broader context of Atlantic contacts.

However, many analyses nonetheless focused on the ultimately disabling strategies of slaving, slavery and military conflict within Africa as the primary, definitive lens through which to analyze and to understand historical change\textsuperscript{16}, usually set within the context of European initiatives elsewhere in the Atlantic. Implicit in much of this literature is an ‘outside-in’ perspective that does not readily account for the multiple ways in Africans may have “impacted” their European trading partners, European communities more broadly or on other people and places around the world with whom they were linked through their commercial relations. More recent historical work on this region during the early modern period by Toby Green has sought to re-situate historical processes in Africa investigating linkages between the processes of creolisation, enslavement and slave trading to show that “the Atlantic trade had produced deep historical

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\item \textsuperscript{15} Ray A. Kea, \textit{Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast}, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
\end{itemize}
transformations that were not just the result of European imposition, but of the internal dynamics of African societies.”

Studies linking coastal west central Africa with the Americas have focused on the particularities of dynamics of the southern Atlantic, such as Mariana Candido’s monograph on 18th century Benguela, serving as a counterweight to generalities about the trade based on the experience in other regions, while others, such as Roquinaldo Ferreira’s *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World*, produce micro-histories of individuals and everyday life in order to write more comprehensive analyses that avoid portraying Africans solely in a reactive role.

For historians of the Atlantic slave trade, whether Africanists or Atlanticists, cotton textiles routinely appeared on lists of commodities European traders sold in exchange for enslaved captives. Work by historian George Metcalf and others has now marginalized the once widely held “gewgaw myth” or the notion that these trade goods were of little economic value. There is a large body of literature on cotton textiles in West Africa produced by art historians, archeologists and textile specialists who often prioritize questions of aesthetics, materials and the technology of production over setting developments within a particular chronological context or measuring change over time. This informative literature ranges from detailed analytical studies such as Rita Bolland’s *Tellem Textiles: Archeological Finds from Burial Caves in Mali’s Bandiagara Cliff* to broad surveys by John Picton *African Textiles and Venice* and Lamb *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* to research monographs by Renee Boser-Sarivaxizavanis such as ‘Recherche sur l’Histoire des Textiles Traditionnels et Teints de l’Afrique Occidentale.’

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21 Kriger, “Mapping the History of Cotton Textile Production in Precolonial West Africa.”
In addition to these works, however, a number of historians have focused on textile production and trade within and between African societies, with prominent examples including Marion Johnson’s work in the early 1970s on Manding weaving and on the use of cotton cloth strip currencies in Senegambia and in parts the western savannah. Johnson worked for years to assemble a dataset of all records of commercial transactions between Britain and ports in Africa for every year of the 18th century. Johnson’s dataset, *Anglo-African Trade in the Eighteenth Century: English statistics on African trade 1699-1808*, has been used by a number of economic historians, including her partners Jan Hogendorn and HA Gemery, while the data relevant to Senegal and Sierra Leone is also discussed in Chapter Three of this study. Johnson’s work on the 18th century was built upon by Richard Roberts whose monograph, *Two worlds of cotton: colonialism and the regional economy in the French Soudan, 1800-1946*, argues that the colonial French regimes of the 19th and 20th centuries failed to redirect local cotton production in West Africa for its own purposes because of the resilience of a centuries old regional economy for the production and exchange of cotton cloth. Roberts’ other work in this period has emphasized the critical role of a centralized state to the structure and performance of the economy in his monograph on the 18th Bamana state at Segu, although this is a position that has been critiqued by later generations of scholars as having limited applicability. Roberts has also looked at how the division of labor within the textile industry of a 19th century community of Maraka Muslims revealed gender relations and how these shifted over time.

Colleen Kriger took a different approach to her research on West African textiles from the Bights of Benin and Biafra in contemporary Nigeria by focusing on the textiles themselves as

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material object sources that served as points of departure for her analysis. Kriger drew on museum collections of African material culture for her monograph, *Cloth in West African History*, that deconstructs the visual and material features of textile objects (both fragments and garments) in order to construct a historical narrative about the societies who produced them. Kriger used this methodology again in a study of textile production in the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate that used textile fragments to argue that women laborers participated in that economy not only in their frequent roles as thread spinners and dyers but also as weavers, particularly in two southern emirates of the Caliphate, Nupe and Ilorin. This finding contradicted much of the published literature for the region that emphasized weaving as an occupation practiced solely by men. Kriger has expanded the scope of her research on textile history throughout the entirety of West Africa including the western savannah and Upper Guinea coast. In another approach to West African textiles during a later period, Judith Byfield’s *The Bluest Hands: a social and economic history of women dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*, analyzes the commercial responses of the women indigo dyers of Abeokuta during an economic downturn to demonstrate how crises within a colonial economy impacted men and women differently. Byfield does so by emphasizing the importance of studying craft production and its organization as changes over time serve as indicators of broader economic and social transformations.

The historical literature on textiles in the West African context is complemented by many other regional studies such as work by Phyllis Martin on the raphia cloth currency of the 17th and 18th century Loango coast of Congo, and Roquinaldo Ferreira’s doctoral research on the role of

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Indian textiles circulating between Portuguese-controlled areas of India, Brazil and Angola in the slave trade of West Central Africa. For East Africa, William Gervase Clarence-Smith has broadly surveyed the development over time of local textile industries within the context of competition and influence from Indian Ocean commerce.\textsuperscript{27} Clarence-Smith rejects the interpretation of other historians such as John Mack, Pedro Machado\textsuperscript{28}, the historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, Ravi Palat and others that suggest that textile industries in eastern Africa were negatively impacted by the competition of imported Indian cloths. Rather, for Clarence-Smith, eastern Africa was a partner in the development of textile production around the Indian Ocean. Other historians of east Africa have emphasized the negotiated nature of textile exchange, consumption and display. Laura Fair examined clothing practices in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Zanzibar to argue that they revealed much about contested class and gender relations.\textsuperscript{29} While Jeremy Prestholdt’s, \textit{Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization}, seeks to historicize an early 21\textsuperscript{st} century notion of “globalization” by analyzing the “global” nature networks responding to the needs of East African consumers in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, with connections established between such far distant places as Salem, Massachusetts and Bombay, India.

\textbf{Chapter Outline}

This study is organized chronologically into five chapters covering the period between 1700 and 1850. Chapter one establishes the regional scope of the larger work by showing how raw cotton and finished cloth were a major vector through which the interests of African, Asian and European traders and producers aligned in novel ways at the turn of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The chapter

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pursues the question from three vantage points: through an analysis of the European carrying trade of African cloth, through examining African networks and consumption of cotton cloth produced in Asia and Europe, and finally through the development of European commercial export schemes in Africa. It places the development of discursive association between African slaves and cloth, such as the accounting unit *pieza de India* within a broader context by drawing on examples from throughout Senegambia and Upper Guinea. Chapter Two moves forward in time, to the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century, and shifts the focus to questions of cotton textile production away from the coast in the western savannah polity of Kaarta by interpreting an oral account of Kaarta’s founding by a textile weaver from the royal Kulibali lineage of Segu, in the context of other oral and written sources on the period. Cotton and woolen textiles were an important trade item across the region where local conditions produced shifting alliances between various groups. In the 1740s, the French attempted to insert themselves into regional commercial dynamics along the Faleme River while trying to access gold mines, but found that their cloth imports were not necessarily competitive with local sources in the Upper Senegal valley in the 1740s. The chapter concludes by examining how in 1748, a new group of English investors bought the factory at Bance Island, Sierra Leone and soon began profiting from a new British policy turn favoring private trade to considerable prosperity. This is a period of rapid expansion in slave trading and the transformation of Bance Island into one famous for its luxuries. Imports of India cloth were a key part of the partners’ business strategy as a few of them were also major investors in the East India Company which helped to secure their privileged access to these goods.

Chapters Three and Four are organized as a comparative look at the dynamics of trade and consumption within the distinct northern and southern areas of the vast Senegambia/Upper Guinea region during the turn of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Both regions were impacted by the outbreak of war
between Britain and France in 1793 as well as the debates leading up to the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. Both regions were also being impacted separately by the emergence of powerful Muslim theocratic states who were upending longstanding relationships between clerics and political rulers. During this period, the Fula clerics at Futa Toro and Futa Jallon, operating in their respective sovereign contexts, also each attempted to impose an embargo on slave trading with Europeans on the coast, a circumstance these chapters use as a departure to compare and contrast the political and economic dynamics, including the consumption patterns of each region. Chapter Three reconsiders the implications of the rise to power of Almamy Qader Kan as ruler of Futa Toro in the 1780s, and of his unilateral ban on slave trading with Europeans until he could ensure protections for Muslims from enslavement and sale to Europeans. A later section of the chapter teases out from available sources details about the women’s indigo dyeing industry of the late 18th century in the context of the environmental crises and religious-political transformations of the period. The chapter moves on to examining the relationship of Eur-African habitants on Saint Louis to the regional economy of cloth consumption and attempts to grapple with the need to critically engage European sources on Africa for this period. Chapter Four looks at the relationship between Almamy Sadu, ruler of the Futa Jallon at Timbo, with a heterogenous group of people and competing interests on the Guinea riverine coast in the context of slave rebellions, warfare, the British abolitionist settlement at Freetown and eventually the British abolition of slave trading. Beyond relations with Timbo, the chapter explores the impact of migration patterns between the savannah and the coast, including dynamics created by a Maninka reformer who sought to impose his own sartorial policy on coastal residents. The remaining sections focus on the clothing practices of a wide swath of West African societies including soldiers, merchants, chiefs, enslaved persons, peasant farmers, clerics and ritual practitioners, before concluding with
a section on European efforts of the early 19th century to develop cotton export agriculture in Sierra Leone and Guinea. Chapter Five extends this study’s focus on cloth trading and consumption in western Africa by considering them during the period when groundnut cultivation in western Africa appeared to offer the alternative to slave trading that many actors had been searching for, although it did little to replace slavery itself which remained a prominent feature of the new export-oriented economy. Neither of these developments diminished the production and exchange of local cotton textiles across the region which remained significant, suggesting the ways in which Africans selectively engaged overseas markets in the era after British ban on slave trading according to the contexts that shaped their own priorities and opportunities.
CHAPTER ONE.
‘WHICH SHOULD BE THE STAPLE COMMODITIE [SIC], TO PITCH THE PRICE UPON?’: COTTON AND CLOTH IN WESTERN AFRICA, 1700-1730

Introduction

They had experience with English merchants and knew how to do business with them. In the early seventeenth century, two West Africans— Fodee Caree, a marabout, or Muslim teacher and Sangulli, a young man who had gained a smattering of English in dealing with foreign traders and could interpret well enough—accepted employment as local guides for the English merchant Richard Jobson up the Gambia river. The men sailed with Jobson eleven miles upstream from the town of Barracunda to a place where he could meet the locally renowned African trader Buckor Sano. Having sailed to West Africa in search of gold, ivory and other profitable commercial goods, Jobson, as the Portuguese had done 150 years before him, was inserting himself into a world of considerable riverine trade along a commercial artery that partially bisects the far western lobe of the African continent. As Jobson and his crew traveled eastwards, and away from the Atlantic ocean, the land along the riverbanks became less thickly forested and he reported seeing cotton being farmed:

With great carefulness, they prepare the ground, to set the seedes of the cotten wool, whereof they plant whole fields, and comming up as roses grow, it beareth coddes, and as they ripen the codde breaketh, and the wooll appeareth, which shewes the time of gathering.¹

Along his route, Jobson described seeing men wearing garments tailored from local cloth woven from this cotton — a loose-fitting surplice-like shirt that hung to the knees, over “breeches”

with ample folds of cloth at the back that seemed to serve as a cushion.² He saw women with large “party-colored” cloth (an alternating blue and white pattern of rectangular shapes) wrapped around their waists, and a second piece flung loosely over their bare shoulders.³ Fodee Carree and Sanguli led Jobson’s crew ashore at Wuuli, a large region of villages and trading centers on the north side of the river that began about 200 miles inland from the Atlantic ocean. Controlled by a Mandespeaking ruler, the region that stretched over 1,200 square miles at its most extensive⁴ is thought to have included several trading centers such as Setico [Sutuko], Pholeycunda [“Fula town”], Fatatenda, Barrakunda, Jalakoto and clerical towns with names like Karantabaa [“The Great School”]. These settlements paid tribute to the ruler in exchange for protection from outside attack and the promotion of commerce, overseen by the Wuli Mansa, or king, and enforced by his soldiers.⁵ The tribute payments or tax usually consisted of a portion of their annual of harvests millet, corn, or cotton, a segment of their cattle herds and an amount of locally woven cotton cloth.⁶

Cotton was a major agricultural product of the Wuli region which also was renowned for its cloth production. Fataro, a locally woven cloth, served as currency in the region, exchangeable for a wide range of other goods.⁷ Cloth production was labor intensive, requiring seasonal planning and organization at different stages—a process which favored those local actors who could attract and retain large groups of dependents to grow cotton and to weave it. In Wuli, these

² Richard Jobson, The Golden Trade, Or, A Discovery of the Riuver Gambra and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians: Also the Commerce with a Great Blacke Merchant Called Buckor Sano and His Report of the Houses Covered with Gold and Other Strange Observations for the Good of Our Owne Countrie (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes and are to be sold by Nicholas Bourne, 1623), 50.
³ Ibid., 55.
⁴ Winifred Faye Galloway, “A History of Wuli from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D., Indiana University, 1975).
⁵ Ibid.
actors included not only the Wuli mansa, or king, but also rulers of the smaller towns and djula traders whose networks transported slaves and circulated a range of other commodities across a vast region.

As a regional polity, Wuuli was one of several within the orbit of the Mali empire, whose power was in decline in the 17th century but still commanded tribute and deference from rulers across a wide region of western Africa. Control over the middle section of the Gambia river was vital because navigation became easier below that point, making it a serviceable transfer point for goods trafficked over land from the interior in exchange for salt, rice and other goods purchased from downriver.  

With its access to the vital riverine corridor, the ruling class of Wuuli sought over time to increase their income from rents in two ways: by keeping trade routes open to receive caravans of goods (slaves, gold, ivory, hides, cotton cloths) and by attracting new settlers to the area who could be taxed. Since at least the 16th century, it included settlements of Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese traders, some of whom Jobson met. He also writes of a settlement of English traders, Tobabo Cunda [“White man's town”] whose interests Wuuli protected against the encroachments from the competing ruler of Niani Maru.  

In this chapter, I show how raw cotton and finished cloth were a major vector through which the interests of African, Asian and European traders and producers aligned in novel ways—but with ambivalent results for the African regions studied. The first three decades of the 18th century in western Africa saw an increase in trade between Africans and Europeans—most significantly represented by expanding slave exports. However, it is also the case that trade in other commodities than slaves — ivory, gold, beeswax, dyewoods, cotton, gum, etc., — also increased during the expansion of the slave trade and remained important to both Africans and Europeans.

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8 Jobson et al., *The Discovery of River Gambia*, 1623.
9 Ibid.
This is particularly true for Senegambia and the Upper Guinea region of West Africa, which began supplying some of the first African slaves to European traders but, during the peak years of the trade, exported far fewer slaves overall than coastal regions of Africa to the east and south.\(^\text{10}\) At the northern edge of this region, the trade in Gum Arabic along the Senegal river remained important to French and British traders throughout the period, while camwood, used to produce a red dye for textile makers in Europe, was a major export from rivers in and around Sierra Leone in the south. Beyond the impact of these and other exports, western Africa was also being transformed by the nature and scale of its imports, textiles prominent among them. The intersections of cloth trading, cloth consumption and the Atlantic trade in Africa with other social and economic processes are multiple and overlapping as will be developed in the following sections. Further, a focus on the trade in textiles also reveals the “global” nature of those encounters which have been conceived in earlier approaches to the era as primarily “triangular” trans-Atlantic relationships. African consumer preferences supported the imports of textiles from Asia and particular European sources far longer than European merchants might have wanted.\(^\text{11}\) To obtain necessary supplies of Asian textiles, European trading firms relied on silver and gold mined in the Americas which depended directly and indirectly on enslaved African labor. Thus Atlantic exchanges on the western coast of Africa depended on broader networks of communication and exchange. To set Atlantic trade in western Africa within a global historical perspective, is not to suggest that connections between places, processes and people have no limits or that they spread uniformly across space and time. Rather it is instead to ask questions about the historical breadth, specificity and limits of those connections in West Africa—while also bringing out the rationale

\(^{10}\) See Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.

for the consumer demand driving trade and the social relations that underpinned the demand.\textsuperscript{12} This approach depends on thinking about western Africans' agency and constraint within the context of their evolving “global” linkages. This chapter uses evidence from eye-witness reports, business memoranda, correspondence and visual images to examine aspects of the region's social and economic transformation from three vantage points, each in a separate section: first, through the European carrying trade of African cloth; second, through examining patterns in the African distribution and consumption of cotton cloth produced in Asia and Europe; and finally through the development of European commercial export schemes in Africa.

It was the marabout Fodee Caree, who brought Jobson to Wuli to meet Bucknor Sano, the Maninka-speaking djula trader, who was one of the most prominent traders in the area. Sano had been informed of the English trader's presence in advance. He arrived to meet Jobson accompanied with musicians playing before him and an entourage of about 40 people, some of whom were armed with bows and arrows. Within two to three hours the crowd of Sano's follows which grew to a settlement of over 200 people, both men and women.\textsuperscript{13} Within the historiography of Atlantic slaving, historians' treatment of this encounter has focused on Jobson's surprise at being offered female slaves for purchase and his rejection of that offer. Jobson's primary trade interest was gold, rather than slaves. West Africans had by then long been trading in slaves with the Portuguese and Dutch (who had seized Goree island from the Portuguese in 1588) while English participation in


\textsuperscript{13} Jobson, The Golden Trade, Or, A Discovery of the Riber Gambra and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians: Also the Commerce with a Great Blacke Merchant Called Buckor Sano and His Report of the Houses Couered with Gold and Other Strange Observations for the Good of Our Own Countrey, 86.
the slave trade up to that point had been episodic and not yet organized in a systematic way.\footnote{Paul Hair suggests in a 1999 introduction to Jobson's text that the episode may represent an offer of female concubinage for Jobson rather for other forms of labor outside Africa.}

Beyond this matter, however, Jobson's trade with Sano is also noteworthy for the ivory, cotton yarn, cloth, and cowhides Sano had available for sale.

Given the economy of Wuuli it should come as no surprise that, in determining the price for items that they wished to trade, Sano chose a finished local cloth—Jobson refers to them as “Negroes clothes”—\footnote{Ibid., 89} as the commodity value upon which all others would be based. These cloths would be the measure by which Sano and Jobson determined how much salt Sano received in exchange. Sano was not interested in the iron Jobson wished to trade, saying that he had his own local supply. Jobson, in turn, declined to buy Sano's cow hides because he said were too heavy to transport on his small boat; but if Sano could arrange to take the hides further downriver, Jobson would take them.

From the mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century, with the establishment of sugar plantations in the Caribbean, both the British and the French stepped up efforts to acquire slaves in Africa for the region.\footnote{Barry, \textit{Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade}.} This development was not unrelated to events in Asia which had, since the beginnings of Portuguese trade there in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, proven itself as a source of commodities that West Africans wanted to buy.\footnote{John K. Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800}, 2nd [expanded] (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).} In Asia, the Portuguese learned in the value of Indian cloth to purchase pepper and other spices from Southeast Asia — and inserted themselves into the intra-regional Indian Ocean trade carrying cloth. By the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, both the English East India Company (1600) and the Dutch East India Company (1602) were challenging Portuguese monopoly claims to the spice trade by expanding their own trade operations into the Indian Ocean. Yet traders from both companies
found that cloths from India were the key to profitable trade in spices and, like the Portuguese before them, sought to insert themselves into regional trade flows. The competition between these companies also reinvigorated and expanded the direct trade of Asian goods in Europe — paid for largely by silver and gold bullion extracted from mines in the Americas. French expansion into the region with the establishment of the French East India Company in 1664 only stepped up traffic and competition further. In important ways, the circulation of goods and people around the Atlantic overlapped with similar patterns linking the Indian Ocean and South China sea. Both the extraction of precious metals in the Americas and the circulation of Asian commodities in Europe had implications for European activities and ambitions in West Africa.

In establishing seaborne trade with Asia, the Portuguese initiated a relative flood of India-made cottons, Chinese and Turkish-made silks into European markets, where they had an ever-increasing impact on consumer tastes, material culture practices, technology and production. Indian cottons were generally less costly, available in bright colors and patterns, and retained their color after washing better than the variety of woolen and linen cloths then typically consumed in Europe. Prasannan Parthasarathi has shown that Indian cloth exports to Europe do not become significant until the mid-17th century when England and Holland become the largest buyers. France likewise became a major buyer of Indian cloth, acquiring access to the port of Pondicherry in 1674 and also trading at Chandranagor in Bengal. Parthasarathi argued that credit provided by European buyers led to an expansion of cloth production in southern India, whose output increased

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substantially throughout the period, including a number of cloths designed with information about west African consumers supplied to them by European merchants.\textsuperscript{22}

In parts of Europe, consumption of Indian cotton textiles resulted over time in what have been called “profound changes in the European economy, industry and material cultures of elite and commoner alike.”\textsuperscript{23} For example, a late-17\textsuperscript{th} century “calico craze” among English commoners and cloth buyers for India-made cottons so worried English wool producers and weavers guilds that they supported anti-calico ‘riots' and pushed for state intervention into the importation and consumption of foreign-made cotton textiles.\textsuperscript{24} In 1686, the French monarch Louis XIV banned the importation of most Indian cloths and heavily taxed the remaining varieties after similar protests from French manufacturers who feared loss of revenue for their own textile businesses.\textsuperscript{25} The king also feared the excessive loss of silver bullion spent to buy cloth in India. The royal edict banned the importation and local printing of plain white cloths from India, as well as the wearing of these cloths in France. The sole exception to the ban, which remained in place until 1759, was for the purpose of re-exporting textiles to foreign markets, particularly to trading posts in Africa.\textsuperscript{26} Not only did many French consumers find their way around these restrictions\textsuperscript{27}, but the period saw the emergence of new industries in Nantes and in other French cities where artisans printed plain cotton cloths called indiennes, inspired by Indian printing methods and patterns. In Britain, the Parliament in 1701 banned the import of “all manufactured silks, Bengalls, and stuffs mixed with silks or herba” as well as dyed, printed or stained calicos from Persia, China or “the East Indies.”

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Lemire, “Revising the Historical Narrative: India, Europe and the Cotton Trade,” 221.
\textsuperscript{24} Parakunnel Joseph Thomas, \textit{Mercantilism and the East India Trade; an Early Phase of the Protection v. Free Trade Controversy} (London: P. S. King & Son, 1926).
\textsuperscript{26} Riello and Parthasarathi, \textit{The Spinning World : A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850}.
The British legislation continued to allow plain white calico to be imported. But, as in the case of the earlier French edicts, the British Parliament responded to pressure from producers to protect local industry from foreign competition, while allowing merchants in the India trade to continue profiting from the sale of textiles, by re-directing them as much as possible to the expansion of the African trade.\textsuperscript{28}

The evidence from throughout the period indicates that there was a large demand and market for textiles across West Africa. The Portuguese found an active trade in North African cloth transported across the Sahara to West Africa when they began trading there in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{29} The Portuguese monarchy was eager to take part in this trade by exchanging North African and northern European textiles for West African gold that was the source of its increased the wealth and prestige.\textsuperscript{30} In attempting to estimate the overall size of the cloth market in just one region of West Africa, the Gold Coast, historian John Thornton has suggested that residents there annually consumed about 750,000 metres of cloth in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century, of which only two percent, or 20,000 metres came from African foreign trade with Europeans.\textsuperscript{31} Thornton's estimates are based on a very generous extrapolation from the visual description of two Akan “commoners” and are meant to emphasize the size and self-sufficiency of indigenous textile production. The estimate assumes a great deal about the clothing practices of a diverse population in the Gold Coast, but its assertion that imported cloth comprised only a minor part of the overall market is reasonable.

As early as the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, Indian textiles were such a central item exchanged in Africa

\textsuperscript{28} Thomas, Mercantilism and the East India Trade; an Early Phase of the Protection v. Free Trade Controversy, 115.
\textsuperscript{29} Thornton, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800.
\textsuperscript{30} John Vogt, “Notes on the Portuguese Cloth Trade in West Africa, 1480-1540.”
\textsuperscript{31} Thornton, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800.
for many commodities, including slaves, that they had become a standard accounting measure, called piezas de Indias, used to record slave purchases.\(^{32}\) This unit of measure later developed in tandem with the Spanish asiento licensing system that was meant to control and sustain the flow of enslaved African labor to the Americas. Under the asiento, a pieza de India was defined as a healthy male slave with no physical defects; women, children, older people and those with disabilities were counted as a fraction of a pieza. The Spanish crown taxed licensees by the number of piezas de Indias delivered to the Americas, which created an incentive to deliver more slaves who could be taxed at less than the full pieza rate, often younger slaves, while earning higher profit.

In West Africa, the discursive associations between slaves and cloth is said to derive from the latter's importance to slave purchases.\(^{33}\) During the early 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese lancado traders used cloth-based units of equivalence, negros and panos, to establish the price of a range of commodities exchanged in the Upper Guinea region, including along the Gambia river, Cacheu and Sierra Leone. A pano was a piece of cloth measuring about one meter by two meters. Two years before Jobson's visit, in 1618, one negro was worth about 150 panos\(^{34}\) This usage suggests that the lancados—similar to what Jobson improvised during his face to face encounter with Bucknor Sano—adopted the currency standard of regions such as Wuuli for their own transactions, record keeping and planning. There are also other discursive associations between West Africa and cloth that indicate the exchanges were part of a wider context, such as the term “guinee” for a type of cloth produced on the Coromandel coast of southern India. As

\(^{34}\) Newson, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century*. 

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mentioned above, guinees were specifically excluded from French ban on the import of Indian cloth. They were a variety of cotton calico distinguished by a standard length of 37 yards; in English, they were called “longcloths” and sometimes bafts. But the cloth is thought to have acquired its name from its importance to the Portuguese for trade in West Africa. From the vantage point of consumption and the convergence of global markets, it is noteworthy that guinees became a staple not only of European trade in West Africa, but they were also popular with shoppers in the Netherlands where sales of it quadrupled during the fifteen year period between 1674 and 1689.

On the Upper Guinea coast, traders were most interested to purchase iron, cloth, finished garments, beads, raw cotton, brass, copper and other metalware, alcohol, horses and kola nut. Linda Newson has shown that India cloths comprised over half the trade goods shipped by Portuguese merchant Manuel Bautista Perez to Cacheu, southwest of the Gambia river trading posts visited by Jobson. Bautista shipped over fifty types of cloth to Cacheu between 1613 and 1618. He had access to Indian cloth, beads, spices and other goods through an uncle, Diogo Rodrigues de Lisboa who had relatives based in Goa. It remained the case throughout the period that networks of European traders resident or visiting trade settlements in Asia—especially India, China and Indonesia—were instrumental in accessing textiles that were in regular demand in West Africa. For much of the 18th century, France and England each carried an increasing number of slaves from Africa to the Americas while, as will be shown, West Africans imported ever larger

37 Ibid., 42.
38 Newson, From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century.
amounts of European-made woolens, linens, linen-blends and cottons, Turkish taffeta, Chinese silks and a range of India-made cottons. It will be indicated below that the consumption of Asian textiles in Africa (as well as European textiles and garments) was transforming African habits at the same time it did so in Europe but in some different ways, and with social and economic implications, that were specific to West Africa.

The Carrying Trade to Western Africa

The Portuguese scholar Antonio Carreira has cited two phases in which cotton cloth became a major staple of the economy of Cape Verde, the island base from which Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese merchants traded throughout a wide section of western Africa. In the first phase, during the 15th century, the Portuguese employed African slaves purchased on the mainland to grow cotton that was exported either to Europe or to Africa—along the Gambia river, to Casamance or to Cacheu—where it was woven into cloth. By the middle of the 16th century, however, the Portuguese had switched to also using slaves to manufacture the cloth on the islands, marking the start of the second phase. This cloth was then sold on the African mainland in exchange for a range of commodities, including slaves, gold, ivory and beeswax. Cloth produced by West African slaves in Cape Verde—particularly on Santiago which gave its name to the distinctively woven “St. Jago” cloths that became a staple of trade between the islands and the coast through at least the middle of the nineteenth century. They were part of what sustained

Cape Verde economically as well as being an industry which functioned through the mobility of Cape Verdean, Afro-Portuguese and African populations between the islands and the mainland. In particular, the Cape Verdean trade relied on Portuguese settlers on the mainland, lancados, who lived under the protection of African rulers, who had some facility with African languages.41

The social and economic ties between Cape Verde and the mainland is detailed in an account by the Cape Verdean trader Andre Donelha who recorded traveling to Kasang, an important trading town on the Gambia river within the province of Wuuli, and meeting a Christianized Mandinka named Gaspar Vaz. Jobson had also visited Kasang which was where he first met Fodee Carree.42 Donelha, who may have been a mulatto,43 was a member of an elite group of trading families on Santiago in Cape Verde. Donelha had previously known Gaspar Vaz on Cape Verde as the baptized slave of a local tailor. Reunited at this small port, the two men greeted each other warmly, but seeing the man “dressed in a Mandinga smock, with amulets of his fetishes around his neck”44, Donelha feared that Gaspar Vaz had renounced Christianity. Donelha does not record whether Vaz also had a name in Maninka and what it might have been. In Kasang, Vaz was not a slave but the socially prominent nephew of a local Muslim notable and, presumably, also a Muslim himself. However, Vaz denied being Muslim to Donelha. Instead, he claimed he dressed in local attire that way to only please his wealthy and powerful uncle from whom he would inherit.

42 Jobson et al., The Discovery of River Gambra, 1623, 3rd ser., no. 2:22.
To prove himself to Donelha, Vaz, “took off his smock, beneath which he wore a doublet and shirt in our fashion, and from around his neck drew out a rosary of Our Lady—‘every day I commend myself to God and the Virgin Our Lady by means of this rosary. And if I do not die, but come to inherit the estate of my uncle, I will see to it that some slaves are sent to Santiago, and when I have found a ship to take me I will go to live in that island and die among Christians.’”

It is striking that in this depiction, Vaz carried on his person both the Catholic rosary and Islamic prayers written on paper inside the gris-gris hung around his neck. Further, his clothing reflected multiple allegiances and the nimbleness with which he negotiated the social and economic landscape of Kasang, which included a settlement of Portuguese and Luso-Africans. The promises of Gaspar Vaz to procure slaves and to renounce living amongst Muslims must have been pleasing for a Cape Verdean trader like Donelha to hear. But his wearing of a “Mandinga smock” suggests that he was equally capable of making a different set of claims if that were beneficial to him. As the Toby Green has noted, building on the work of French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle, this negotiation of social allegiances was a generalized aspect of living in the region that followed a ‘mestizo logics’ of cultural accommodation and syncretism that was conducive to the functioning of long-distance trade diasporas. In Senegambia and Upper Guinea, these ‘mestizo logics' consisted in a two-way process of interaction and influence between groups of newcomers and settled populations that emphasized the incorporation and syncretism of disparate cultural elements rather than artificial cultural difference. People in coastal regions and along riverine trade routes found themselves needing to accommodate both migrations of Mande-

45 Ibid.
46 Jobson et al., The Discovery of River Gambra, 1623.
48 Green, The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589, 63–64.
speaking Muslims from the interior and settlements of Portuguese arriving from the Atlantic. This accommodation took place through marriage alliances that were part of a West African strategy of accumulating wealth and power through kinship relations and an ideology of lineage.\(^{49}\) In this context, local practices and tastes were not completely overridden by incoming ideologies but rather existed in a negotiated tension alongside them. Elsewhere in his account, Donelha describes lancados living among Wolof-speaking people of the Petite-Cote who had married African women and adopted some of the practices of their host communities.\(^{50}\) In the case of Donelha and Gaspar Vaz at Kasang, it is clear that a regional economy of slavery and cotton cloth trading brought the interests of both men together in multiple ways. Later, in an exchange of gifts with Gaspar Vaz' powerful uncle, Donelha received two pieces of local cloth, so valuable that he used one piece downriver to purchase a young, female slave worth 25,000 reis on Cape Verde.\(^{51}\)

Beyond these exchanges with Cape Verde, the Africans of Senegambia sold an “immense quantity” of locally made cloths to Portuguese, English and Dutch merchants who did a “considerable traffic” in trading them all along the African coast, according to John Barbot.\(^{52}\) In describing this region, Olfert Dapper, the Dutch physician and geographer who compiled published information about Africa in the 17th century, mentioned at least three markets in the former Jolof kingdom where one found locally made cloths for sale—at Gereop, Kerero, and Iamesil. At Gereop, there was a market held every four days where finished cloths and raw cotton were for sale along with slaves, tobacco, horses, camels and small animals.\(^{53}\) The largest such

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\(^{49}\) Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589.*  
\(^{50}\) Ibid.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 155.  
\(^{53}\) Olfert Dapper, *Description de l’Afrique : Contenant Les Noms, La Situation & Les Confin Croutes De Toutes Ses Parties, Leurs Rivières, Leurs Villes & Leurs Habitations, Leurs Plantes & Leurs Animaux, Les Moeurs, Les Coûtumes, La*
market in the Jolof territory described by Dapper was held at Camino, although there were others throughout the area such as at Refrisco (Rufisque), Porto d'Ale (Portudal), and Juala (Joal). Some of the Portuguese who settled in parts of Senegambia during this period were “New Christian” or converso Jewish members of a trade diaspora that extended to weavers and Jewish traders in North Africa. There were settlements of European Jews at the coastal trade towns of Portudal, Joal, which each had its own synagogue, and further south at Cacheu in the 17th century. These settlers traveled frequently between the three ports creating commercial links between them. At Portudal, the Wolof-speaking ruler of Bawol, Lambaia, protected about 30 Jews living there in 1609 from the hostilities of Portuguese Catholics. Lambaia did so in order to prevent the Portuguese from limiting the commercial activities of the New Christians, according to an account from Sebastiao Fernandes Cacao, a New Christian who lived in Cacheu at the time. Lambaia's actions helped to extend into territory he controlled a trade diaspora that extended to parts of North Africa, Portugal and Holland into territory he controlled. For centuries Jewish weavers and embroiderers living in Morocco had influenced West African consumer tastes as traders circulated their textiles across the Sahara with embroidered motifs that became incorporated as standard West African designs.

Trade diasporas of European and North African Jewish, Portuguese Catholics, African Muslims and African blacksmiths converged through myriad interactions across Senegambia and Upper Guinea. In describing the peoples of the Senegal and Gambia river valleys, Olfert Dapper

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*Langue, Les Richesses, La Religion & Le Gouvernement de Ses Peuples (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren, 1686).*

55 Ibid., 234.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
makes the assertion that the “only” African artisans Europeans met along these waterways were blacksmiths and weavers.\(^5^9\) This of course greatly understates the case by overlooking many other artisan groups such as potters, dyers, builders and calligraphers whose work is documented in other sources and has been studied by archeologists and other scholars.\(^6^0\) But it does suggest the visibility of blacksmiths and weavers to European visitors.

The African merchants in towns along the Gambia river such as Kasang, Borsalo and Kantor sold cloth to Europeans who carried them south to Sierra Leone, Sherbro and the Gold Coast where they were exchanged for ivory or gold.\(^6^1\) The most common of these cloths thus traded between African ports were panos sake, bantans and barafulas. The panos sake were made on a white background with eight bands of “couleur de feu,” presumably a bright red color along their length. Several French inventories of goods sent to Senegambia included quantities of wool yarn (often in red and yellow) and wool cards used for preparing raw wool to be spun into thread\(^6^2\). This suggests that trade engagements with Europeans may have also supported African cloth production and embroidery that added value to finished cloths. Panos sake and the barafulas were each larger and more expensive than the bantans, selling at one iron bar for each cloth compared to the price of two iron bars for three bantans.\(^6^3\) Quantities of this cloth traveled as far afield as Loango in contemporary Congo-Brazzaville where a Dutch trader in the 17th century used some of it to buy a


\(^{6^2}\) Andre Brue, “Memoire a La Compagnie Royal Du Senegal” June 29, 1702.

piece of ivory that weighed 88 pounds. It is clear from the account of Dapper and others that these cloths were not only traded with Europeans but circulated widely between Africans through regional markets. Dapper notes that residents of the Cape Verde islands, as well as Luso Africans and Africans living at the coastal towns of Rufisque, Portudal and Joal — traveled in small boats to the same Gambia river markets frequented by Europeans to buy these cloths along with hides, wax rice, ivory and gold where they could be found at lower prices than on the coast. These and other land routes of exchange between regional trading centers within western West Africa are discernable from European-language sources. Andre Almada, the Cape Verdean trader, referred in his account of the area to one such route between Degola, a Mandinka-speaking town located south of the Gambia river in territory controlled by the Muslim Maninka rulers of Kaabu, and the Biafara lands on the coast near Bissau. He said cotton cloths and raw cotton were among the most important goods exchanged on these routes. Taken together, the routes gives some sense of the degree of regional economic interaction in which the exchange of local cloth was a basic element. But consumers along throughout the region also showed an openness to incorporating foreign textiles of various qualities from the expensive, luxury cloths to practical lower cost varieties. Dapper noted that Africans in this region purchased large amounts of used sheets from Dutch traders which they found kept them “more fresh” than local cloths. These sheets were likely sold along many of the same interior trade routes through which local cloths and other foreign textiles from Asia and Europe circulated.

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64 de Moraes, “Le Commerce Des Tissus a La Petite Cote Au XVIIeme Sicle (Senegambie),” 72, note 1.
65 Ibid.
Along the coasts, the movement of these textiles had become a standard feature of European trade with Africans at the turn of the 18th century. In 1681, the chief agent for the English Royal African Company acknowledged receipt of 1,413 African-produced cotton cloths sent from Gambia to Sherbro island near Sierra Leone. As mentioned with the phases outlined by Carreira, the Portuguese had by the late sixteenth century created a cloth industry on Cape Verde that was closely integrated with mainland markets. Based on the production of enslaved West African labor, this industry relied on the regular traffic of lancados and Portuguese vessels as well as those of competing European vessels.

The interaction of European traders with this intra-regional trade in West Africa was shaped by competition between merchant empires, particularly their pursuit of mercantilist policies to create exclusive trading zones along the coast. Along the Senegal river valley, for example, the

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flow of African traders was pulled alternately towards the French-controlled Saint Louis or northward towards Portendick and Arguim, Dutch-controlled towns on the Mauritanian coast—depending on price advantages to the Africans. These contests between Europeans sometimes became violent such as when the French attacked and captured Goree island from the Dutch in 1677. They attempted to impose a monopoly favoring their traders on sections of the nearby “Petite Cote” of West Africa, from the Gambia river south to Rio Grande in Guinea Bissau. They faced intense competition there from the English based on St. James Island in the Gambia and the Portuguese based on Cape Verde. Each of the European powers backing these trade efforts sought secure a zone of influence that kept out competitors. In 1687, the Portuguese monarch, Dom Pedro II, increased the penalty for violating his ban of the sale of Cap Verdian cloths to foreign merchants—from the seizure of ‘illicit' goods and imprisonment to death.

Such efforts generally failed to have their desired effect, however. Nize Izabel de Moraes argued that the combined results of the French monopoly efforts on the Petite Cote — signing treaties with local rulers, imposing tariffs and seizing the vessels of the Dutch and other groups — was to kill off much of that region's export trade, including cloth, as African merchants went to other areas to avoid them. Polities where French influence was weaker found themselves benefitting from the local reaction against market control. For example, the kingdom of Saloum, an inland region of Senegal with an outlet on both the Atlantic coast and the Gambia river saw bigger markets during the 1680s when the French were keeping out competitors from trading towns elsewhere on the coast. Similarly, the Portuguese royal edict was unable to contain a trade in Cape Verdean cloths that became considered “indispensable” for commerce on the mainland

69 Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*.
70 de Moraes, “Le Commerce Des Tissus a La Petite Cote Au XVIIeme Siecle (Senegambia).”
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
through the end of the eighteenth century. It seems only to have set the stage for the growth of an illicit trade in these cloths that merchants from competing countries engaged in for decades.

African rulers and traders also undermined European mercantilist monopoly attempts because they frequently rejected attempts to limit their foreign trade options. In 1701, the Damel, or ruler, of the Wolof-speaking Cayor region, Lat Sukaabe Fal (1695-1719) ordered a group of his soldiers to take Andre Brue, the French director of the Compagnie du Senegal, prisoner for a month in June 1701. Before becoming the ruler of Cayor, Fal had been the ruler of the subsidiary Bawol and, like his predecessor Lambaia, he opposed French efforts to keep out European competitors and to control the amount of customs duties paid to Africans for the right to trade.73 Fal was trying to maintain his access to higher prices paid by the British. In addition to taking Brue captive, Fal imposed a commercial ban against traders in his territory and sent some of his soldiers in canoes to burn and loot French trading houses on Goree island.

Boubacar Barry has argued that this incident is emblematic of the period of the rising power of ceddo states— backed by armies of enslaved soldiers of various ethnic origins — that shaped the social and economic dynamics of the region. It also demonstrates a political dimension to the dynamics of cultural accommodation described earlier as integral to social interaction across the region. Fal had become Damel in the wake of the War of the Marabouts (1673-1677) a failed Islamic revival led from Mauritania by the Berber cleric Nasir-al-Din. Earlier rulers of Cayor had been among those criticized by al-Din for what he viewed as incorrect Muslim practices such as their patronage of griots, having more than four wives as prohibited by Islamic law and for selling Muslims into slavery. Those rulers fell to armies sympathetic to al-Din's vision although the clerics they swept to power were unable to retain power very long.

73 Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. 
Fal, who had been ruler of the neighboring Bawol polity, rose to power at Cayor in the context of lingering weakness among the traditional leadership there. He sought to consolidate power between the two African polities. As the new ruler, he aimed to increase social and economic stability by giving limited political roles to his harshest critics—Muslim clerics from the Futa Toro region—while at the same time ensuring that descendants of his matrilineage, the Geej, could succeed to the highest political office. Lucie Colvin argues that it is important to remember that the conflict in Cayor was effectively a dispute between Muslims (rather than between Muslims and “pagans”), as both rulers and their critics defended themselves through their own recourse to interpretations of Islamic law.

After receiving a ransom payment, Fal released Brue on June 1701, but the issues that had led to the detention remained unresolved for years to come. Fal and his successors were frequently in debt to the Compagnie du Senegal. Yet it remained true that Fal had succeeded in centralizing control of the ceddo, or enslaved soldiers, of Cayor who were key actors in the procurement of slaves for the export trade. In order to remain in power, and to effectuate his vision for the region, Fal needed access to the weapons and gunpowder he obtained through the Atlantic trade. But he also needed the textiles, beads, yarn and paper that embellished the lives of his clients and helped to secure their allegiance. Barry has argued that the rise of ceddo states in the region depended largely on access to goods obtained through the Atlantic trade which in turn relied on cycles of violence to obtain slaves. The ongoing political crises within Cayor and other polities also drew the French into the internal succession struggles — particularly as the rate of customs duties was

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74 Ibid.
76 Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. 
influenced by whomever was selected Damel.\textsuperscript{77} Even after Fal's death, Andre Brue would spend much of his 20-year tenure as director of the Compagnie du Senegal at Saint Louis seeking to undermine the unification of Cayor with Bawol that would have strengthened the bargaining position of Fal and his successors.\textsuperscript{78}

Cayor nonetheless represented a powerful counterweight to French ambition in northwestern Senegambia. A year after his detention, Brue was busy planning for the expansion of trade with Cayor, but in a context in which he describes the Damel as “more powerful” than before and able to command the highest prices for slaves at 30 bars per person.\textsuperscript{79} In a 1702 memorandum to the Royal Company of Senegal, Brue identified Cayor among sixteen trading areas within Senegambia where the French were already active and sought to expand their influence. These included posts across a substantial region of West Africa as far east from Saint Louis on the coast as Galam, about 300 miles inland and south to the Rio Nunez towards Sierra Leone. For each of these areas, Brue recorded information about what goods might be obtained there at what price, during what season and under what conditions. Included in this document is a separate page for the duties to be paid annually to the Damel of Cayor for the right of the French to trade in territories controlled by him. The duties list included twenty-five items with quantities of musket balls, knives, cavalry guns, buccaneer guns, pistols, iron and gun powder prominent of the required goods. Also listed were coral, different types of beads, paper, red and yellow wool yarn used for embroidery, bright red sheets, and taffeta scarves with fringes. The king was also to receive six aunes (about eight yards) of a French-made cloth called quintin for each slave and five aunes of the slightly more expensive India cloth.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Brue, “Memoire a La Compagnie Royal Du Senegal.”
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
The French interest in trading was not only in slaves but also in other commodities such as millet and cowhides. The trading ports outlined by Brue along the critical Senegal river valley included those at Terrier Rouge in the Futa Toro and posts along the desert side where Moorish traders brought Gum Arabic, a mordant vital to French textile production.\textsuperscript{81} French traders purchased Gum Arabic with Indian bafetas or guinees\textsuperscript{82}, a deep indigo-dyed cotton cloth, black and blue-dyed pagnes (local cotton cloths), iron bars and sheets of various colors imported from Europe. Brue made particular mention of the goods needed to support the trade in Gum Arabic, arguing that key chiefs controlling that trade should receive generous gifts. In a separate chart, he also seeks to stabilize prices paid for the largest amount of gum by specifying what quantity of imported goods would be acceptable for what quantity of gum. Here the indigo-dyed cotton India-made bafetas were valued at the same price as plain white ones and plain white French linen—10 aunes of cloth (about 13 yards) for one quintal of gum. The printed cotton India cloth indiennes were worth twice as much. Brue mentioned that the Company would probably have to increase the lengths of cloth it pays from 10 aunes to 12 aunes in order to keep the Moors from traveling to Arguin where they might potentially access Dutch traders for the cheaper varieties.\textsuperscript{83}

Even as Brue charted a plan to import large amounts of textiles into the region, local African producers were also sending their cloths to the same markets. Notably, elite women were key to the production of cloths as they were able to use their access to enslaved or indentured labor to spin cotton yarn, and to weave and dye cloth. Other women were also important to the distribution of textiles because they were frequently the sellers of it at local markets—in a pattern that was noted by European visitors throughout coastal Senegambia and Upper Guinea. In his

\textsuperscript{81} Riello and Parthasarathi, \textit{The Spinning World : A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850}.
\textsuperscript{82} There may have been a distinction between the two cloths or they may be different names for the same cloth.
\textsuperscript{83} Andre Brue, “Departement Du Senegal 29 Juin 1702” n.d.
report to the directors of the Compagnie du Senegal, Michel Jajolet de la Courbe mentioned how women from nearby villages traveled to the company store at coastal St. Louis to re-sell goods that they had procured at low cost from the interior.

I entered the store where one trades. I found there several women from Bieurt and other neighboring villages who had brought hides, millet and pagnes, or cotton stuffs, because it is they who conduct practically all the commerce of Senegal; they have many captives who they send very far inland to buy the hides that they carry more than fifteen leagues on their heads or on donkeys; they buy them at very low prices.84

De la Courbe continued that the women's involvement in trade in the region near Saint Louis was more extensive than that of local men who, except when they had one or two slaves to sell, limited themselves to fishing and farming.85 The common use of cloth as bridewealth also implicated women in the distribution of wealth between and within households—not only as brides but as key participants in a series of ritual commemoration of life cycle events: birth, circumcision, marriage, and funerals where the exchange or use of cloth held symbolic meaning.86 Thus, women were central to the circulation and distribution of cloth within the household and in the market. An extensive literature has documented the activities of “signares”, African or Eur-African women traders who typically established themselves through marriage to Europeans.87 In establishing trade with the French, Brue writes that some of the African women traders “under the pretext of selling merchandise” became sexually involved with the French traders in order to a get

85 La Courbe et al., *Premier Voyage Du Sieur de La Courbe Fait à La Coste d’Afrique En 1685*.
a better deal, or receive extra goods. His assertion that the women initiated these relations ("they
do not make love without interest") ignores the motivation of “single” men traveling in foreign
lands who likely pursued them for their own purposes. In any case, these relationships or coastal
“marriages” between African women and French traders worried company officials in France who
learned that their employees “used the most beautiful and the most precious of the Company's
merchandise to satisfy and to assuage the luxury of these (female) fornicators.”

The women's acquisition and display of costly goods was part of a general pattern that
overlapped with the production and trade of local and foreign textiles in the lower Senegal river
valley. De la Courbe mentions several encounters he had with elite African women in which they
were either extravagantly dressed in such fabrics or were directly involved in overseeing the
production of them. He described receiving a visit from two grown daughters of Fara Comba, a
ruler of the Waalo polity on the southern banks of the Senegal river who had been killed in fighting
with the Moors who lived north of the river. The women, accompanied by two servant girls and a
praise singer, were dressed in two “beautiful black pagnes with white stripes, one of which served
as a skirt that hung down to their feet, and the other they wore like a coat that dragged behind them
in a long train, distinguishing them from people of a lesser condition.”

In another instance, the first wife of the Brak, who de la Courbe refers to as “the sultan
queen”, visited de la Courbe at the riverside with a group of high-ranking women all riding
donkeys, along with two praise singers and followed by ten to twelve male valets on foot. “They
were all dressed up in pagnes that they wrapped around their heads in turbans that also served as
parasols,” he wrote. “In removing them, they revealed a small cap made of striped cloth that is the
mark of women of quality. Next, they removed the [upper] pagne to show themselves nude from

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88 La Courbe et al., *Premier Voyage Du Sieur de La Courbe Fait à La Coste d’Afrique En 1685*, 26 note.
89 Ibid., 143.
the waist up, except for the queen, who remained entirely covered.”

Later, de la Courbe visited the same woman (“la sultane”) at her home where he found her “seated at the foot of her bed…[with] five or six women around her, sitting on matts on the ground, who were spinning cotton. She stood as I entered. After I extended my hand and took off my hat, she bade me to sit next to her.”

In other words, the Africans who were buying cloth and other goods from Europeans were also making their own for local and regional markets. Such depictions highlight the active participation of women in the regional economy which, when it involved European mariners, included access to the maritime carrying trade moving African goods between ports in Africa. This process of distribution, which overlapped with pre-existing African land and maritime commerce, animated the production and consumption patterns of African elites and merchants, as well as thousands of their freeborn peasant and enslaved clients.

Brue's economic planning in 1702 called for the French to secure more Gum Arabic from Moorish traders by taking better advantage of African-made cotton cloth production, as these were saleable in desert-side markets. Local cloths were also valuable commodities further away, in Bissau, where the French bundled them other commodities such as guns, gunpowder, and brass pans and exchanged them for slaves. French traders could purchase 1,500 to 2,000 finished cloths each year at ports in the lower Senegal river, Brue noted, such as at Guilcard “when the cotton bushes are not destroyed by locusts” and twice that amount, between 3,000 and 4,000 cloths at upper river ports. Brue wrote that the carrying trade in locally made cloths along the Senegal

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
93 Brue, “Département Du Senegal 29 Juin 1702.”
river was “an important business to develop, as much for the cost advantages it gives us in the gum trade as for that of captives in Bissau.”

A few hundred miles south of Saint Louis, Bissau was a focus of intensified French trading interests in the last two decades of the 17th century. Here, unlike at the Senegal river valley, the French could present themselves as supporters of the Africans' free trade interests by providing an alternative to an effective monopoly imposed by the Portuguese. In February 1701, a few months before his detention by the Damel-Teen at Cayor, Brue traveled south to Bissau, where he successfully established new trade agreements with the Papel ruler, Incina Te, over the objections of the Portuguese. In this region, settlements of Portuguese, Luso-Africans and their clients were larger in number and more firmly entrenched than in the area around Saint Louis.

Travelers to the area frequently mentioned that Luso Africans, as well as some African rulers and traders of the area dressed in Portuguese fashion items such as cloaks, shoes and hats. Peter Mark has written that a characteristic of Luso Africans were their religious practices that blended Jewish, Christian and African elements. Contemporary observers such as Andres de Almada suggested that these clothing items reflected close associations between Luso-African traders and European merchants who traveled throughout the region together. For example, among the Luso-Africans were “many black women of the advanced kind, known as tangomas, because they serve the adventurers who go to those parts. These blacks, men and women, go with the adventurers from one river to another and to Santiago Island and other places. But our people do

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94 Ibid.
not take them without first obtaining permission from their fathers or their uncles.”

Communities of Luso Africans could be found throughout the Bissau region. Located on the mouth of the Rio Geba, Bissau sat amidst a densely forested coastline inhabited within a radius of a few hundred miles by several non-Muslim ethnic communities—including the Papel, Balanta, Brame, Biafada, Bijagos, Banyun, Feloup, Cassanga and others—who were in competition with one another for resources. Immediately inland from this coastal region was the Mandinka state of Kaabu, a centralized polity ruled by Muslims connected to the larger empire of Mali. Several scholars have argued that the social landscape of this portion of Upper Guinea was shaped by the ways in which residents had accommodated a series of newcomers over time. This began with the 13th century expansion of the Maninka from the Mali empire whose heartland lay a few hundred miles east and then repeated itself with the influx of Portuguese along the western coast from the 15th century. By the 17th century, the rulers of Kaabu found it difficult to gain influence through intermarriage with coastal groups because of the decentralized nature of authority in communities there. But this also makes clear the utility of the Portuguese and other Europeans to coastal Africans such as the Papel as an alternative to the encroaching influence of the Mandinka. At the mouth of the Rio Geba, the Portuguese had established a small fort under strict limitations imposed by the Papel.

Despite this, the French saw themselves as having made prior trade agreements on Bissau with the Papel, and trying to revive a once-vibrant trade in the area after exchange from that had flagged. The Papel ruler, Incina Te, agreed to Brue's request and allowed the French to trade in the region, but only after first presiding over a hearing in which he called the Portuguese governor of

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99 Hawthorne, Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900.
Bissau before him to explain their position. A description of Incina Te on this occasion indicates his relative wealth, power and access to a range of local and foreign luxury goods. He was:

dressed in a green mohair doublet, trimmed with silver frogs at the breasts and sleeves. A fine cotton cloth served him for breeches. He had on his head a red cloth cap, like a sugar loaf, with a double row of hemp-cord round the bottom. This last is the mark of the absolute power he has of making slaves. Four of his wives sat at his feet, all of his grandees stood round, but at some distance.  

Before announcing his decision to allow the French to trade in his port, Incina Te participated in a ritual around a large tree that was intended to seek the approval of local gods. The ritual was conducted by a priest “dressed in a parti-coloured jacket, like a harlequin, and hung with little bells.” An account of this scene claims that the outcome had been foretold when Brue “had taken care to second a favorable answer by the presents secretly given to the priest, the king's wives and the chief grandees” before the ceremony.

The Papel king's formal clothing, as well as the specialized attire of the priest interacted with the formality of French military uniforms in a discursive exchange of symbolic power. A ritual sacrifice of an animal to the xina spirits believed to inhabit the tree and the dripping of its blood over the shoes of the French commander seemed to consecrate the agreement between the two interested business parties. It is not clear from the sources the degree to which Brue himself was or was not impressed by the appearance of the rulers of Bissa and Cayor—an outcome which would have depended on a range of factors beyond dress alone. Yet the extensive recording of details of the kings' attire in French accounts indicate that there were considered important. An engraved image of Brue's arrest created a century later in Paris by Sebastian Leroy uses clothing

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100 Brue, “Voyage for the Discovery of the Lake of Cayor in 1714.”
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
to create strong visual contrasts between the French and the Africans. Brue is represented wearing full military attire including a tailored jacket with metal buttons, a waist-coat, breeches and leather boots and is forcefully defending himself with a long sword. By contrast, the African soldiers grabbing Brue are represented as shirtless and wearing simple white cloths wrapped around their waists while Lat Sukaable Fal, the Damel of Cayor, is represented as a kind of stoic elderly Greek patriarch. Standing near the center of the image away from the violence taking place around him, and appearing to direct his fighters in the foreground, the gray-bearded figure of Fal appears draped with abundant cloth over his left shoulder that hangs to just above his ankles.

The invented and imaginative nature of this representation is clear from the Africans' clothing to the foliage and thatched-roof buildings in the background, which are all more stylized than realistic. Further, contemporary descriptions of African officials such as the king indicate that they frequently wore loose-fitting tailored shirts with sleeves made of finely woven local cotton. Underneath this garment, which was typically embroidered around the neck, they wore pants made of ample amounts of cloth folded in the back that served as support when seated. De la Courbe met the king of Houale not far from Saint Louis who, seated on horseback, wore a similar upper garment made of “pagnes de Maures”, or Moorish cloth, that glistened with a shiny starched finish and was covered with gris-gris, or small pouches containing Muslim prayers that were believed to have protective properties.104 This king was very impressed with the Frenchman's garments, especially the knee-length coat with tails, but he did not like the European breeches which he said were too narrow, unlike the loose-fitting breeches worn in his country. The Brak asked that he be sent some of the same garments from France, and promised to pay de la Courbe three slaves for doing so. The details of De la Courbe's description create a different impression from some of the

104 La Courbe et al., *Premier Voyage Du Sieur de La Courbe Fait à La Coste d’Afrique En 1685*, 72.
visual imagery of the French in Senegambia circulating in Europe. For Durand, who published an account of his time in Senegal a century later, the arrest of Andre Brue, served to only re-brand France's long involvement in region to promote further expansion in the context of rivalry with the British. In the image of Brue's arrest, the visual allusion to a figure from ancient Greece communicates to viewers a kind of temporal difference between the French and the people of Cayor that was part of a larger “scientific” discourse that emphasized Africans' supposed racial and civilizational difference from Europeans.

Such 18th century European representations replaced the specificity and diversity of African clothing practices limited range of visual tropes. But a more complex picture emerges from other travel narratives, account books and other evidence. For example, after Bissau, Brue traveled to the nearby Bijagos island where he was met by an elderly, gray-bearded chief to a building that turned out to be a church, complete with chapel, benches and a heavy bell imported from Europe. The chief was not himself a Christian but had the chapel built to accommodate European visitors, such as Brue, to whom he extended trading rights. The local chief, who may well have been a trader, lived in a Portuguese style home with a porch where he sat on wooden chairs and stools. However, when the chief introduces Brue to the Bijagos king, he encounters an old man wearing only a single pagne and a matching cap. At the time, observers reported that women and girls on Bijagos wore “nothing about their waists but a thick kind of fringe made of reeds, which drops to their knees.” It is thus significant to note the suggestion that new consumption patterns appear to have been introduced onto the Bijagos islands with the European linens and wool cloths as well as the variety African-produced cottons which figured prominently on the list of most saleable items.

107 Brue, “Voyage for the Discovery of the Lake of Cayor in 1714.”
in local markets there.

The goods proper for the isles are yellow amber, baise, cloth, serges, red and yellow; brandy in large quantities, brass and copper bells, and fowling pieces, and yellow worsted; cotton cloths or pagnes; pewter plates, brass basons, linen of different sorts, with some few glass beads, red and black.\textsuperscript{108}

Indian cloth is not specifically cited in this assessment of trade goods useful at Bijagos, which contrasts from the demand for them noted along the Senegal river valley, at Goree and elsewhere. In either case, Brue and the Senegal Company were in a position to answer the market demand on Bijagos for imported cloth in a way that greatly surpassed what the Portuguese had previously brought to market.

To the north, a similar dynamic was underway along the Gambia river, where the British had also inserted themselves into cloth exchange networks, which helped to sustain their larger trading interests in the region. Francis Moore described trade in the products of the local weaving industry:

This day two Joloff people came to the island with some cloths to sell. The Joloffs make the finest kind of cotton-cloths, and that in large quantities: their pieces are generally twenty seven yards long, and never above nine inches wide; they cut them to what length they please, and sew them together very neatly, to make them serve the use of broader cloths. They clean the cotton from the seed by hand, and spin it by hand with spindle and distaff, they weave them with a shuttle and a loom of very plain, coarse workmanship…I have seen a pair of cloths so fine, and so bright dyed, as to be worth thirty shillings sterling.\textsuperscript{109}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 453.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{109} Francis Moore, \textit{Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa: Containing a Description of the Several Nations for the Space of Six Hundred Miles up the River Gambia; Their Trade, Habits, Customs, Language, Manners, Religion and Government; the Power, Disposition and Characters of Some Negro Princes; with a Particular Account of Job Ben Solomon, a Pholey, Who Was in England in the Year 1733, and Known by the Name of the African. To Which Is Added, Capt. Stibbs’s Voyage up the Gambia in the Year 1723, to Make Discoveries; with an Accurate Map of That River Taken on the Spot: And Many Other Copper Plates. Also Extracts from the Nubian’s Geography, Leo the African, and Other Authors Antient and Modern, Concerning the Niger-Nile, or Gambia, and Observations Thereon. By Francis Moore, Factor Several Years to the Royal African Company of England} (London: printed by Edward Cave, at St John’s Gate, for the author, and sold by J. Stagg, in Westminster Hall; and at St John’s Gate aforesaid, 1738).}
At the same time, cotton continued to be one of the regular commodities exported from the British fort at St. James island, though perhaps in only relatively modest amounts. In describing the productive landscape, Francis Moore noted the relative abundance of land to the density of population along the Gambia. The availability of land meant both that rulers of the agriculturalist Mande could be generous in allowing pastoralists to settle among them and build separate towns and that Fulas would simply “break up their towns and remove to another” if they felt ill-treated.\textsuperscript{110}

An accompanying image of a Fulani town—planned in a concentric circular form—suggests that cotton was grown directly behind rows of homes at the center of the circle. Moore's account confirms that cotton was grown not only for domestic use but also sold for export, noting that the local English factor, William Roberts, arrived on St. James in the boat Sea Nymph after a trading mission upriver carrying “a good quantity of cotton and beeswax.”\textsuperscript{111}

Thus European merchants in West Africa — whether backed by groups of private investors, state-funded ventures or acting independently as privateers — advanced their own trade interests by taking part in, and helping to expand existing commercial networks by carrying African goods between African ports in their ships. The carrying trade helped to build relationships with merchants who were relied upon to access slaves. It also facilitated access to commodities that were sought after in European markets. In the 1720s, British ships that collected thousands of tons of camwood from Bance Island and other ports in Sierra Leone and Sherbro. But they also delivered a variety of textiles from Europe, Asia and other ports in West Africa in order to purchase the camwood used to produce a bright red dye for the textile industry in Britain. Colleen Kriger's examination of 17th Century Royal Africa Company records has shown that the company supplied a demand on York Island for cotton shirts and breeches tailored on Cape Mount in contemporary

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 50.
Liberia.\textsuperscript{112} Company factors sold a combination of European woolens and Indian cotton cloths at Cape Mount to purchase the cloths that in turn secured camwood, ivory and wax from York Island. It was common to also include more expensive varieties of African cloth, such as barafulas and golozans produced on Cape Verde, along with Cape Mount garments as payment for commodities on York Island and rent to the local ruler. Company officials considered the camwood trade in the area important enough to have commissioned the making of imitation “Sherbro cloths” in Britain, some of which was sent to the Sierra Leone region in 1702, though a gap in the archival record makes it difficult to know whether the imitation cloth was ever successful.\textsuperscript{113}

But the example accords with a larger pattern of exchange through Senegambia and Upper Guinea even as the trade in slaves had become more important the trade in gold with Europeans from the middle of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Textiles were a major commodity that was traded between, and thus served to connect regional markets in West Africa. Local textiles were important to trade in Guinea, but so too were a variety of new cloths available via the Atlantic markets. More will be said below about consumption but an examination of the carrying trade in cloth reveals the regularity of exchanges, and that the quantity and variety of cloths exchanged suggest that it reached both elites and commoners. The combined tastes of a variety of consumers shaped the changing demand for particular kinds of cloth and affected distribution networks and market prices outside Africa. This study supports and extends Kriger's argument that pushes beyond a view that equates the “Atlantic” trade with slave trading towards a recognition that within Africa the Atlantic trade represented a complex system of multi-lateral exchange between diverse groups of people.

From the perspective cotton cloth, and other textiles, it is clear that the Atlantic trade distributed


\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
global commodities to West Africans that fed local productivity, flattered consumer tastes and introduced new ones.

Reading West African Consumption Patterns from Internal Regional Dynamics

The economic historian David Richardson argued in an influential article that consumption patterns along the West African coast had a significant impact on the structure, organization and profitability of English slave trading in the 18th century. Differences in consumer tastes varied greatly over space within West Africa and across time. For European merchants and investors, failure to attend to distinctions in local demand, or to send the right assortment of goods resulted in lengthy delays and higher prices for slaves in Africa. For Richardson, the study of West African consumption patterns (in his case through English export records) can be useful to shed light on the internal function of regional economies and societies, particularly in sorting out distinctions in the structure and robustness of those economies. Only a few years after the publication of Richardson's study, the historian Ray Kea published an exhaustive study of 17th century trade on the Gold Coast took Richardson's approach further. Kea not only revealed the internal dynamics of African societies in towns throughout the Gold Coast but did so by specifying details about hierarchical social groups—such as the elite afahene and the commoner anihumanifo among Akan speakers—and discussing them within the framework of Marxian analysis of the social relations of production. For Kea, analysis of these categories and the interactions between them is necessary in order to reveal the social relations of production that define the economic structure of the society in question.

114 Richardson, “West African Consumption Patterns and Their Influence on the Eighteenth-Century English Slave Trade.”
For the 17th century Gold Coast, Kea found that the elite afahene (“the big men”) enjoyed great public authority, social power and controlled large amounts of corporate and private wealth.115 In a context in which public generosity, public display and ceremony were highly valued, their wealth allowed the afahene to access beneficial trade, to organize feasts, to donate extravagantly to religious shrines and to support a large group of clients. Free commoners and slaves could not afford such public displays of wealth, but they were nonetheless consumers who satisfied their needs with lower cost items in the market. In terms of cloth, Kea found that afahene households consumed the more expensive African-produced cloths such as Mandinka, Benin and Ardra cloths as well as the finer varieties of imported cotton, linen and woollens.116 Commoners typically consumed the less expensive imported coarse linens, plain woolens and cotton Kwakwa cloths made in contemporary Ivory Coast. Those who could not afford even the cheapest imported cloth wore locally made bark cloth. Wealth allowed the elite to acquire and maintain loyal clients and to finance military campaigns. Since the redistribution of goods helped to reproduce the social power of the elites, they were the largest consumers on the Gold Coast. They invested heavily in textiles, and it was not uncommon for a person of means to possess dozens of varieties of local and imported cloth in his or her household.

Together the works of Kea and Richardson demonstrate not only the utility of attention to patterns of consumption for historians, but a detailed analysis based on that premise that reveals sharp social distinctions within and between communities in West Africa. This study will draw on these insights to construct and analyze similar dynamics in the Senegambia/Upper Guinea region, where West Africans purchased a wide variety of finished cottons, woolens and other cloths, amidst a backdrop of European competition for exclusive trading areas along the coast. Some of

116 Ibid., 319.
these cloths were produced in England—such as Welsh plains, perpetuanas (a wool or wool blend cloth made in England) and Manchester linens. Others came from continental Europe, such as silesias, woven in a region stretching across parts of contemporary Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. The British and French also obtained a plurality of the most sought after cloths from their trade operations in Asia, especially India, where they bought such cloths as calicoes, chintz, bafts, romals, photoes, culgees, allejars, bijautapauts, silks and ginghams.\textsuperscript{117}

Rather than directly transporting them from Asia to Africa, however, these goods reached Africans after first being imported to company stores in Britain or France and then re-exported. It was at this stage that coordination took place between producers and markets in Asia and markets in Africa and where access to updated and accurate information about both regions was critical. An example of the link between Asian textiles and slave trading in West Africa during what arguably were the best years of the British Royal African Company before its demise in the 1740s will further establish the context by illustrating the scale of the exchanges taking place. In 1724, John Brown, a member of the Company's Committee of Trade, agreed to loan the Company 6,300 pounds in order to purchase a quantity of “India Goods” that had been brokered for it by a Portuguese broker, Isaac de Faro on behalf of Lisbon-based merchants, De Bruyn and Cloots.\textsuperscript{118} The Committee of Trade was one of several within the Company that organized trade to, from and between British forts in Africa—including in this instance trade to the Gambia river and to Sierra Leone. As recorded in Royal Africa Company Minute books of the period, Committee directives to budget enough funds to pay for East India goods were a regular part of managing the African trade. Under the agreement, the Company was to cover the cost of insuring Brown's loan against

\textsuperscript{117} T70/60, “African House to Mr. Alexander Archbold Chief Factor at Sierra Leone” July 10, 1723, The National Archive, UK.
\textsuperscript{118} T70/124, “Royal African Company: Committee of Trade Minute Book” 1722 1725, The National Archive, UK.
loss. The value of a loan that size would be equivalent to over two hundred thousand pounds in the early 21st century. A few months later, Brown accepted repayment in “Lisbon bills.” 119 Such an arrangement illustrates not only the trans-regional nature of the networks that circulated commodities for sale in West Africa but the size of the investment officials like Brown were willing to make.

In western Africa, a wide variety of these Indian cloths was distinguished by their individual weight, fineness, price, finishings, the quality of the dye used to color them and whether they were hand-painted with designs, printed or plain. Indian-made blue “bafetas” or “bafts” were particularly sought after by the gum traders of the Futa Toro region. 120 But there were many other types of India cloth that were in demand along the length of the Senegal river valley. When De la Courbe met the mother of the Moorish king, Leydy, she was dressed in a black “salapoury”, a finely woven cotton cloth from India that she acquired through trade with the Europeans. 121 This elite woman gave the Frenchman a cow as a gift and informed him that her husband would soon send a large caravan of gum to trade. De la Courbe contrasts what he describes as the modest dress of this elite woman with that of her female praise singer whose less fine clothing was covered with gris-gris amulets that shook when she performed for her mistress. The social arrangement between the two women is reminiscent of the distinction drawn by Kea on the Gold Coast between nobles, or non-producers who owned or possessed the means of production (and retainers, or non-producers separated from the means of production). 122 It was possession of fields of acacia trees, and the slave labor to collect gum from them, that defined Leydy's relationship to the praise singer. The latter derived her sustenance from her mistress and had only limited means to interact with the market. Variations of that kind of social relation existed throughout Senegambia and Upper Guinea.

119 Ibid.
120 Brue, “Departement Du Senegal 29 Juin 1702.”
121 La Courbe et al., Premier Voyage Du Sieur de La Courbe Fait à La Coste d’Afrique En 1685, 170.
122 Kea, Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast.
Yet there were markets where people of differing means exchanged goods. At riverside fairs, merchants for the Compagnie du Senegal took special pains to prove to buyers that their India cloths were high quality—by burning both ends of the cloth to demonstrate the density of the weave—\(^{123}\) in order to guarantee the highest amount of African commodities in return. The demand for these cloths was such that company employees—both European and African—attempted to turn a profit from selling them independently. Andre Brue noted in his 1702 memo that such employees were to be prevented from doing so as “this greatly troubles our cloth business on the Senegal which should uniquely be for the Company.”\(^{124}\) Further east, Brue hoped to start receiving as many as 400 slaves annually by establishing a trading post along the Faleme river at Kainoura where he would send “good merchandise” such as a of Indian-made cottons, wool yarn, African-made cloths, and French-made woollens.\(^{125}\)

In the early 18th century, the Upper Senegal river valley where Brue hoped to expand was also drawing the interest of the British. The directors of the Royal Africa Company sought information about the possibilities for expanding trade in the region “above Galam” hundreds of miles north of their fort at Sierra Leone.\(^{126}\) The French had built a few forts in the late 17th century in the region of Galam, but abandoned them with the outbreak of War of the Spanish Succession in Europe. With the signing of a peace treaty at Utrecht in 1713, the British won the lucrative asiento contract to supply slaves to the Americas, while the French returned to the Galam region, continuing to push further inland along the Faleme river to advance Brue's earlier plan. The ultimate goal for the French was to be closer to gold mines at Bambuk and to caravans of slaves arriving from the Upper

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\(^{123}\) C 739, “Andre Brue, Memoire a La Compagnie Royal Du Senegal, 29 Juin 1702” (Departement du Senegal, 1702), Archives Departementales de Loire-Atlantique, France.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.

\(^{125}\) Ibid.

Niger valley. A 1726 French map of the region depicts a caravan route from “Bambara country” to the east passing in a long arc past the French fort at Galam, though in reality the loyalty of such caravans to the French was not guaranteed. To improve their chances, it was important to establish regular trade with goods and prices attractive enough to draw merchant caravans toward the French rather than towards the British. In this way, the consumers of the region affected the strategies of the European merchants seeking to reach them with their products, including such decisions as where to locate trading posts and how to stock them.

The British and the French were only the latest contenders for the region of fertile flood plains, near the confluence of the Senegal and Faleme rivers. Galam's location marked the confluence of several groups of Africans locked in a decades long struggle to control its agricultural resources and commerce. Much of the region was controlled politically by Soninke, but they faced challenges with regular raids from Moors across the Senegal river in contemporary Mauritania. Soninke authority was also challenged by the Fulani who founded a Muslim theocratic state at nearby Bundu in the 1690s, led by Malik Sy. This expansion of Fulani political power at Bundu would, over the course of the 18th century drive a wedge between Mande agriculturalists at Bambuk and at Wuli, along the Gambia. Similarly, the Fulani creation of an Islamic state in the Futa Jallon in the 1720s would have significant implications for Europeans trading in slaves at the coast of Sierra Leone, as state-organized raids resulted in thousands of slaves being sent to the coastal markets.

Still both the English and the French hoped their traders might access markets in the interior. Arriving there, French company officials found a complex set of competing interests on the ground. Writing from the Faleme in 1724, French India Company agent Sieur Levens described

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the enmity between the ruling Soninke and the neighboring Fulani, as well as the devastating raids by the “Moroccans”\textsuperscript{128} north of the river. Levens complained of the Soninke behavior toward the French even as he sought repeatedly to win their favor for trade.

“They are such an unreasonable people that there is no neighbor that they've had that they haven't turned into an enemy,” he wrote about the “Saracolets”, also known as the Soninke.\textsuperscript{129}

The Saracolet marabouts are too attached to their interests, besides being overly spiritual, to not desire a perfect union with the French fort…They are the ones who commerce in captives, the other negroes not troubling themselves to do so. And they have amassed riches that would be considerable among them were it not for frequent pillages made upon them by the Moroccan [sic] general.\textsuperscript{130}

Levens’ description of marabouts as religious figures and as traders neatly summarizes the historical roles played by this professional group across West Africa and the Maghreb. Linguistically and ethnically diverse, they shared a vocation and an avocation across a wide range of interpretations and circumstances. They were the embodiment of a trade diaspora whose linkages, like those of the Jewish traders mentioned above, extended to North Africa and had evolved over centuries— except in Africa their numbers were greater. In particular, the Soninke, sometimes called djula, were a desert-edge people associated with the gold-rich 8th century empire of Ghana who had been gradually dispersing southward over centuries. This longue duree process was driven in part by extended periods of drought and the expanding Sahara desert. Environmental change had the effect of dispersing Soninke clerical-commercial communities throughout Senegambia and Upper Guinea in a process that was not significantly interrupted until the colonial period.\textsuperscript{131} Their communities enjoyed semi-autonomy from states while their combined roles as

\textsuperscript{128} The Moors of the north side of the river were sometimes joined by soldiers from the Moroccan army whose king had an interest in controlling the Moorish emirates. See Boubacar Barry
\textsuperscript{129} Sieur Levens, “Compte Rendu Du Sieur Levens” July 10, 1725.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Philip D. Curtin, Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).
traders and clerics meant that they not only supplied markets but they likely also influenced consumer tastes toward Muslim standards of dress. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there provided the interface between European traders and a wider African public buying goods in the market. Not only were their trade networks extensive, but they had an increasingly large impact on the direction and outcome of transformative political events throughout the 19th century and beyond.

Across Senegambia and Upper Guinea, there were a number of ethnic groups that claimed descent from Soninke settlers but adopted local languages even as they continued their vocations as traders and clerics. Among these were the Jakhanke whose caravans trafficked in slaves and other commodities during the dry season and linked communities throughout the region near Galam. Related to the Soninke, the Jakhanke claimed to originally be from Dia, a town on the Niger river flood plain near Jenne. But they migrated southward, as early as the 15th century, to establish a commercial and clerical town, Jakhaba, on the Bafing river southeast of Galam where they promulgated the pacifist, trade-oriented tenets of one of the town's notables Al Hajj Salim Suwari. The ‘Suwarian' interpretation of Islam counseled Muslims to live in peace under non-Muslim authority. However, the fact that in doing so they were to nurture their own learning and faith in order to serve as good examples to others only further clarifies the impact that they likely had on shaping consumer demand across the region.

Soninke and Jakhanke marabouts engaged in similar activities but in the 18th century, Galam repeatedly became a theater of violence. Three small agricultural communities on both sides of the Faleme river trading independently in Galam, were subject to the routine raids from armies based in contemporary Mauritania. They were led by Arab and Berber soldiers from the north bank of the Senegal river and those from the kingdom of Morocco that were active there. The violence also extended further east into the gold mining lands of Bambouk which faced annual
raids from neighboring Khassonke. At least one king from the region encouraged French settlement in a bid to discourage these raids.\textsuperscript{132} This was an agenda that the directors of the Senegal Company were trying to advance in the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century with their trading posts along the Faleme river, further inland than any European trading posts in West Africa at the time.

At least two European sources from the period give an account of the evolving local exchange economy in which African groups competed. In the 1680s, Cornelius Hodges wrote that Jakhanke merchants employed slaves to produce cotton cloth that the merchants exchanged for gold at Bambuk. From there, they traveled northward to a desert-side market at Tarra to buy salt and slaves. They kept some of the slaves (mostly women and children) for their own use, and they sold others (mostly men) to Europeans on the coast. The merchants kept some of the goods obtained from Europeans in exchange for slaves, including European and Asian cloth, but another portion of these goods was sold in Bambuk to repeat the exchange cycle.\textsuperscript{133} However, the establishment of a theocratic state at Bundu in 1690 changed some of these dynamics. While on a journey to Bambuk in 1729, Claude Boucard observed this when he saw cotton being farmed and cloth being sold in nearby Bundu. Fulani residents there made “beautiful” strip cloths of seven bands each that were about three and a half “coudees” long (the length from the elbow to the tips of the fingers) and about six inches wide. These cloths were dyed a very dark shade of indigo and sold for about one “gros d’or” or pile of gold dust each.\textsuperscript{134} In Bambuk itself, Boucard claimed that the Fulani had “taken over” the cloth trade with these cloths that they sold to Maninka residents of the mining\textsuperscript{135} area. It is not clear from this text whether the Fulani cloth merchants had ousted the

\textsuperscript{132} Boucard, Curtin, and BoulÈgue, “Relation de Bamboue (1729).”
\textsuperscript{134} Boucard, Curtin, and BoulÈgue, “Relation de Bamboue (1729),” 257.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 275.
Jakhanke from the markets of Bambuk entirely but that is a possibility.

It should be clear from the above discussion that the intra-regional exchanges in the Upper Senegal Valley were frequently integrated into exchange networks on the coast. Their integration was uneven and dynamic in accord with changing circumstances across time and space. However, djula traders who could be found in Jakhaba, Tarra, Jenne, Segu, Kankan and Kong could also be found in coastal trading towns from Saint Louis in Senegal to those along the Gold Coast two thousand miles away. It is through their movements and activities that the contours of a regional demand for textiles begins to be revealed. In terms of the analytic scheme advanced by Kea, the djula traders would be among the elite consumers of the Senegambia and Upper Guinea region, analogous to the afahene of the Gold Coast, who controlled access to the means of production. Wherever the djula invested in cloth production, as they did at Jakhaba, they also supported a number of other local industries such as indigo dyeing, pottery (to build vats for the dye), embroidery and tool-making—thus they could be important players in the regional economy. The level of djula political power and social influence differed greatly according to local circumstances across a diverse space. Specifically, much depended upon their relationship to the local military and traditional elite. Their prestige was high in interior regions like Galam, even where it had to be shared by their Fulani co-religionists, while in coastal areas such as Bissau and Sherbro it was much more limited.

In those regions, the trader role was more often fulfilled by Eur-Africans or local African headmen, both of whom were obliged to pay customs duty to the local ruler. It was these coastal headmen and rulers who at the early part of the 18th century, in the flush of an expanding slave trade, received the steadily increasing flow of Europeans ships and their exotic commodities. A
1721 letter from an RAC factor seeking the delivery of items needed for trade at Cape Coast castle lists almost three dozen types of cloth, more than half of which were from India. The wide range of cloths—as well as requests for smaller-sized, cheaper varieties of some popular types—suggests that not all of these cloths were intended for elite buyers. Some of the indigo-dyed and plain white cloths were valued for their similarity to versions produced in west Africa, while others, especially the painted and stamp print varieties, were innovations.

The British factors at Cape Coast Castle requested that the Company send them special fabrics and other items intended as gifts to African rulers or prominent traders and their families. For the customary gifts needed to secure loyal trade relationships, the RAC requested three pieces of fine quality blue and four pieces of scarlet cloth, specifying that some should be embroidered “about one foot deep” with gold and silver threads and lined with silk. They also asked for a dozen “showish” gowns with caps and sashes, pieces of silk, several hats with feathers and brass helmets similar as one worn by one of the English merchants. Also included on this list of sixteen specific items were six pieces of “slight silks” intended for gifts to elite women, two dozen silver-headed walking canes embossed with the RAC coat of arms, and 30 silk flags of various colors embellished with the coat of arms—suggesting the cross-cultural transfer of elite status symbols.

For the African rulers and merchants, trade with the Europeans on the coast was not primarily about subsistence needs, although many of those needs were met through those exchanges. It was also about acquiring foreign novelties that helped to reproduce social relations of the region by conveying prestige upon those who possessed them. Much of the question of foreign trade turned on the prestige of the participants and those who could access foreign goods.

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136 T70/60, “African House to Mr. Alexander Archbold Chief Factor at Sierra Leone.”
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
in the market. When describing Bucknor Sano, Jobson wrote how the marabout arrived with his trade entourage wearing “his best clothes.” The salience of prestige as was implicitly acknowledged again by a British factor who wrote in 1721:

Those who make the most acceptable presents has [sic] the most friendship from them and tho' the Great Men are seldom traders, yet it is very much in their power to command and influence the trades to the place they recommend to them. The Dutch are very extravagant in their presents and without it, the Royal African Company's honour can't be maintained.

**Commercial agriculture for export**

In the early 1720s, the British Royal African Company was very much interested to pursue a number of agricultural projects on the West African coast. Its directors focused most on getting their factors to initiate the farming of indigo, cotton and pepper on land near Company buildings with the cooperation of local African rulers and using both English (or other European) company workers and African workers whether purchased slaves or free wage laborers called gromettas. A full century before the term “legitimate trade” was to become a buzzword among British proponents for the abolition of the slave trade, the Company directors envisioned that these proposed agricultural schemes were to be run simultaneously with ongoing trading in slaves, gold, ivory and other commodities.

In May, 1721, the Company directors were explicit in their instructions to their Chief Merchant Robert Plunkett, with whom they were in any case impatient after upbraiding him for allegedly slow and incomplete book-keeping. They wanted Plunkett to send them an estimate

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141 T70/60, “African House to Mr. Alexander Archbold Chief Factor at Sierra Leone.”
142 T70/60, “African House (London) to Messrs. Robert Plunkett and Abraham Knox Our Chief Merchant at Sierra Leone.”
for how much “wood, pepper, indigo, cotton, ivory and gold” he could send to England “every six weeks to two months.”

You are to use your utmost endeavours to improve the planting of cotton, indigo and pepper or to encourage the Natives in doing the same which will be of great advantage in fitting such ships and vessels as come directly back for England, and as we shall endeavor to send you over persons who are well skill’d in those manufactures, with proper engines and utensils relating thereto, we desire and direct you in order to the greater improvement: thereof to take such Number of slaves into the Company service as ye shall judge necessary for that purpose.

In promising to send skilled help to their base in Sierra Leone, the directors were thinking of enslaved young men from their Caribbean colonies who could be “trained” to grow cotton and indigo and sent to work in the African coastal forts. They also promised to search for English men skilled in those crops to send to the African coast. In July 1722, they sent Plunkett's successor, Mr. Archbold, written instructions from Jamaica about how to plant and manage indigo saying they desired that “no time may be lost in your beginning to work thereon.”

As an incentive, the Company offered its factors three percent “upon the net sale over and above the Commission already settled by the court to be divided in proportion as the other commission is, and the allowance to continue for seven years.”

Company board members were in search of any profit making opportunity on the coast. This speculative experimentation with potentially lucrative crops from West Africa occurred in a context where there was similar experimentation in English colonies in the Americas and competition with other European mercantilist operations as well as free agent pirates or

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144 T70/60, “African House (London) to Messrs. Robert Plunkett and Abraham Knox Our Chief Merchant at Sierra Leone.”
145 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
“interlopers.” When the directors learned from a ship captain of indigo processing cisterns on Tasso island built by an earlier generation of Portuguese, they wanted to repair these to use as part of what they imagined would be an expanded production of the “very valuable commodity” of indigo.

They instructed their factors to gather information about local industries, such as for indigo cloth dyeing, and about plants useful for medicines or industry from merchants arriving to the coast from the interior. Factors were even to question slaves purchased and held for domestic use in the Company factory about their homelands. “What sort of meat, drink and clothing [do] they have and whether any manufactures? And if they have in what manner, of what materials they are worked and to what uses applied?”

It is difficult to assess how British factors and local Africans received Royal African Company proposals. But the tone of the responding correspondence was decidedly less sanguine than that of the Company directors. A summary of Plunkett's letter to the Company in April 1722 notes that he agreed to send back samples of local pepper and to purchase slaves to clear land and farm cotton and indigo. However, Plunkett refers repeatedly to the deaths of Company carpenters and soldiers on the coast from tropical illnesses. He was also pessimistic about another director-proposed scheme that locally woven mats from Sherbro could be a viable and regular export to England, where they could be used for chair backs and seats. The RAC had ordered Plunkett to have 10,000 of them made using the labor of a group of formerly enslaved African

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148 T70/60, “African House (London) to Messrs Robert Plunkett Chief Merchant at Sierra Leone and the Council There.”
150 T70/7, “Rio Sierra Leone...Mr. Plunkett Writes” April 4, 1722, The National Archive, UK.
151 T70/60, “African House (London) to Messrs Robert Plunkett Chief Merchant at Sierra Leone and the Council There.”
women who Plunkett had redeemed from their captors. They even sent Plunkett design patterns that they wanted to have woven into the mats. On Sherbro, the rattan mats were reportedly colored using dye extracted from a local berry and used for bedding. It is not clear from the sources how the women were to be paid and a visiting surgeon reported that Plunkett was not able to order the production of such a large quantity. “To my certain knowledge, it was with the greatest difficulty he cou’d get so much rattane, and as many as hands to manage those few he sent for a sample.”

Plunkett himself did believe that there was potential to increase the production of both cotton and indigo on the coast. But he rejected the idea that such work would be done by the Africans. “If nothing better than this matt trade can be proposed,” he wrote. “The African stock must fall.”

Plunkett paints a fairly harsh picture of conditions around the Bunce Island fort and the nature of the trading community that had grown up around it—at least in the 1720s.

“Your honors have thrown a great deal of mony [sic] away in those Cambletts, Silk Druggetts and trimming having sent them without a tailor to make them which if I had one might chance sell them therefore desire you will send one over at first opportunity else you may expect

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153 T70/7, “Bence Island, Sierra Leone...Messrs Plunkett and Archbold Write” June 30, 1722, The National Archive, UK.
154 Houstoun, Some New and Accurate Observations Geographical, Natural and Historical. Containing a True and Impartial Account of the Situation, Product, and Natural History of the Coast of Guinea, so Far As Relates to the Improvement of That Trade, for the Advantage of Great Britain in General, and the Royal African Company in Particular. By James Houstoun, M. D. Humbly Address’d to the Honourable the Court of Assistants of the Royal African Company of Great Britain, 10.
155 Ibid.
156 T70/7, “Bence Island, Sierra Leone...Messrs Plunkett and Archbold Write.”
them all to be rotten; turnovers and stocks they never will sell for we do not take that pride in dressing here, as they may do elsewhere, we being made more for slaves than gentlemen,” he wrote.\footnote{\textit{T70/23, “Rec’d 28 October, Mr. Plunkett Writes” July 10, 1721, The National Archive, UK.}}

Despite Plunkett's pessimism, however, the directors continued to press him and other factors along the coast to develop agriculture for export. A year later, they expressed satisfaction with the quality of the Sherbro mats and requested more information about how much the factors were paying for them.\footnote{\textit{T70/60, “African House to Mr. Alexander Archbold Chief Factor at Sierra Leone.”}} The directors pointed to the success of rice plantations in Carolina, North America as an example of their hopes for agricultural produce from Africa.

\begin{quote}
The people of Carolina not many years since began with one poor bag of rice and now they furnish a great part of Europe with that commodity,” the directors wrote in 1728 to their Sierra Leone at the time, Walker Charles. In Africa, “there is nothing wanting but care and some expense to improve them (cotton, indigo and pepper) to any degree, as to quantity as well as quality.\footnote{\textit{TNA, 18 July 1728 #755}}
\end{quote}

Still, European efforts to develop export agriculture in West Africa continued to provide them only disappointing results throughout this period. Access to land and control of labor were two key issues that distinguished the Europeans' potential for commercial farming in Africa from that of the Americas. In Africa, Europeans were limited by how much land they could procure from African rulers and how much control they could establish over their operations there. Indeed one argument for the supposed suitably of the farming scheme in Sierra Leone was the presence there of a number of a smaller islands that the British believed they could sufficiently control and protect from both Africans and other Europeans.\footnote{\textit{Houstoun, Some New and Accurate Observations Geographical, Natural and Historical. Containing a True and Impartial Account of the Situation, Product, and Natural History of the Coast of Guinea, so Far As Relates to the Improvement of That Trade, for the Advantage of Great Britain in General, and the Royal African Company in}}

Over the 17th and 18th centuries, the British and
French had eliminated Portugal’s dominance in the West Africa trade, limited to the rivers near Bissau. However, the Portuguese benefited from the most productive and enduring European export agriculture and industry in the region with their plantations on the Cape Verde islands that continued to support trade on the mainland.

**Conclusion**

References to locally grown cotton and to cloth weaving appeared in some of the written earliest accounts of visitors of West Africa, beginning with an 11th century account of cotton cloth in the Senegal river valley by Al-Bakri and were repeated with early reports by Portuguese and other visitors in the fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century, additional European maritime merchants became involved in Africa in the context of an expanding, competitive trade linking parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Raw cotton and finished cloth were key commodity exchanged throughout all parts of these networks. In West Africa, the production and sale of raw cotton as well as a carrying trade in finished cloth between African ports gave Europeans an early point of reliable exchange with African traders. They also profitably re-exported Indian cottons to West Africa as a major supplement to their sales of European woollens and linen cloths there. Through the intermediary of European maritime traders, consumers in West Africa were being brought into relation with European and Asian textile producers in novel ways at a time when the British and French sought to limit the impact of Asian cloth on their own markets. Africans purchased a wide variety of these cloths at a time when the export trade in African slaves was expanding. The distribution and consumption of these textiles were shaped by the

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Particular. By James Houstoun, M. D. Humbly Address’d to the Honourable the Court of Assistants of the Royal African Company of Great Britain, 11–12.

activities of djula traders whose networks extended across a vast politically volatile region. Interested in the possibilities as African sources of raw cotton to supply their own weaving industries, European company officials of the 17th and early 18th centuries sought to organize commercial farming on rented land from African rulers at various points along the coast from Sierra Leone to Ouidah. The Dutch and English did export limited amounts of raw cotton from these operations. But these early efforts were hampered by several factors including a hostile disease environment and a shortage of skilled labor. This chapter suggests that far from being a passing curiosity or irrelevant to the central activity of slave trading, African production of cotton and cotton goods, as well as the consumption of foreign textiles, were critical elements facilitating the expansion of European trade in Africa through the period, though dwarfed by both the value of gold and ivory and the scale and human suffering of slave trading.

CHAPTER TWO.
VIEW FROM THE SAVANNAH (1740-1780)

When the women saw the cloth [Sonsan] had made,
The Maraka men never wove again for the Maraka women.
Whenever a Maraka would ask a woman if it was time to do her weaving,
The woman would reply,
“If the Bamana will do the weaving it is time to weave,
But if somebody else is to weave my wool I will wait.
I will not give my wool to anyone but the Bamana.”

Excerpt from the epic ‘Sonsan of Kaarta’ as related by Djeli Mamary Kouyate

‘If you get me a magnificent bubu, a bubu fit for a great chief, I will impregnate it
with such magic power that when Foulakoro puts it on, the town of Sonsanna will
be yours!’

Claim reportedly made by a marabout to Sonsan’s rival, the ruler of Segu, as
recorded in Legendes historiques du pays de Nioro.

Introduction

Over three days in August 1975, the Malian traditional oral historian Jeli Mamary Kouyate
performed for American researcher David Conrad and his assistants a narration of the founding of
Kaarta in the early eighteenth century. Kouyate's recitation took place in the town of Kolokani, in
the region of Beledugu, which was located in terrain once controlled by Kaarta before the French
colonial state formally displaced it in the 1880s. The Kaarta state emerged over time from a region
within a stretch of unevenly fertile scrublands of the savannah between the nutrient rich and
densely populated Senegal river valley (and its tributaries) in the west and the equally fertile Niger
river valley to the east. It was an area where the amount of rainfall produced climate and soil

1 Jeli Mamary Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta” (oral historical narrative, Kolokani, Mali, August 19, 1975) lines 738-44.
conditions that were more favorable to cotton farming than on many areas of the coast. Cotton was farmed extensively across this region which sent its products, including textiles and grain, to Saharan markets in exchange for salt and to Atlantic markets in exchange for kola, European metalware, weapons and other goods.

A number of historians have found that the polity known as Kaarta was established by a scion of the ruling Kulibali lineage of Segu in the early eighteenth century. Fleeing a succession dispute at the town of Segu-Sikoro on the Niger river, Sounsan Kulibali was said to lead a group of followers from Segu away to “the lands of the Kare” (in Bamana: “Kaarta”) where their hosts were members of the Serakhulle lineage of Kare in the northern savannah between the Senegal and Niver river valleys. At Kaarta, the ruling Bamana-speaking Kulibali lineage intermarried with Serakhulle Muslims, a practice that consolidated their authority which began to spread over ever more territory on the basis of the military prowess of their followers. In time, Kulubali descendants and their clients maintained an exalted place in Kaartan society, and a ethos of exclusivity partly through their control of an oracle called bouri or silama that incorporated mystical authority into judicial proceedings. As John Hanson has noted, much of Kulibali influence stemmed from the activities associated with non-Muslims such as blacksmiths, royal slaves known as ton-jon who distinguished themselves as fierce fighters identified by particular forms of clothing and consumption of local beer (dolo), and priests who manipulated the oracle. Some of Kaartan elite incorporated Muslim-made amulets into their clothing but as a group they were said to only rarely observe Islamic rituals and prohibitions. For much of its existence Kaarta was thought of by its

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4 Terms given and described a century later in Raffenel as an ‘ancient’ ‘Bambara’ practice. Anne Raffenel, *Voyage dans l’Afrique Occidentale : Comprendant L’exploration Du Sénégal ... Exécuté, En 1843 et 1844, Par Une Commission Composée de MM. Huard-Bessinieres, Jamin, Raffenel, Peyre-Ferry et Pottin-Patterson* (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1846), 283.
5 John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta*. 

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neighbors as a non-Muslim polity, and this fact shaped both regional politics and Kaarta's own fortunes throughout the 19th century.

For almost a century and a half, this newly composite Kaarta operated as an expansionist state power through war and trade in a region of commercial and political rivals. These included those of the king of Morocco and of Moorish groups north of the Senegal river, those of the Bamana state at Segu to the east and those from Muslim polities at Khasso, Gajaaga, Bundu and Futa Toro to the south and west. The political organization of rulers and their respective armies at Segu, Khasso and Bundu are all thought to have emerged in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries, suggesting it was a period of turbulent and active trading and raiding, with large markets and an intense struggle to control them. Throughout its apogee, raiding parties from Kaarta sent large numbers of slaves into Atlantic and Saharan slave markets, a process that related to the importation and consumption of foreign made textiles in such large numbers that, by the 1840s,6 imported Guineen cloth from India that it was identified in French accounts as local currency.

Both imported and locally produced cloth were intimately tied to the social and economic life of the western African savannah of the mid-eighteenth century, although this is difficult to reconstruct in detail for analytical purposes from written sources, which are more abundant for coastal areas and present only episodic and generalized views of towns and residents of the interior. A few accounts, such as that by Pierre David of a journey in the 1740s to the gold mines of Bambuk, break with this general pattern and offer valuable information about dynamics along the Faleme river that branches south from the Senegal river east of Galam, a few hundred miles east of the Atlantic coast. But more first-hand European accounts of areas such as the eastern Gambia,

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6 Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 269.
the Futa Jallon and the Niger river valley were still decades away. David traveled to the Faleme in his capacity as director of the Senegal concession of the French India Company where his father also held a high-ranking position from his base in France. David sought to gain for the French India Company access to gold mined in the Bambuk region along the Faleme. His family connections within the French India Company suggest the direct linkages such a proposal to pursue gold in West Africa would establish between that region and producers in Asia where the Company had gained entry into major textile markets of India whose goods were in demand among both African and European consumers. Thus David's account reveals something of the “global” nature of African and European commercial exchanges, and also indicates the reach of these exchanges into the more heavily populated regions inland from the Atlantic coast.

Oral accounts offer some additional insight but can be limited in terms of their perspective, scope and capacity to be mapped neatly onto western temporalities and conceptual frameworks. Oral accounts of at least two major polities flourishing here in the 1740s—Kaarta and Khasso—do suggest that cotton cloth was an important part of the savannah economy and its relationship with its neighbors. Over the longue durée, the interactions of the agricultural Mande-language speakers and pastoralist Fula-speakers lend coherence to the dynamics of change across both regions, as both groups migrated throughout Senegambia and Upper Guinea in the past several centuries. Local conditions produced shifting alliances between these groups in different areas across the space. This chapter will draw on oral narratives more extensively than the other chapters of this study in order to critically engage African historical discourses about the period that do not foreground the major thematic concerns and conventional periodization of western

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historiographies. Where possible it integrates evidence drawn from European archival documents about the savannah, the trans-Saharan commerce and commerce along the coast.

In 1748, as political and commercial actors within Kaarta and Khasson flourished in the savannah, a new group of English investors bought the factory at Bance Island, in a Sierra Leone coastal outlet, from the Royal Africa Company. It was located a few hundred miles south of the major interior market towns at Labe in the Futa Jallon, Galam on the Senegal river and in Kankan-Bate in the savannah region watered by branches of the Niger river. Traders from the gold-mining region of Bambuk as well as those from the Faleme river also interacted with Bance Island along with an array of smaller posts north and south along the coast. At Bance Island, the investors Grant, Oswald and Company and John and Alexander Anderson soon began profiting from a new British policy turn favoring the expansion of private traders to considerable prosperity. This was a period of rapid expansion in slave trading at Bance Island which saw its transformation from a disease-prone backwater that had been abandoned after a 1728 attack from a competing Luso-African trader into a busy port famous for the luxuries available to resident merchants in the second half of the eighteenth century. Imports of India cloth were a key part of the partners' business strategy as a few of them were also major investors in the East India Company which helped to secure their privileged access to these goods. One partner, John Boyd, served as a Director of the East India Company for much of the 1750s and 1760s, used his influence to benefit trade operations on Bance Island with favored access to trade goods desirable in markets near there. In the same period, British governors took over trade operations at the French forts at St. Louis, Senegal and Albreda on the Gambia river for twenty years between 1763 and 1783, as a result of

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10 Ibid., 177.
11 Ibid., 218.
its victory in the Seven Year War with France. At Fort St. Lewis, Senegal, Governor O'Hara prioritized British access to the gum Arabic trade, important to textile manufacturing industries in Europe, but also advanced a scheme to develop cotton plantations for export throughout the 1770's.

Beginning with Kaarta in the savannah region, but considering evidence from neighboring at Khasso, the Faleme river valley and markets at Jenne and Timbuktu, this chapter asks a number of questions about the regional cloth economy that crossed ecological and political frontiers of the region. What does a focus on cloth and clothing reveal a range of social relationships implicit in the narration of such events as the rise of a major savannah polity at Kaarta? What is revealed about the negotiation between traditional and Islamic authority in this period through an examination of clothing and consumption? How can traditional oral and written sources critically inform one another to illuminate how consumers in the western savannah interacted with “global” markets for cotton cloth during this period?

A reading of the representation of weaving, textiles and social relations in the Sonsan narrative suggests their roles in state building and in mediating cultural and religious differences in Kaarta. It also suggests some of the ways in which residents of the savannah may have interacted with external markets across the Sahara and on the Atlantic coasts. Insights from these transcribed oral traditional sources can be read productively against those drawn archival documents with contemporary witness accounts or data from the region. Together they show the reach of imported European and Indian textiles from the Atlantic coast into the savannah and suggests the ways in which these imports intersected with local consumption patterns and practices.
Djeli Mamari Kouyate's oral narrative of the origins of a major Bamana-speaking state of the eighteenth century, “Sonsan of Kaarta,” unfolds over 2,300 lines and 60 pages in English transcription. It tells the story of a Bamana noble from Segu, the charismatic Sonsan Kulubali, who was chased from his father's home by jealous brothers and found welcoming refuge in a town controlled by ethnic Maraka Muslim traders, using the Bamana-language term for the northern Mande-speakers identified in European sources alternately as “Serakhulle” or “Sarakholle.” In Bamana-speaking societies, certain lineages of agriculturalists sat atop a three-tiered social hierarchy that included caste-like social strata of nyamakalaw (including blacksmiths and praise-singing bards) and the enslaved. With the nobility associated with agricultural, and ritual control

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12 Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta.”
of land, Bamana-controlled communities differed from their neighbors where pastoralists and Muslim clerics and merchants were the dominant influencers. Emily Osborn, having examined a range of Maninka oral traditions of which the Bamana traditions form a part, has identified the Manding linguistic and conceptual term, *fadenya*—or household conflict in patrilineal, polygynous households between children of different mothers and the same father—expressed as a trope of sibling rivalry within many of the great hero narratives of Manding oral tradition beginning with that of Sunjata, the thirteenth century founder of the Mali empire.\(^{13}\) The narrative of Sonsan, and its story of jealousy between brothers in the ruling Kulibali clan of Segu, expresses *fadenya* as an explanation for Sonsan's migration away from Segu on the banks of the Niger river to lands far west. Other scholars might associate the narrative of Sonsan with a pattern in oral historical narratives from the western savannah an in-migrating conquering hero or group.\(^{14}\) The Sunjata narrative might equally be analyzed from this perspective, in which marriage between incoming individuals and groups (i.e., “strangers”) and members of the host society (“landlords”) constitute a central element of the narrative.

Like many other narratives of the savannah, Djeli Kouyate's account of Kaarta includes references to cotton and cotton textiles which were a major feature of the market exchanges and social life in the region. Kouyate related that Sonsan endeared himself to his Maraka hosts through his talents as a weaver, a narrative which suggests that cotton was among the items grown in the region, that local cloth had market value and that it could and often did mediate important social relationships, such as those between landlord and stranger, Muslim and animist as well as between prospective marriage partners. Kouyate's narrative relates how the weaver Sonsan fled from a


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 28.
succession dispute at Segu to acquire land for himself in the lands of the Kare, and how he gradually won independence from his Maraka hosts, beginning with the successful cultivation on land that the Maraka had once considered an off-limits sacred grove.\textsuperscript{15} This narrative suggests that the negotiation between the two individuals (and by implication between the two groups, Bamana and Maraka) for land, expressed itself partly as a struggle over ritual and spiritual authority. These struggles had spatial implications— the outcome set who could determine which places were to be safeguarded as ritually sacred, used for agricultural production, or as a market space, for example — have been usefully analyzed in studies of Sierra Leone and Guinea by Allen Howard and this study will also draw on that work.\textsuperscript{16} The negotiation of social relations described in Kouyate's narrative “Sonsan of Kaarta” also likely obtained in many other settings across the savannah, between different sets of players, although with similar issues in play. As is evident in a close reading of Kouyate's narrative, this negotiation of interests between and among regional groups expressed itself partly through clothing and bodily adornment which functioned as symbols or expressions of an individual's affiliations, status and concerns.

With regard to Kouyate's narration, it is noteworthy that in order to convey the founding of Kaarta he must take an extended detour through the founding of Segou, its parent state, showing the close association between the two. He does so with almost no direct comment on either the trans-Saharan or Atlantic slave trades (with one notable exception, to be discussed below) which have been the almost exclusive focus of so many professional historians from outside Africa.

Instead Kouyate’s narration about the heroic figure Sonsan of Kaarta is set within a discursive tradition of Islam that is intersected by a series of non-Muslim or even anti-Muslim

\textsuperscript{15} Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta.”
discourses. Characters are described as having a range of engagements with the faith, from expressions of sincere devotion to open rejection of the faith and its practices. Similarly, there are references to a range of ritual practices from performing daily ablutions and going on pilgrimage to Mecca to the consultation of diviners, conversations with spirit djinns and the taking of blood oaths. In a key opening episode, Kouyate described three ancestors of Sonsan as having fought for the Prophet in “the battle of Khaybar,” which he then goes on to explain is “actually” the Malian city of Kayes. This narrative device inscribes local historical events into the narrative of seventh century Muslim expansion led by Muhammad in the Arabian peninsula—and by so doing it imbues the story with a double-meaning. The reference to the Prophet suggests that the narrator has collapsed large amounts of time into a narrowly telescoped series of events, or perhaps simply an expression of the centrality of Islam, and its history in the region, to Kouyate's narration.

Read in the context of Muhammad's wars to conquer territory in the early period of Islam, it seems significant that Kouyate linked the founding of Kaarta structurally in this account to a religious war at Kayes. The town lay close to the Senegal river just above Galam, the crossroads of much regional trading activity. It was also situated in a zone where religion and access to resources such as weapons, enslaved captives and gold were primary causal factors in the expansion of violence through raids and counter-raids between groups that took place. Kouyate's narration of the battle of Kayes (“Khaybar”) locates the event within the temporal frame of the successful establishment of Islam.

When the country had been destroyed, the leader asked them if they wanted a place in paradise. This was not just any chief. This was the Prophet. They had helped him in the battle of Kaybara. He said, “Do you not want a place in paradise?” They replied, “Bobbing up and down all night, Bobbing up and down all day to gain such a reward. We have no time for that.” So the Prophet said, “Very well, What would you like instead? We want powder and bullets,” they said. “Very well, they are
yours,” said the Prophet, “And good luck to you.17

Kouyate's narrative is suffused within an implied telos of the triumph of Islam (“a place in paradise”). Yet Sonsan's ancestors are portrayed as more interested in acquiring weapons than in praying. That the Prophet matter-of-factly complies with the men's wishes makes this one of a number of moments throughout the text in which interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims are presented in fairly neutral terms. The Prophet's statement of “good luck” to the warriors is ambiguous. However, notably absent from this account are the explicit references to pagans, infidels or non-believers that are fairly common in European-language sources of the period. From this encounter with the Prophet, these warriors migrated to establish new settlements. They are said to earn the lineage name “Kulubali” based on an incident during these migrations in which they purportedly used magic to cross a river without a canoe. Etymologically, the name is said to be a contraction of the Bamana language phrase, ‘mun ye kurun beli’, or ‘those who go before the canoe'. One of the settlements the Kulubali established was Segou, which later became the capital of an expansive Bamana state, from which the scion Sonsan later branched off to establish Kaarta, with its center at Guemou.

Although Segu was famously ruled by non-Muslims throughout the 18th century, Kouyate relates that Segu was actually named for a Quranic student, Sekou, who, after a lesson with a “Muslim teacher… from the North”, died suddenly of a stomach illness. The Muslim teacher is not named, however, he is said to have written the following prayer on a flat rock above the dead students grave: “May Allah cause the fourteen sides of the world to hear the name of this town. May Allah never cause this town to be hidden from the rest of the world.”18

17 Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta.”
18 Ibid., lines 92–93.
Although the town is named for the Quranic student, credit for founding Segu in Kouyate's narration goes to the non-Muslim Tigiton Kulubali, whose name could refer equally to an individual or to a type of individual, suggesting that the person described might be a composite character. It might also be the case that the actions of Mamari Kulubali (also referred to as “Tigiton” or “Biton”) exemplified the qualities of a “tigi” which in Bamana language may have the connotation of master, leader or owner and “ton” refers to a social group of men who work collectively as warriors, farmers or hunters. The name of Segu's founder thus could be read to mean “the leader of the ‘ton’ who used magic to cross the river without a canoe.” These are among the multiple ways in which Islamic and non-Muslim aspects of the region's past are presented in dynamic interplay throughout the Kouyate's narration. Nevertheless, certain elements imply the ultimate triumph of Islam, such as the prayer written on rock and statements the storyteller himself who ends the entire story by praising Allah.

Tigiton Kulubali married a Muslim woman who, unable to bear children, went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to ask the blessing of an imam in Jeddah. Historians such as Nehemia Levzion have referred to the child she eventually bore as the first ruler of Segu, Biton Kulubali. Levzion argued that it was important politically for rulers of Segu of this period to balance allegiances to traditional religious elites and Muslim elites, citing one Kulubali descendant killed for doing so.

‘Twelve meters of new cloth'

Born into the founding Bamana lineage of Segu, Sonsan is portrayed as a child so popular

20 Ibid.
with everyone in his father's home that he made his older brothers jealous. They plotted to kill him in order to remove the threat he posed to their possible inheritance. Thrown by his brothers into a well where they pelted him with rocks and expected him to die, Sonsan survived. His mother and sister eventually rescue him by dropping into the well “twelve meters of new cloth”\textsuperscript{21} that they used to pull him to safety. The image of “new cloth” suggests the relative wealth of Sonsan's family which had access to such a valuable commodity produced by a local weaver or possibly even purchased in trade. At the same time, the number twelve echoes the original number of Mande families from whom Sonsan is said to descend, while the mention of cloth prefigures the specific craft and labor, textile weaving, that will become the guaranteed source of his “destiny and fame.” Such language associated with the founder of the Kaarta polity suggests an important place for textile weaving in the symbolic representations and memory of the state itself.

With the help of his mother and sister, Sonsan fled Segu, traveling northward (where for centuries the region's trade had been oriented to markets across the Sahara) to eventually seek refuge in at a settlement called Dorko, another town controlled by Maraka Muslim traders. Kouyate's narrative of Sonsan's travels delineates a social and economic geography of towns, such as Dorko, Gwegwa and Sonsana, which are all place names that do not much appear in European records, if it all, but may allow contemporary historians to better map Kaarta's commercial ties with both Atlantic and trans-Saharan regions. To endear himself to his new hosts by making himself useful in his new home at Dorko, Sonsan asks the Maraka chiefs for balls of cotton to “keep my hands busy.” The mention of this request in Kouyate's narration is matched by references in 18\textsuperscript{a} century European written sources that describe how in Bundu, for example, itinerant weavers traveled from village to village seeking patrons with spun cotton who wished to pay for

\textsuperscript{21} Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta,” line 645.
their services, usually paid for with an exchange of a local commodity such as rice, millet, fowl, iron or even gold dust. This pattern of exchange between local patrons with quantities of spun cotton (farmed, harvested, cleaned and spun by household members) and itinerant weavers was also described by several djeliw, or traditional oral historians, in Kankan, Guinea, when speaking of the Milo river region and areas southward during the 18th century.

In Kouyate's narrative of Sonsan, the Bamana noble works the cotton given to him on a loom and finishes by impressing everyone with the quality of his woven cloth. Kouyate interrupted the narrative of this section with a song with elements of onomatopoeia and Mande theoretical concepts:

Chi cho,
Dossokolodo,
Chi cho,
Chi cho,
Chi cho chi,
Bayee bayee.
Whoever speaks to sons of the numuw,
The sons of numuw who are there,
The sons of numuw who are there,
You will find nyama in back of that\textsuperscript{22}

The onomatopoeia served as a mnemonic device not only to recall narrative 'facts' but also to evoke the sound of the wooden shuttle passing between the warp and weft of a wooden loom as

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., line 736.
a strip of cloth was woven. ‘Nyama’ is the Mande concept of a vital life force. ‘Numuw’ are blacksmiths who, as a caste of trained and skilled artisans, have been understood to have a special ability to manipulate ‘nyama.’ Mention of these words in this song indicates not only that, in Kouyate's narration, Sonsan was shown to be aware of and to respect these Manding concepts, rooted in local understandings developed over centuries. In the same vein, the Maraka Muslims are described within this Bamana/Manding interpretive framework as being unexpectedly seduced by their appreciation of the cloth produced by the Bamana ‘stranger' in their community. In this way, the episode described in the epilogue at the start of the chapter about the response of Maraka women at Dorko to Sonsan's weaving fits into the narration's metanarrative of the ascendance of a Bamana ruler over local competitors. It represents this process in gendered terms whereby women purchaser's of the Bamana man's products become the vector through which these ethnic strangers displace local Maraka men as weavers, carving a prominent place for themselves in their new region.

The Maraka Muslims protected an area within the settlement at Dorka they described as a “sacred grove” of trees that they believed their ancestors had once tended and was therefore inhabited by their ancestral spirits. In Kouyate's narration, those Maraka spirits (djinns) encouraged Sonsan to clear the land of the sacred grove and to begin farming “cotton, gourds and maize” in order to secure his “destiny and fame.” It is striking that two of these three are utilitarian crops that support industry: cotton as the basis for weaving and the trade in cloth (for the second time mentioned in conjunction with his destiny and fame); gourds as tools used both domestically and for porterage; while the third crop, maize, suggests linkages with the Atlantic. To the amazement of the Maraka, Sonsan acquired the services of a local blacksmith (another

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23 Ibid., line 961.
suggestion of a confrontation between spiritual forces of non-Muslims and Muslims) to make an appropriate tool then began to clear the grove and to farm there.

Having established his farm, Sonsan further follows the djinns instruction by marrying an invalid Fulani woman and helping to restore her health. He had but one demand: that the woman's father accept a dowry payment from him:

I am not a Muslim,

I will not take a wife without paying the proper bride-price.”

The *djinnamagha*\(^{24}\) agreed that this should be done because,

“A woman's power comes from the marriage.”\(^{25}\)

There is an implied critique of Muslim actors in Sonsan's statement about paying a bride price. Sonsan's marriage to the Fulani woman indicated his insistence of this perceived non-Muslim social convention within the local context. In Kouyate's narration, there is no direct reference to what Sonsan is thought to have ultimately paid in bride-price but it is very likely that it would have at least included some portion of cloth, especially given his already noted reputation as a weaver. The use of cloth as a dowry payment, either in part or whole, was widespread across the region, and in many instances particular varieties of locally made cloth were considered appropriate for such occasions. This type of cloth consumption would likely have favored locally produced cloths that were ascribed special meaning, but it would difficult to get at those meanings in an 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century context.

The discussion of Sonsan's marriage to Duba Sangare in Kouyate's narration also features the negotiation between ethnic groups, Bamana and Fulani (Peul, Fula), and perhaps further,

\(^{24}\) the king of the djinn

between modes of production, farmers and pastoralists. This marital association between farmers and pastoralists, Bamana and Peul, also features in narratives of the founding of Segu, and in many other similar narratives of regions across the western savannah. These marital alliances are sometimes mediated by the question of Islam, as in the instance of Kouyate's narration of Sonsan. Kouyate's version is perhaps noteworthy because it represents an instance of a non-Muslim male, Sonsan, marrying a Muslim female, which counters a pattern found by some scholars of oral traditions in the savannah whereby non-Muslim men generally do not wed Muslim women. Such marriages may likely have also had sartorial implications as for example the relative importance of Islam in the resulting union would likely impact the choice of clothing worn by the household.

In Kouyate's narration, Sonsan's marriage initiates a period of growing prosperity for himself. However, on one day, Sonsan's Maraka hosts came upon a group of “fifty lost men [who] were wandering near the Maraka village.” The Maraka took the men hostage and chained them inside Sonsan's compound at Dorko. Like Sonsan, the captives are described ethnically Bamana. Their wretched presence reminded Sonsan, now married and relatively wealthy, of his own past as a “wandering” victim of his brothers' greed at Segu. He is represented as saying to the enslaved captives:

You are Bamana and I am Bamana/ Yet they have captured you and imprisoned you in my compound/ This is the same kind of greed that brought me here/ If you see me weeping it is because I am reminded of my own suffering.26

This powerful moment in Kouyate's narration makes explicit the vulnerability Sonsan and other savannah residents felt during the period when kidnapping and violent slave raiding were a common threat. But it is also instructive in its representation of how the enslaved people effectively

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26 Kouyate, “Sonsan of Kaarta.”
united under the leadership of Sonsan, presumably on the basis of their linguistic and ethnic affiliations as well as their shared identification as rural farmers vulnerable to raiding parties. The narrative's concluding episode described how Sonsan and the captives successfully plotted to rebel against the Maraka traders, and how after winning their independence from them, Sonsan's male descendants went on to establish Kaarta and expand its territory.

Despite this concluding episode, Kouyate's narration generally lacks explicit references to slave raiding. Silence on this issue contrasts with European documentary evidence from the period, as well as Arab chronicles from the region, that suggest warfare was a central factor throughout Kaarta’s development as a regional power, as its armies supplied enslaved captives to merchants who transported them in caravans to markets along both the Senegal and Gambia rivers.27

The Arab chronicle of Oualata and of Nema, two Sahelian regions north of Kaarta, recorded a major attack in 1754 by the armies of Segu on the town of Sonsanna in the Beledugu region that was ruled by “Massa” a cousin of the ruling family at Segu.28 In this version, “Massa” was the scion of Kulibali lineage that originally settled Segu, and may in fact refer to Sonsan, whose descendants became known as the “Massasi” (literally Massa “seeds” clan or descendants). During the attack, Biton Kulibali was said to have destroyed Sonsan's town, Sonsanna, and to have killed its chief, Massa's son, whose name was Fulakoro.29 It was this defeat that prompted survivors of the attack to migrate to the northwest, where they reconstituted themselves under a new leader and established their independence as “Kaarta.”

‘A Magnificent Bubu'

27 Curtin, Economic Change in Precolony Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade.
29 Ibid.
Another Arab chronicle published by colonial officer M.G. Adam further detailed that Segu's attack in 1754 came as retaliation after the chief Fulakoro captured and forcibly married the Segovian leader's daughter, Bassana, who had been promised to one of his military subordinates. This provocation led Biton Kulibali, ruler of Segu, to send his fighters against Fulakoro who successfully repulsed the first two attacks, sending Segu's fighters into retreat. After these routs, Biton Kulibali was said to turn to local marabouts for spiritual assistance in order to gain advantage over the chief Fulakoro who was his distant cousin.

It was such a difficult case, the marabouts spent seven months looking for a solution. Finally, one of them said, ‘If someone were to give me a magnificent boubou of a great chief, I will impregnate it with such qualities that when Foulakoro puts it on, the town of Sounsanna will be yours!’ Biton bought a resplendent boubou, pricked all over it with a needle and delivered it to the marabout. Once the incantation was completed, they called a Djula trader who used to trade between Segu and Sounsanna and promised him payment of one hundred enslaved captives if he succeeded in selling the garment in question to Foulakoro. The individual accepted and set off on his way.

According to the chronicle, the marabouts had treated the chiefly garment to be purchased by Foulakoro with a substance meant to incapacitate or to kill him. The plot worked in that the Djula trader reportedly met the chief, sold the bubu to him for the price of ten enslaved captives which he managed to leave behind in his haste to flee from the area. Having put on the bubu, Foulakoro reported passed out in “drunkenness” for a period of time, although the drug's effect wore off sooner than expected. The chief figured out that he had been tricked but it was already too late, the Segovian army of “40,000 men” already had a lead advance on Sonsanna that Foulakoro and his army, caught unprepared, were not able to mount an adequate defense against.

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33 Ibid.
Taken together, the Arabic chronicles of Oualata and those collected in the Sahelian town of Nioro by French colonial officials at the turn of the 20th century, recuperate the economies of warfare and enslavement that were largely elided in Kouyate's narration of the founding of Kaarta, but which nevertheless were an important part of its history. They also demonstrate the importance of cloth and clothing as mediators of social relations between groups in the western African savannah. The Chronicle of Nioro demonstrates how the non-Muslim nobles and warriors of Segu interacted as patrons to Muslim clerical clients whom they hired to employ the Muslims' specialized skills to support an attack on a neighboring group. That the marabouts planned to use an especially attractive (and poisoned) bubu to entrap an unsuspecting rival chief suggests the degree to which this garment associated with Muslim towns in the north was accepted by non-Muslim elites of the savannah as a desirable sartorial expression of wealth and status. This exchange implies the vitality of the local textile production of the region as well as the dominance of a Saharan-oriented aesthetic and material culture among elites of the savannah, regardless of their religious practices. These elites participated in the commercial exchange of enslaved captives in order to acquire the most desirable textiles and tailored garments.

There is no obvious suggestion in either of the Arab chronicles mentioned above or in Kouyate's narration of the purchase or consumption of imported textiles or other imported commodities. However, each type of source can be read comparatively against the others in order to confirm or else to challenge certain assertions. In the present study, the Arab chronicles are more explicit and detailed in their depiction of specific violent conflicts involving key figures of 18th century Kaarta. But they also concur with the main premise of Kouyate's narration that gave a central “place” in savannah society for local textile production and consumption, especially by elite figures such as Sonsanna and his descendants. Africanist historians and other scholars
working with oral traditions as sources have generally moved beyond treating oral ‘texts’ from which a researcher might simply extract “chunks” of historical evidence, to focus more on the processes by which the oral ‘texts' are produced, structured, remembered and performed. This necessitates contextualizing Kouyate's narration of Sonsan within the much broader tradition of Mande epics whose genealogies trace to the Sunjata epic of 13th century Mali of which it is apart. It also ideally should account for any significant dissonance if any between major versions of the narration, a level of research beyond the scale of the present chapter. However, if one shifts the methodological focus from a narrowly positivist search for verifiable ‘facts' to pay more attention to context and performance, Kouyate's narration then becomes useful counterpoint to the narrative details recorded in the Arab chronicles. Specifically, the narration's silences, internal tensions and fissures inform us about relations between various social groups (at least prescriptively) and how they are remembered in public performances of oral tradition.

Parsing silences and elision in Kouyate's narration

Michel Rolph-Trouillot has been among those emphasizing that history is a process structured on multiple levels by ‘power' which informs not only what happens in societies at any given moment but what is said (and not said) about what happened, elevating some voices and perspectives while silencing others. Such interplay between dominant perspectives and silences also structure how ‘what happened' gets recorded, preserved and disseminated. In a similar vein, the work of anthropologist Saba Mahmood suggests a means to interpret some of the power

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struggles embedded within oral traditional sources such as Kouyate's narration of ‘Sonsan of Kaarta.’ Mahmood argued that, “understanding the coherence of a discursive tradition is neither to justify that tradition, nor to argue for some irreducible essentialism or cultural relativism. It is, indeed, to take a necessary step toward explaining the force that a discourse demands.”

With this in mind, silences in the narration around slavery and violence associated with enslavement have particular implications when one considers its representations of women. Many of the enslaved captives employed locally or traded northward across the Sahara were girls and young women, an aspect of communal life elided by Kouyate's narration, which aimed primarily to tell a heroic story about a male and female actors. Women, such as the wife who went on pilgrimage to Mecca by herself and the mother who pulled her trapped child to safety, do appear throughout the narration as agentive. Nevertheless, the women are basically portrayed as heroic actors. Traditional narrations of the founding of savannah polities such as Kaarta and Segu do not generally reveal much about the women and children who farmed cotton and spun thread and the numerous male weavers who produced cotton for the market, although this activity remained economically important throughout the period. Two nearby regional centers of the Niger river valley, Nyamina and Sansanding, both dominated by a Serakhulle/Maraka merchant class gained reputations by the 18th century as centers of weaving production and the tailoring of the lomasa or d'loki, Bamana-language terms for a loose fitting shirt that circulated widely. Kouyate's narration refers to Nyamina several times. It is mentioned, for example, as the town in which the founder of Segu, Tigiton Kulubali marries a woman of the Sakho clan. Nyamina's cloth producers exchanged their valuable goods on regional and Sahara markets. Cotton textiles were among the commodities

exchanged between market centers on a north to southeast axis from Jenne to Segu, Kong and Begho, and also to the southwest from Jenne to Kankan-Bate and to Galam, as attested to by written documents and other sources. Both the silences in the traditional oral narrations on enslavement and labor and the heroic representations of women in these ‘texts’ work to displace or elide the likely historical experience and memory of women laborers who were quite important to the social economy. The oral traditional sources are also only suggestive of the importance of local industry, such as the textile industry, to the structuring of local society and relations between individuals, communities and groups, focusing instead on the ways in which heroic individuals built large and successful communities. Nevertheless, this study has shown that the oral traditional sources such as Kouyate's narration can be usefully interrogated for knowledge about the past, particularly when read ‘against the grain’ and in conjunction with a range of other kinds of historical evidence that pushes back against the silences that structure them.

**Political transformations and the reconfiguration of commercial patterns over the long durée**

Both the warrior states of Kaarta and of its progenitor Segu emerged chronologically in the period after the collapse of the last major Sudanic state power, Songhay in 1591, and the arrival of the Fulani Muslim state of Umar Tal in 1861. Spatially, they were located midway between former Songhay strongholds to the north at Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao and the Futa Jallon plateau to the south in Guinea where Umar Tal launched a jihad in 1852. Indeed the fall of Segu marked a turning point for the broader western savannah and was followed within two decades by French conquest. Lands that came under the political control of powerful rulers at Segu and Kaarta in the eighteenth century had previously been incorporated into territories claimed by the rulers of Mali. Populations within the region therefore would have had an awareness as having once been politically
integrated, as indeed much of the oral tradition of the region insists. In terms of their scale, Segu and Kaarta were worlds away from the arguably less ambitious centralized polities on the Upper Guinea coast north of Sierra Leone. Rather than a densely-populated humid tropical rain forest, they were located in the drier savannah that was unevenly fertile and thus unevenly settled, featuring dense clusters of residents along river valleys along with areas of sparsely settled villages where people planted fonio, millet, corn, other foodstuffs and cotton.

Pero Fernandes, a Portuguese traveler, recorded a voyage to the capital of the Mali empire in 1534. However, few Europeans had ever visited the western African savannah by the 17th century. There is little evidence Luso-African traders, with their Judeo-Christian cultural influences, settled there in any significant number in the early eighteenth century in contrast to their presence in coastal areas. Instead, the “foreign” traders circulating in the local villages of Kaarta and Segu were more likely to be Muslims “strangers,” of a variety of backgrounds and religious expression: Serakhulle, Djula, Fula, Tuareg or occasionally Arab traders. The Segovian and Kaartan economies interacted more directly with traders from the Sahara, even as they drew strength from trading with Atlantic ports along the Senegal and Gambia rivers and at Sierra Leone, and also intra-regionally. This is indicated spatially by the northward orientation of the ruling Kulubali lineage of Kaarta whose capital was first located at Guemou to the west of Segu but considerably north of the Senegal and Gambia rivers that provided it access to European traders.

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The 1727 Delisle map indicated a caravan trade route traveled by “Bambara” merchants which might refer to either those from Segu or Kaarta. Beginning from an inland river valley, the route indicated on the map heads in a north-westerly direction from Segu toward Diafunu, and ancient and prolific center of Serakhulle Muslim scholarship and trade, before turning southwest toward the Senegal river in Galam, passing the French trading post and slave barracoon at Fort St. Joseph there and continuing southward toward Barakunda and British traders on the Gambia river. Before reaching Galam the route passed through an area marked as a region of “Fugitive ‘Here' people” that stretches between a mountain range to the east and a more densely drawn cluster of

39 Osborn, Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule.
Serakhulle towns south of the Senegal river.\textsuperscript{40} This may indicate that the caravan route passed through an area known for self-emancipated or fugitive captives across the river from the French trading post.

The route's north-south axis along the “Riviere Joto” (or Xolombinne river) also allowed merchants to travel “chez les Maures” (“to the Moors”)\textsuperscript{41} before heading south toward the European outposts, suggesting the linkages between the two commercial networks. In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Kaartans moved their capital northwest to a new capital at Yelimane on the Xolombinne, after several years of fighting with the neighboring Khassonke,\textsuperscript{42} who occupied the region on the north bank of the Bafing river between Kaarta and the gold-mining region of Bambuk. Such a move would have given Kaarta both direct access to Saharan caravans traveling along the Xoolimbine river valley south to Galam, and to the European forts in the region.

The Khassonke (i.e., ‘people of Khasso’) were major regional players who operated from a position of strength along a fertile stretch of the Bafing river, a branch of the Upper Senegal, near the gold mines at Bambuk but east of Faleme river where the French were attempting to establish trading posts. The Khassonke represented a “metissage” of Fula and Maninka\textsuperscript{43} people who practiced farming and herding, as is indicated on French maps of the period. The polity coalesced in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century and thereafter began to grow as a military power conducting annual and profitable slave raids in the area. Several oral accounts claim that the name Khasso refers to the cloth “kasa” that Fula merchants who first came to the area were famous for selling.\textsuperscript{44}  

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40} It is not clear but the term ‘Here’ may refer to the Manding term for “peace” in English, which frequently appears as part of a place name in the western savannah.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} L’Isle, Guillaume de, Marie AngÉ\textsuperscript{E}lique Delisle, Collection David Rumsey, and Associates Cartography. "Carte De L’afrique FranÁoise Ou Du Sènegal Dressée Sur Un Grand Nombre De Cartes Manuscrites Et D’itinéraires Rectifiés Par Diverses Observations." [In French]. (1727).
  \item \textsuperscript{42} John H. Hanson, \textit{Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta}, 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Mande-speakers
  \item \textsuperscript{44} The Malian history Sekene Mody Cissoko reports this fact but he finds the story unconvincing. although he accepts the idea that migrating Fulani and the sale of ‘Kasa.’
\end{itemize}
*Kasa* were large cloths woven of wool or a blend of wool and cotton, made of several strips sewn together side-by-side in an alternating pattern of blue and white rectangles. Associated with Fula weavers in Jenne, Massina, “kasa” cloths were used as blankets, rugs, door hangings, or adornment for homes and ritual objects across the region. They circulated as trade items along a north south axis of trade routes between between the market towns of Jenne, Kong, Begho and the markets of the Asante to the east as well as westward to the Senegal river basin. Their diffusion also followed the migrations of Fula populations from north to south between the fifteenth century and eighteenth century when the villages of Khasso became regional producers of these cloths. A seventeenth century painting of the Dutch governor of the Dutch East India Company inside the slave trading fort Sao Jorge da Mina on the Gold Coast depicts lush imported Asian carpets and silk hangings displayed in the room, but also shows an example of West African *kasa* cloth used as a bed covering.45

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In the painting of Dirck Wilre, director of the Dutch East India Company, an African servant or visitor and another European man, there is a dark blue and white patterned cloth hangs as a covered on the bed in his chamber. It is likely that cotton cloth produced locally in Khasso was also integrated into the Atlantic markets closest to it (where the cloths could be exchanged for salt, kola, rice and iron), regional markets (in exchange for gold) and the Sahara markets (in exchange for salt). This multiple orientation toward market exchanges obtained across the western savannah. Throughout the second half of the 18th century, the rulers of Segu fought several battles with their distant cousins at Kaarta over access to the lucrative Serakhulle markets at Galam, gateway to Saint Louis and the Atlantic. For its part, Khasso defended itself against Kaarta but
also took opportunities to increase wealth through establishing and enforcing vassalage and tribute payments from its weaker neighbors. In roughly the same period that the Kaartans relocated to Yelimane, Segu officials extended their authority *north-eastward* where they established control over the major trading centers of Jenne (known for its textile weaving and embroidery industries) and to Timbuktu (known for its large markets) with access to Saharan markets in the first half of the 19th century.\(^{46}\) The expansion and contraction of state power across the western savannah, and the changing of the actual seat of power with the moving of capital towns, was a process informed by the intra-regional competition for access to markets.

**French merchants seek to expand into the Faleme River**

In the 1740s, the French trading concession at Saint Louis was seeking to increase its presence in the region by seeking partners among the local rulers by which they would gain permission to establish trading posts protected by cannons. In 1742, the director of the Compagnie du Senegal, Pierre David, traveled a few dozen kilometers upriver of the French forts at Galam, to investigate the possibility of establishing other French trading posts closer to the gold mines at Bambuk on the Faleme river near Kainoura. David found a welcome reception from several rulers in Bambuk who wanted to align with the French for protection against seasonal raids from Khasso who were in alliance with Serakhulle merchants. David believed that by establishing a French trading post in the region, the Company could break the control that Serakhulle enjoyed over both Khasso and Bambuk to position themselves as the dominant traders in the region, which was favorably located north and east of British trading posts on the Gambia river.

Les Saracolets, laches et faibles comme ils sont, n'osant rien entreprendre par eux memes ne se servent que de la marchandise pour faire agir les Bamboucains et les

\(^{46}\)Levtzion, “North-West Africa: From the Maghrib to the Fringes of the Forest.”
Casson suivant l'occurrence toutes les fois qu'ils ont besoin de force. Quand nous serons donc liés avec ces deux nations, établi chez eux, manquant moins de marchandises que les Saracolets, nous serons les maîtres de rompre toutes leurs mesures qui nous seraient contraires et par la nous tiendrons pour toujours cette nation hautaine, avare, orgueilleuse et traitresse dans la nécessité d'acquiescer à tout ce qui nous conviendra.

The Serakhulle, soft and weak as they are, do not dare any enterprise themselves, only using merchandise to make the people of Bambuk act, and the Khasso, every time they need some power. Once we ally with these two nations, and are established among them, and not lacking the goods that the Serakhulle do, we will be able to break with any of their measures contrary to us and thereby we would always hold this haughty, avaricious, proud and traitorous nation in need to acquiesce to all that is convenient to us.\textsuperscript{47}

David's comments are instructive in that they suggest how, in this region, the power of the Serakhulle stemmed from their control of the market and their access to certain kinds of merchandise. By this means, he claimed that they were able to compel members of neighboring communities to act, although David characterizes the Serakhulle as “soft and weak” because of their location in this web of inter-group social relations. David's travel through the region was as a representative of the French king in his capacity as a director of the Senegal concession at Saint Louis, but because his father played an important role in the France-based French India Company, he might be thought to have an additionally personal stake in the outcome of the company's commercial ventures in western Africa. As the quote above suggests, David appeared confident that the French could provide a wider variety of goods than the Serakhulle merchants did, and by such means they would gain not only an important commercial foothold near a gold-mining region, but they would also effectively gain political control that might open the door to even greater profits. This provides some indication of the importance of the market in commodities such as

textiles to the economic and political strategies of elites, including elite French and British actors, seeking dominance in the region. In 1746, David was transferred to the ile de Bourbon, the French Indian Ocean island colony of settlers who profited from importing enslaved people from Madagascar to work on coffee plantations, and where he was to serve as governor.\(^{48}\)

In 1747, an employee of the Compagnie du Senegal named Duliron returned to the region visited by David to find that some of the villages of Bambuk were already trading with the British interlopers who occasionally reached them overland from the Gambia river with an assortment of goods. References to Bambouk in several European eyewitness accounts state that the Maninka residents of this region devoted themselves almost entirely to mining activity, and purchased most of their food, cloth and tools on the market with the gold from their mines.\(^{49}\) At the same time, Duliron described a landscape of fortified villages, surrounded by high walls which were intended for defense against seasonal assaults from the Khassonke across the Faleme river. It was for additional defense against their raids that the ruler of an area called Cicella was among those in Bambuk offering land to Duliron for the French to establish a trading post. For the French, the opportunity represented not only an opportunity to potentially access gold, but also to encounter caravans of slave coffles as they traveled south toward the British posts at the Gambia river. For the Maninka of Bambouk, the potential presence of the French meant not only physical protection but also expanded markets, with a prominent place for French-imported goods, including Indian cottons, French and European-made cottons, woolens and linens, along with metalware, beads, weapons and other goods.

These maneuvers between polities such as Bambouk, Khasso, Kaarta, the French and the British in these interior regions took place within a broader context in which textile manufacturing


was a key focus of mercantile interests in both Britain and France in the mid-18th century. The importance of West African consumers in the nexus of interests that produced the “Guinea trade” is demonstrated in a 1767 record of a deposition before a council of judges at the Chamber of Commerce in the port city of Nantes, France in which the judges are discussing the importance of textiles to the African trade. Petitioner M. Raudin posed a series of three questions to the Judges: Had Nantes effectively become an entrepôt for cloth imported from overseas? Was it wise to impose a tax on cloth coming from abroad but destined for West Africa? And whether the fake dye (“faux teint”) then used in French cloth made for West Africans was possibly limiting the success of the trade. Nantes was a major Atlantic center of the French slave trade, by some estimates accounting for as much as half of all French ships traveling to Africa. It was also the center of the French indiennage textile industry that sprung up during the course of the 18th century in which French textile makers developed print designs and techniques influenced pattern cloth imported from India.\(^{50}\) This print-making industry was located on a small island dividing the Loire river that flows eastward a few dozen miles to the Atlantic ocean. The spatial proximity of the indiennage industry to the city's busy imports underscores the linkages of West African consumers to production and trade far from their own lands.

In response to the first question, the Council found that Nantes had by then indeed become a center for commerce in imported Indian cloth because this was necessary for trading in “Guinee.” This designation likely referred to all ports in Atlantic Africa where the French traded, but for the Upper Guinea coast it should be noted that the French competed actively with the British and Portuguese for control of trading posts and influence throughout the region between Saint Louis and Sierra Leone.

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The Guinea commerce being very considerable in Nantes, and the Indian cloths being proper for that commerce, it is not surprising that one finds a lot of them in the city's entrepôt, for speculation that armaments might decide from one instant to the next and this wouldn't be able to happen if they had to wait for all the merchandise necessary for the cargo.\footnote{Nantes Municipal Archives}

With that explanation the Chamber judges seemed to be saying that the ready availability of varieties of Indian made cloth on the market at Nantes was not of particular concern to local textile producers because it was “necessary” for the Guinea trade and was to be sold primarily abroad in Africa. On the other hand, the Judges did not agree that a tax should be imposed on the import and re-export of the Indian textiles because “that would be subordinating the general interests of the State to the interests of a few particulars.”\footnote{Nantes Municipal Archives} With that the Chamber judges seemed intent to protect the circulation of Indian textiles through the port at Nantes en route to buyers in Africa which is an indication of the importance of that commerce connecting Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean networks to the city's merchant elite.

In turning to the question of the value of the Rouen imitations of the blue-dyed cloths that were a staple of the African trade, the Chamber found that the French cloths had not yet become competitive in many African markets because the quality of the dye was not to the liking of African buyers.

The dye is the part to which the Blacks are most drawn. We could hardly fool them or at least not twice with impunity. They take care of themselves in recovering once they have been imposed upon… The necessity of a good dye is one more reason that the producers in the local textile dye industry should be exempt from taxes, entirely or partially.\footnote{Nantes Municipal Archives}

The proposed relief from a tax burden was ostensibly meant to encourage local industry,
in the face of competition from Indian cloth, to improve its dye quality. A note handwritten in small script at the margins of the main record of this hearing indicates that the intensity of the dye quality of Rouen cloth was thought to be about half that of similar Indian cloths, and that these latter were the most in demand for the slave trade.

In the period that French merchants and Chamber of Commerce at Nantes debated the importance of textile trading and production to the wealth city's merchants, and by extension to that of the State, a group of competing British investors had taken advantage of Parliament's passage of the African Trade Act of 1750 that allowed private traders open access to commerce there that had previously been limited to joint-stock companies with exclusive trading rights. Passage of the new law represented the opening for which investors like John Boyd, Alexander Grant and Richard Oswald and others among the merchant class of Liverpool, Bristol and London had successfully lobbied. Historian David Hancock has detailed how the formation of “Grant, Oswald, & Co.,” a trading company by this group of men in London brought together business networks, experience and expertise that stretched to continental Europe, Africa, South Asia and the Americas. Boyd became a director of the British East India Company for much of the 1750s and was a wealthy absentee owner of sugar plantations on St. Kitts in the Caribbean. At the East India Company, he worked to secure favorable deals for his partners in the Bance Island venture, including Grant, Sargent and Oswald, who became over time large purchasers of Indian cloth that filled the Company's storage rooms on Leadenhall Street in London before being shipping to Bance Island, Sierra Leone.

From their house in Mincing Lane, Sargent, Stratton, Aufrere, Chambers, Cooke, Gardiner and Rolleston combined an India trade in cottons, a Hamburg trade in German linens, and a Levant trade in Persian and Turkish silks. The Bance Island proprietors drew from all three regional sources to obtain cloth for barter in Sierra
Leone.  

Such examples from the Nantes Chamber of Commerce and the group of London-based investors demonstrate the ways in which British and French textile producers, merchants and investors focused on Africa as a viable market and also how their activities centered on having knowledge of African consumers and developing textiles that appealed to them. Areas of the West African coast, particularly the Upper Guinea coast region north of Freetown, were continually contested by British and French traders, backed up with varying degrees of effectiveness by the respective navies. After the conclusion of the Seven Years war in 1763, demand for enslaved workers in the Americas increased dramatically. The number of slaves exported from the Bance Island factory purchased by “Grant, Oswald, & Co.,” the number of slaves reached record highs in the period after the war. At the same time, the factory on the Sierra Leone river became known for its luxuries and comforts, including a two-hole golf course, and its defensive fortifications. The interaction of global textile trading patterns, and textile consumption in West Africa was critical for the development of European capitalism in the 18th century. This process was also closely connected to the development of trans-Atlantic slave trading, as well as the entrenchment of slave-based labor economies across West Africa.

**Niger river Valley and Sahara-oriented networks**

Significant amounts textiles reached the western savannah from Saharan caravans reaching Timbuktu, Jenne and northern markets such as Nioro that were controlled largely by

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Soninke/Serakhulle merchants before being redistributed southward. Linen silesian cloths that were produced in central Europe, initially sold at Hamburg and again in Spain reached markets at Timbuktu, Mali on camel-bound caravans as reported in 1787 by the Moroccan merchant El Hajj Abd Salam Shabeeny. He first traveled to Timbuktu from Fes in the 1770s with his father on a trading caravan at age fourteen, had lived there and at Kano for several years and continued to trade as an adult between the Maghreb and the Niger Valley. Kano sent textiles to Saharan market at Timbuktu. At Timbuktu, Shabeeny reported that these silesian linens were known as kameemas and were valued at about fifty Mexican dollars. Shabeeny outlined his commercial and religious travel biography to British officials when he was detained briefly after being intercepted on a trading voyage to Hamburg. This itinerary represents an example of the land-based Old-World linkages between western Africa, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and Europe that some British hoped to turn to their advantage in the late 18th century through their control of maritime trade routes. He traveled to Mecca through Egypt, exchanging Moroccan goods such as wool caps, leather slippers, cochineal, saffron and sewn cotton or woolen garments called haiks in markets at Cairo and on the Arabian peninsula for Indian muslins, raw silk and perfumes that he later sold at a profit on his return to the Maghreb. His testimony indicates that not only Indian muslins but particular types of India-inspired garments such as the juliba were worn by elites in the trading emporium of Timbuktu where “some of its inhabitants are amazingly rich. The dress of common women has often been worth 1,000 dollars. A principal source of their wealth is lending gold-dust and slaves at high interest to foreign merchants, which is repaid by goods from Morocco and other countries.”

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56 Ibid., 29.
Shabeeny's account of Timbuktu likely fed European fantasies of a wealthy city on the edge of the African Sahara at a moment in which business elites in both London and Paris sought greater knowledge about West Africa and imagined expanded business ties. Yet there is independent evidence of Timbuktu as a market and Jenne as both market and manufacturing center of textiles in this period. Already by the early 16th century, Leo Africanus described the residents of Jenne as “very well dressed” in large cotton garments dyed either black or blue “though the priests and the doctors wear a white one.”

The people of the land make considerable profit from the trade in cotton cloth which they carry on with the Barbary merchants. For their part, these merchants sell them many European cloths.

In a later passage on the Niger riverside town of Gao, Africanus mentioned a diversified cloth market including inexpensive, low-quality woolens and “fine Venetian cloth” called monacchino and the minima in colors like “scarlet, violet or turquoise.” Shabeeny claimed that Timbuktu was under the control of the Emir of Kano who had the right to choose its governing sultan, and also was responsible to pay soldiers who protected the city. Kano's chosen surrogate at Timbuktu, according to Shabeeny, lived in a “palace” near the eastern gate of the city where he often collected taxes from merchants arriving to trade.

Shabeeny claimed that “the blacks” of Timbuktu engaged in many crafts such as blacksmithing, carpentry, shoemaking, tailoring and masonry but not weaving. By contrast, he claimed that “Arab” carpet weavers sold their productions made from wool, camel hair and goat

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57 Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh Sa‘dī and John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa‘dī’s Ta‘rīkh Al-Sūdān down to 1613 and Other Contemporary Documents*, Islamic History and Civilization (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 278.
58 Ibid., 277.
59 Ibid., 284.
hair similar to those woven in Fes, Morocco. However, the nearby regions of Jenne and Maasina were known as much for their cloth production as for the range of imported goods available in their markets. Venice Lamb cited evidence that cotton-wool blend blankets made by Fulani weavers in this area known as “kassa” were sold in Asante lands after being redistributed from markets at Kong and at Begho, where Mande-speaking clerics and Djula traders were the dominant actors. Asante used the thick cloths as blankets, door hangings, coverings for drums, fetish objects and palanquins to carry dignitaries. In the late 18th century, political control of Timbuktu was hotly contested between four powerful regional constituencies—the Fulani Arma of Macina, the Tuareg, the Moorish Kunta and the Bambara at Segu. In 1803, the ruler of Segu, Mansang Diarra took control of Timbuktu, marking the second time in a century that a Bamana ruler controlled the cosmopolitan Saharan urban center. Even as Segu pursued territorial expansion northward as mentioned earlier, Segu's power also sent raiding parties along its southern frontiers, hundreds of miles south along the Niger river valley, with organized attacks that carried enslaved captives to regional markets. The impact of these attacks on portions of the immense Wasulu region, which also faced incursions from the Futa Jallon highlands to its southeast, will be discussed further in a later chapter.

61 Ibid., 23.
63 Tauxier, *Histoire Des Bambara*. 
CHAPTER THREE.
CONTEXTUALIZING GLOBAL EXCHANGES, PART 1: CLOTH AND CONSUMERS IN NORTHERN SENEGAMBIA, 1776-1815

This cloth is for them such precious merchandise that they remain in admiration as they see pieces unfolded; just as we Europeans do with the gold these Marabouts sometimes bring to sell.

— Pruneau de Pommegorge, *Description de la Nigritie*, 1789

**Introduction**

Late eighteenth century written, visual and material sources on Senegambia suggest a broad range of interactions between western African consumers and traders with global textile markets. Large quantities of imported cloth were off-loaded from ships near Saint Louis and ferried ashore in canoes, delivered to Goree island, and carried to ports along the Petite Cote south of contemporary Dakar, and transported to many markets inland of northern Senegambia. The French slave trader Dominique Lamiral wrote with equal parts outrage and marvel at how one process of local redistribution occurred before his eyes. On a trading day, he would receive a visit from a local Moorish chief who on an ordinary day was indistinguishable from the crowd of his subjects who were “badly dressed and malnourished\(^1\).” But on this day the chief would turn up with an entourage of officials dressed in beautifully made local robes. If the chief had no fine robes of his own, he would borrow some clothes from a *signare*, one of the prominent female merchants in town known as doyennes of fashionable taste. While negotiating prices, the chief would “march about with gravitas, look around with a disdainful air, and have [Lamiral's French] words repeated to him by two interpreters even though he has well understood.” Once this performance resulted

in an acceptable exchange of goods, the Moorish chief and entourage returned to their home where social distinctions appeared to melt away as those referred to as “slaves” in front of the whites were free enough to eat from the same bowl and smoke from the same pipe as the chief. Also at home, the Moorish chief would quickly distribute goods just obtained from the French, with 40 to 50 thousand French *livres* worth of merchandise—textiles, gunpowder, guns, accessories — given out within an hour or so.

When the chief had given it all away, if his people were still not satisfied, they would take even his shirt, saying to him, ‘you can still give up the shirt, the whites will not refuse you something to wear.’

In another example of African interaction with global cloth markets, the Swedish evangelist and abolitionist Karl Wadstrom described an encounter in the late 1780s with the Buurba Sin, ruler of a Serer-speaking area inland from the Petite Cote in Senegal. As a small token gift, Wadstrom thought to present the Buurba Sin with a few polished metallic Birmingham sleeve-buttons, an item then being manufactured in that English city, and used as fasteners and decoration on waist coats, coats, breeches, dresses and shirts.

On my shewing him for what purpose they were intended, he appeared much mortified that his shirt had no button-holes; but observing that that of a mulatto from Goree was furnished with them, (the king) insisted on exchanging shirts with him, in our presence; a demand with which the man was forced to comply. Transported with his new ornaments, the king held up his hands to display them to the people.

Many similar examples could be cited to suggest the ways in which Africans in

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2 Ibid., 120.

3 Ibid.

4 Carl Bernhard Wadström, *Observations on the Slave Trade, and a Description Of Some Part of the Coast of Guinea, during a Voyage, Made in 1787, and 1788, in Company with Doctor A. Sparrman and Captain Arrehenius, by C. B. Wadström, Chief Director of the Royal Assay and Refining Office; Member of the Royal Chamber of Commerce, and of the Royal Patriotic Society, for Improving Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce in Sweden* (London: printed and sold by James Phillips, George-Yard, Lombard-Street, 1789), 21.
Senegambia and elsewhere deployed clothing, and their access to intercontinental suppliers of textiles and other related goods, to exercise and negotiate social power. They also suggest something of the slipperiness of identification in which particular personas and claims could be made and unmade with forms of dress. Though far less ubiquitous than in contemporary times, cotton textiles enjoyed wide appeal in late 18th century west Africa. Consumers in western Europe, Asia the Americas and western Africa were by the late 18th century enmeshed in a global market for consumable goods such as textiles, accessories such as hats, clothing, tools, and raw materials such as dye woods, iron, precious metals, cowrie shells, leather hides, alcohol and food, among others. For textile manufacturing in Britain, Joseph Inikori has shown how a process of import substitution unfolded in England throughout the eighteenth century whereby domestically produced textiles replaced those formerly imported to Britain from India in tandem with the development of mechanized, factory production. Technological developments such as John Kay's invention of the flying shuttle in 1733, which sped up loom weaving, John Hargreaves' spinning jenny invention of the 1760s and Richard Arkwright's water-powered thread spinning machine put to use in the 1770s each represented milestones in the emergence of large-scale factory production by the end of the century in England and later in France. Crucially, markets outside Europe, particularly in Africa and the Americas, exposed English manufacturers to fierce competition leading to innovations that improved quality and cut costs. Consumers across western Africa were situated at a key node of exchange connecting four continents, and choices made in their various local contexts had impact far outside the region.

In Senegambia, cotton, both as woven textiles and raw material, was a vital element of an economy which engaged a heterogeneous group of men and women as well as a variety of

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social groupings—signares, African, Eur-African and European merchants, peasant farmers, indigo dyers, marabouts, enslaved persons, wage laborers (called “gromettas” or “laptots”), soldiers, abolitionists and missionizing speculators. This West African consumption depended upon and grew in tandem with the transport and exchange of commodities within the region and the circulation of goods around the Indian and Atlantic ocean basins. On the coast from Saint Louis to Freetown, well-positioned men and women sought situational advantage in an evolving system of exchange driven by the interaction between local and global dynamics. African rulers and merchants often conditioned their participation in commercial exchanges with Europeans on a strictly enforced customs payment of a specific set of goods. They sometimes disengaged from Atlantic trade altogether by staging embargoes on trade with Europeans, as occurred several times. The threat of an African embargo heightened the importance European traders placed on delivering a satisfactory customs payment, which often included both luxury and daily use textiles that could in turn be stored, consumed, sold or given away by an African noble or ruler to loyal clients. The western African economies of cotton and cloth took shape within a regional context of environmental pressures such as drought, episodic violence stemming from ethnic and religious conflict, and slave raiding which kept populations on the move and ethnic identity in flux. These dynamics provided the contours and limits of the social life of cotton.

By attending to questions about the purchase, circulation and use of objects such as cloth and clothing, this study's focus on materiality shows that cultural exchange of the period was not limited to direct exchanges between European and African traders but also depended on linkages to production and exchange within West Africa as well as with parts of Asia and the Americas. On one level, it emphasizes that many of the commodities Africans purchased from Europeans were actually produced in Asia sometimes by weavers armed with specific information about African
consumers’ tastes. On another level, attention to materiality shows the significance of these exchanges was not merely quantitative (how many pieces were bought from where for how much) but also suggests the qualitative forms of influence on African aesthetic and cultural practices that perhaps unfolded over different time scales and in a variety of ways. It is with some attention to interactions around cloth as a vital consumer item that a broad range of a west African “public” becomes visible in the historical record. This breadth has sometimes been elided in historiographical approaches focused on export slave trading that are concerned primarily with identifying political and economic structures that produced enslaved persons for the market. Already diverse in ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliation, the western African public of the late eighteenth century had a wide variety of aesthetic choices and ideological models to choose from in recreating identities for themselves appropriate to the times and for imagining their futures.

The last quarter of the 18th century, which is widely associated with the political revolutions reshaping British and French empires, and their American colonies, was also a turbulent period within western Africa. In Futa Toro along the Senegal river, a group of Fulani clerics seized power from Denyanke leaders in 1776, claiming outrage by what they viewed as corruption of leaders who failed to protect Tukulor Muslim peasants from being captured in raids by Berber/Arab horsemen. Over the next thirty years the cleric-led state launched a number of defensive and expansionist military campaigns to establish their control over the central district, forbidding the enslavement of Muslims, and governing by sharia. The implications of this political revolution were large, as by example it proposed to re-order long-standing relations between clerics and rulers, landlords and guests and even farmers and pastoralists that had long-obtained across the region. Its emergence followed that of the Fulani theocratic state in the Futa Jalon, and its pattern would be repeated across vast stretches of the savannah at Sokoto, Maacina and even at Segu over
the next century, affecting millions of people.

The emergence of Fula-controlled theocratic states in two vital regions of Senegambia in the 18th century has often been folded into a larger narrative about Islamic jihads in West Africa or into a longer chronology of Islam as practiced in the region over centuries. Each of these polities was integrated into and drew strength from Atlantic commerce, and each sought to bend market dynamics to their favor by imposing a trade embargo on Europeans at Saint Louis (1776) and at Freetown (1794). As separate events, they represent moments in which an African state entity expressed its power of refusal to participate in commerce with European traders during a period in which European economic power was ostensibly ascendant. The respective leaders of each of the Fula states had different views on slave trading, and held different objectives in imposing an embargo on European traders. Yet, as will be shown over the next two chapters, neither was able to impose their desired outcome unilaterally, as much depended on circumstances and dynamics out of their control. These dynamics included the commercial reverberations felt in western Africa from the American, French and Haitian revolutions which broke out one after the other in this period, and affected each region differently. They also included the global repercussions of the Napoleonic wars in Europe that interrupted French trade in western Africa, and saw Britain resume control of Saint Louis and Goree island from 1808-1815. Finally, and perhaps most critically, they included the dynamic convergence of environmental, demographic and political factors internal to the region that shaped west African societies. These two instances were not the only times Africans unilaterally suspended trade relations, nor were these events limited to ethnic Fulani or to centralized polities. Walter Hawthorne cites examples of such embargoes organized by the acephalous Balanta near the Portuguese trading center at Bissau; and other examples could be

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cited along the length of the African coast.

However, as explicit attempts by an African state to reform trade, the respective embargoes imposed by the two Futas offer an opportunity to consider the commercial dynamics and social relations of each region in some detail. Looking comparatively at these events separated by only a few hundred kilometers and a few years presents an opportunity to observe similarities and differences between the two events as a means of establishing a better picture of the overall Senegambia/Upper coast region from the perspective of its material culture and textile consumption. Through the next two chapters, I will be looking comparatively at how a variety of actors used cloth and clothing to display power (or the relative absence of power) within specific contexts, as well as their own cosmopolitanisms, sobriety, allegiances and ambitions.

In this chapter, focused on dynamics in northern Senegambia, I will begin by establishing the political, economic and environmental context for the emergence of a powerful Islamic state in central Futa Toro in 1776. The chapter then moves on to situate the predominance of indigo-dyed “guinea cloths” among Senegalese imports in the context of a local industry of indigo dying operated primarily by women dyers. After a brief discussion of material sources from this period, the chapter goes on to show how the clothing practices of a variety of regional actors— the Almamy Qader Kan, anonymous soldiers and enslaved people, Saint Louis habitants and signares— likely interacted with local and import markets. Finally, the chapter critically presents from two divergent bodies of sources, travel narratives and quantitative data compiled on British imports to Senegambia in the 18th century before drawing conclusions from all of the evidence presented.

**Embargoes Compared: A Halt to Slave Caravans Across Futa Toro in the 1780s**
The first of these embargoes occurred in 1787 as a new clerical ruler of Futa Toro, Almamy Abdul Qader Kan [ca.1728-1807], imposed a ban of all slave trading with Saint Louis because he was outraged at the enslavement and sale of Muslims to Christian Europeans. The imposition of the embargo came after Kan's consolidated power as head of a centralized state, replacing a centuries old dynasty of military rulers known as the Siratigi. It represented the culmination of tensions building for years along the the 600-mile long Senegal river valley between numerous

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parties including the Trarza Moors, Wolof rulers in Waalo and Cayor, and especially with the French based on the coastal island of Saint Louis. In political terms, the fertile valley was differentiated by a series of elite lineages who claimed authority over sections of the lower, middle and upper river valley, and adjacent lands on both river banks. This included communities of Wolof-speaking peasant farmers and warriors, Berber and Hassani Arab pastoralists, Fulani herders and clerics of Futa Toro and of Bundu, Serakhulle merchants and, in the savannah woodlands directly east of the river, Bamana-speaking Kaartans, Khassonke and others.

At a point along the eastern bend of the Senegal river, as it angles southeastward, two branches of it—the Faleme and the Bafing—begin to run into the highlands of the Futa Jallon plateau, which is the source of an extensive riverine system interior to western Africa. The region watered by the Faleme and Bafing rivers now run along the contemporary national borders of Senegal, Mali and Guinea, but they also sit at the spatial conjuncture of three ecological zones, the forest, the savannah/sahel and the desert. The centrality of the region's location, combined with favorable agricultural conditions to be found in river valleys, attracted a dense, diverse population whose commercial exchanges reached westward toward Saint Louis, south toward the Gambia river, northward toward Diafunu and Timbuktu, eastward toward Segu, and southeastward toward Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. This region of Bondu near the gold-rich mining communities of Bambouk represented a vital node in an extensive network of merchants, clerics, and other actors circulating goods and services across an area of several hundred kilometers.

Along the central Senegal river valley in the late 18th century, there were conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and traders on the north side of the river who rode camels and horses to raid settled farmers to the south for grain, laborers and other booty as well as conflicts between European merchants and Tukulor communities along the route to Galam, several hundred
kilometers east from Saint Louis. Political conflict between African communities living along the valley generally centered on tensions between traditional rulers and Muslim reformers struggling for scarce resources in the context of expanding slave trading and use of enslaved laborers. This broad pattern could be observed in the separate but overlapping struggles for regional hegemony between the empires of Segu Bamana, Kaarta and that of the Fula Maacina, between the Tukulor almamate at Futa Toro and its neighbors, and between the almamate at Futa Jallon and its neighbors, to name but a few examples.

Environmental factors

In northern Senegambia, these conflicts were exacerbated by environmental crises created by periods of drought and infestations of locusts, which occurred intermittently between 1782 and 1789 and again in 1793. Famines resulting from these conditions sometimes worsened still when marauding armies burned down villages and destroyed crops. These recurring shortages of water and food meant that rainfall amounts during the last quarter of the eighteenth century had scarcely improved over similarly devastating droughts in the 1750s. Such scarcity was on occasion worsened by insect infestations. “I have known the whole vegetation of a country swept away in twenty four hours by locusts,” reported John Barnes to the British House of Commons in 1789 after having lived thirteen years in Senegambia, with three years spent as governor of Saint Lewis. These conditions raised the stakes of survival both for vulnerable farmers and nomadic pastoralists who generally disdained agricultural work.

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9 Great Britain Parliament, House of Commons and Board of Trade, *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations : Submitting to His Majesty’s Consideration the Evidence and Information They Have Collected in Consequence of His Majesty’s Order in Council Dated the 11th of February 1788, Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa, and Particularly the Trade in Slaves* (London, 1789) Tuesday, May 26 and Wednesday, May 27, 1789.
Scholars have debated the degree to which the Tukulor-led toorodbe movement emerged as a direct response to raids from “Moorish” (principally Berber and Arab) soldiers into Futa Toro villages that resulted in the enslavement of Muslims\textsuperscript{10} to Christians, which sparked ideological opposition to that practice. Others have placed more emphasis on the region's difficult environmental conditions, and the contest over limited labor resources, to argue that these effectively shaped the contours of daily life, long-term planning, and episodic violent conflicts leading up to the establishment of a centralized Islamic-ruled polity. Climatic diversity is a unique feature of far western Africa where three distinct ecological zones fade into each other of a distance of a few hundred kilometers, from desert to Sahel in the north to savannah woodlands and tropical forest on the southern coasts. Rainfall amounts differed dramatically in the region between areas only 100 kilometers apart, with annual rainfall at Saint Louis being half as much as along the Gambia river which in turn received up to a third less rain each year than coastal Guinea and Freetown.\textsuperscript{11} Climate change over time has repeatedly shifted the contours and frontiers of these ecological zones, a process affected by human activity even as a slower-moving but inexorable process imposed limitations on human activity. James Webb has convincingly shown that a gradual increase in desertification over the longue durée in western Africa tended to push pastoralist groups to migrate and settle further south, putting population pressure on agricultural communities residing there. An extended dry period between 1600 and 1850 accelerated the pace of desertification during these years, such that by 1850 the ecological zone of rainfall agriculture, which permitted camel and cattle herding, had descended southward by 200-300 kilometers to


\textsuperscript{11} George E. Brooks, Eurafriicans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 3.
within 100 kilometers of the Senegal river.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map.png}
\caption{Map 4 Ecological change across western Africa from Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel 1600-1850}
\end{figure}

Both the Moorish raids and the toorodbe reform movement of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century were situated within this environmental context and its contingent economic dynamics. Well-positioned women and men, African, European and Eur-African — struggled for control of labor, reproduction and access to scarce resources, such as grain, water and desirable farmland. Generally poor soil quality outside of the alluvial flood zone of the riverbanks and unpredictable rainfall meant that agricultural communities adapted farming techniques and allocations of labor to these specific yet changing conditions. Decisions about what seeds to plant, the proportion of food crops to non-food crops (such as cotton), and when to plant seeds depended on knowledge farmers accumulated over the long-term as well as adaptations from year to year. The availability of labor at particular times of year was also a critical factor. If the Moorish traders north of the river needed labor to harvest resin for sale to European buyers at Saint Louis, Wolof and Tukulor farmers also

\textsuperscript{12} James L. A. Webb, Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850 (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 10–11.
sought to attract labor to grow grain that both groups were selling to Saint Louis, to sustain its expanding population and provision the enslaved being shipped overseas.

Searing and other historians have correctly pointed out that famines of the period can not be fully understood outside a consideration of the pressure placed on local agriculture to support the coastal slave trade economy and the political volatility resulting from the violence used to acquire slaves. He notes how village farmers used slaves to clear forests to use land for planting millet sold to feed enslaved people on caravans, while housed at Saint Louis and on trans-Atlantic transport. This provisioning trade in grain also sold food among the Berber/Arab populations north of the Senegal river, and represented an entrepreneurial response to regional and global markets. When poor rainfall, disease or insect infestation caused grain shortages, there was the increased likelihood of conflict between desert pastoralists, military aristocrats and savannah peasant farmers. Conditions during the rainy season, such as the presence of tsetse flies and roads made unpassable by flooding and mud, limited the mobility of horse-bound raiders. By contrast, prolonged dry periods also facilitated the use of horses and camels for raiding over large distances by pushing southward the line of tsetse fly infestation that might menace those animals' survival, giving them free reign to roam of a broader area. Webb's argument that the exchange of horses was ultimately of greater importance to Wolof state builders south of the Senegal river than were the arms they obtained from the Atlantic makes sense given the advantages horses gave to soldiers over their targets. A lack of roads substantially limited mobility of people and goods through the region to river traffic. However, those who commanded enough wealth to buy horses overcame this obstacle and gained a considerable advantage over others.

Berber/Arab horse-mounted warriors raided vulnerable farming communities for labor to harvest acacia-tree resin that was sold to Europeans at Saint Louis, who used it as a mordant to
improve textile dyes. Europeans also used the resin as a stiffener in making hats, glue, paint, ink, cosmetics, glue and as a starch for cloth, finding these multiple uses for this substance much like the people of western Africa, who became the main global supplier of the resin to western European markets in the late 18th century. The peoples of northern Senegambia and southern Mauritania used the gum resin as a food stuff, for medicinal treatments (including for diarrhea), for cosmetics and hair treatment, for making, glue, ink, paint and for helping to seal mud walls. Since the late 17th century, rival Dutch, French and English powers competed for access to markets for the gum resin harvested from acacia trees found in the region north of the Gambia river to Mauritania and the western Sahara. The gum trade, which was symbol and substance of the expanding production and trade of textiles globally in this period, remained important even during the peak years of slave trading. Senegambian ports (Saint Louis and Goree) supplied only a minor percentage of all enslaved Africans sold to European traders, forming not more than twelve percent of the total from Africa for any period. Webb has suggested that the value of the gum exported from the desert coasts exceeded that of enslaved people sold from across the Atlantic from the Senegal river valley for several years in the late 17th century. By the 1720s, the value of slaves surpassed all other commodities for much of the century, after 1790, gum again became the most valuable commodity traded from northern Senegambia. West African gum resins found many of the same uses in both European and African textile production processes, although the output of increasingly mechanized European production was targeted to more and larger overseas markets (in Africa and the Americas) than was the case for African production. There is evidence for the export of African-made textiles from such ports as Saint Louis to other regional African ports such

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13 Webb, *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850.*
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
as those along the Petite Cote, the Gambia river and Guinea-Bissau, but export of African textiles to larger markets in Europe and the Americas was limited. In the western Sahel, the trades in gum and in horses each formed part of a pattern of commercial exchange between Senegambian people and their neighbors as linked as they were divided by religious, ethnic and social affiliations, as well as whether they were farmers, pastoralists or lived from raiding. These entanglements help to explain the strength of Sahara-oriented networks which continued to expand throughout the 19th century until the building of railroads completed slow-moving rise in the dominance of colonial governments and economies.  

Spatial and technological factors combine with environmental ones to further establish the late 18th century Senegambian context. Conditions such as easily eroding laterite soils and sections of uncultivable desert between the Senegal and Gambia rivers led to the tendency of resident populations to cluster densely in some parts of the region and avoid others. Cultivable land remained abundant in relation to the overall population, however. This facilitated the mobility of populations who, when unhappy with a given sovereign or patron, could withdraw their allegiance and move away, provided they could find adequate protection or safety elsewhere. Anthony Hopkins' *An Economic History of West Africa* advanced a classical economic theory which holds that in contexts where land was abundant, labor scarce, and the level of technology was low, slave-holding became a more profitable to owners of capital rather than a system based on free wage labor.  

This was the situation in late 18th century Senegambia where a market for enslaved labor continued to exist throughout the period. This occurred in a context in which strong households were those which could claim a large number of dependents whose labor produced wealth and

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whose allegiance was a source of political power. Social dynamics were centered on accumulating dependents, whether free, pawned or enslaved. The children of enslaved mothers often belonged to the mother's owner, could not be sold in the market and added to the prominence of the owner's household and lineage. The availability of land favored the development of land extensive farming practices, discouraged private land ownership, and provided an additional rationale for both slavery and slave trading.

Through exchanges with Europeans on the Atlantic coast, these commercial dynamics within western Africa interacted with global maritime trade networks. Textiles were a principal commodity traded across all sectors of these networks.

**Guinee cloths**

At Saint Louis, indigo-dyed “guinee” cloths became especially identified with consumers along the Senegal river valley, although Europeans sold them throughout western, central western and parts of east Africa. Named for their principal destination market, “Guinee” cotton textiles were woven along the Coromandel coast of southern India and used both for clothing and as a unit of account across the desert/savannah frontier zone. A French memorandum from the early 1780s claimed that slave raids by Trarza Moors, instigated by Europeans on Saint Louis, produced so many captives on the Saint Louis market over a six-month period that the dropped to a low of one guinee cloth for one enslaved person. Xavier de Golbery, a French geographer who was sent by

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18 Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*.
20 C6/18, “Memoire Sur Le Commerce Du Senegal,” 1789, ANOM.
king Louis XVI to conduct a study in Senegal in the 1780s, noted that the price of guinee cloth from India more than doubled from 20 francs to 50 francs because of disruptions from the American Revolutionary war, before leveling out to around 25 francs by the end of the 1780s.²¹

He estimated it would cost the French 15,000 pieces of guinea cloth to purchase two million pounds of gum from five regional forests north of the Senegal river. The cost of that trade “would still offer an enormous return after the expenses of procuring it, of expeditions in the river, of establishments and settlements in the island of St. Louis, freight, fitting out, etc., etc, fairly deducted.”²²

At Saint Louis, Africans admired the cloths aesthetically for the intensity of their dye, preferably a very dark blue or black, with a coppery red sheen visible on the surface produced from over saturation, as well as for added starch.²³ Berber/Arab merchants carried these cloths into regions of the desert where they functioned as currency along with gold and salt²⁴ while Wolof, Fulbe and Manding Juula merchants carried them south and east, where iron, gold, salt and cowrie shells also served as currency in some areas. It is noteworthy that cowrie shells, like Indian textiles, reinforced trade patterns linking Europe, Asia and Africa, as the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean remained the principle global source for the shells, showing the relationship between Indian ocean commerce and circum-Atlantic trade.²⁵ These maritime networks overlapped, and in time came to supplant, land-based routes of exchange that were centuries older but which had also delivered cowrie shells and Asian textiles across trans-Saharan networks. By the end of the

²¹ Sylvain Meinrad Xavier de Golbery, Fragmens D’un Voyage En Afrique. English, 2nd ed. (London: Jones and Bumford, 1808), 175.
²² Ibid., 176.
²³ Curtin, Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade, 260.
seventeenth century, the India-made guinea cloths had already become a staple item of French maritime trade at Saint Louis, and remained so well into the 19th century, when they became an exchange item used by the French military as it extended its colonial authority eastward from the Senegal river toward the Niger river in the 1860s.

By the 1750s guinees had become a standard measure used to calculate the price of goods in European records, which further helped to reify the notion of the *piece d'Inde/pieza de India* as the measure for an enslaved African. When the British took control of the French trading settlement for a 20-year period beginning in 1757, they relied on their own networks in India to obtain the cloths which, arguably had come to dominate commerce at Saint Louis, if less so than in ports further south. In northern Senegambia, guinea cloths had evidently become absorbed into a broader pattern of exchange along the ecological frontier partially constituted by the Senegal river. Desert-side merchants had long obtained millet and cloth from Sahel-side cultivators in exchange for horses, cattle and salt. With the expanded trade in gum arabic with Europeans, these desert-side merchants had a steady supply of indigo-dyed cloths once obtained only from local farmers, for use not only as clothing but also as a valuable resource to procure other desired goods. Although perhaps more important in Senegal river than in other western African ports, *guinee* cloths as currency fit a broader pattern of “currency” imports. West Africa was a net importer of currency, whether in the form of cowries, textiles or iron bars, throughout the 18th century.

**Women's Indigo Cloth Dyeing Industry**

Even as deep indigo-dyed “guinea cloths” were a heavily imported textile at Saint Louis, the practice of indigo cloth dyeing was widespread across a range of geographic, social and

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linguistic settings in West Africa. Park, Lamiral and others from this period reported that male weavers and female indigo dyers in Bundu produced indigo cloth that was exchanged northward to Moorish markets at Gedumah and Benown for salt extracted from desert mines.27 Bunduucke (people of Bundu) also traded in gum arabic and aromatic resins used to perfume homes and clothing.

To the west of Futa Toro, in Cayor, Thomas Clarkson wrote that he observed that indigo dyeing was a specialized craft practiced exclusively by trained women who originated from only a few villages where they were taught.28 These dyers circulated to villages in the region to perform work on commission for local buyers who paid them in quantities of millet, cloth, salt or other agreed upon commodity. In one document, Clarkson described a sample of blue and white-patterned cloths he purchased at Joal, a market town on Senegal's Petite Cote, and sent to London as examples of the fine quality of indigo dye available in the region, although he believed the English could improve the dye's quality by introducing their own production techniques.29

In her study of colonial-era Yoruba women who were indigo dyers in Abeokuta, Nigeria, Judith Byfield challenged claims that indigenous textiles there were forced out of the market by cheaper European imports upon which African consumers became dependent.30 Instead, she argued that any such impact from foreign imports was not static nor absolute, that it varied across


29 Sierra Leone 12.131, “Letter Addressed to the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Clarkson” n.d., British Library.

sectors of the craft at particular times and places. The specific organization of specialist craft producers of 18th century Senegambia, such as the women indigo dyers mentioned by Clarkson, would need to be carefully parsed from the available sources for particular regions, a task that is outside the reach of the present discussion. It is noteworthy, however, that the dyers are described as mobile entrepreneurs, like many people occupying the middle-rung social status of the stratified societies of the savannah and savannah-woodlands. As producers, the income of these women would have depended on relations with weavers (usually men) and with those who controlled quantities of finished cloth. There could be significant differences between sub-regions within Senegambia, but these social relations were likely regulated by kinship networks, lineage alliances, and marriage patterns between craft specialists, all of which facilitated long distance commerce.31 Contemporary European sources suggest that particular regions within Senegambia were known for their indigo cloth production. Similar centers of indigo dye specialization in 19th century Hausaland, studied by Philip Shea, grew in tandem with the popularity of their cloths with particular markets, such as among the Tuareg to the north. Shea found that the dye pits produced such wealth that some came to be owned by opportunistic investors, rather than dyers, who controlled production for their own financial gain and paid taxes on their gains to the state ruler. In some cases, successful female dyers in the Kano region were reported as having many slaves working on their behalf.

In a study of 19th century Maraka (Serakhule) textile production in the Middle Niger valley, Richard Roberts suggested that the structural consolidation of Segu in the late 18th century affected the economic and social relations of female indigo dyers and male weavers over time. Based substantially on a series of oral history interviews he conducted in Mali, Roberts argued Maraka

entrepreneurs took the opportunities present within a context of political stability established by the Segu state to gain a greater share of desert-side and regional trade by organizing “plantations” of enslaved people to increase production for the market. But these decisions also had profound implications for the gender relations of household production. Maraka women previously had rights as indigo dyers, a specialized craft that added great value to white cloths produced through the combined efforts of men and women. These cloths catered to an expanding “aristocratic and patrician class of consumers” spawned by the increased stability and wealth promoted by a state. But as household production increased beyond a level of “subsistence” to one aimed at the market through the use of enslaved workers, free Maraka women gradually lost control over indigo to the men who typically owned the slaves used to cultivate and process the larger quantities of indigo.

Roberts’ argues that the move to large-scale slave production in the middle Niger valley had implications for the gendered social relations of that region. The Maraka example can not prove that such a shift was also true a century earlier under Almamy Kan in the Futa Toro, several hundred kilometers to the southwest of Roberts' study area. But it suggests the plausibility of such a scenario taking place under similar conditions.

From another perspective, Walter Hawthorne questioned Roberts' assertion that the presence of state structures are necessary for economic growth in West Africa with his research on 17th century by acephalous Balanta communities on the Guinea coast. There Balanta villagers both increased rice production for the Atlantic market and maintained their independence from the neighboring Kaabu state by changing their settlement patterns and reshaping their social

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33 Ibid., 231.
institutions (without creating a centralized hierarchy\textsuperscript{34}). Hawthorne's analysis points to the relevance of market conditions, the availability of both land and labor and the specificity of environmental conditions to explaining West African efforts to organize production for the market. Such a perspective leaves in place the possibility that economic growth expanded under the state institutions controlled by Almamy Kan. It also suggests the impetus for such growth did not forcibly depend upon those institutions, but rather that in the regional specificity of the Futa Toro, centralized state actors organized successfully to do so.

Slaveholding relationships between women dyers and dependent workers similar to those described by Roberts may have also existed along the Senegal river valley in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Indigo cloths produced in Senegambian pits, such as those in Bundu to the east, and to the west, in Cayor, Sin and Saalum, were the primary alternative to those indigo cloths imported heavily from European ports. In this case, the focus on materiality suggests the critical nature of women's labor for historians of African social and economic history. The historical predominance of women in indigo cloth dyeing across Senegambia placed these female laborers, whether free peasants or enslaved, at a critical juncture in the convergence of global networks circulating indigo cotton cloths into western Africa. They represented a segment of the Senegambian population affected by and interacting directly with these global networks. Yet their experience has usually only been glossed in studies focused on long-distance networks dominated by men.

Lamiral claimed that women in Senegambia traded in locally made cloths that they commissioned from male weavers who worked with yarn that the women had spun for

themselves. Lamiral wrote that “the cotton is of a fineness and brilliance that equals it to silk and the people of the country make very beautiful cloths from them. The indigo is also very beautiful… Our most beautiful guinees from India are of a less lively and of less azure. All of their cloths are not dyed in the same way: they also have the art to mottle them, to stain them in patterns and make designs on them.”

Among the regional consumers of the indigo cloth produced along the Senegal river valley were communities of Berber/Arab Moors living to the north. Golbery, who visited some of the trading posts where gum arabic was exchanged, described the standard outfit of lower class Moorish men as being made entirely of “blue callico” or indigo cotton cloth. He described the basic garment as “a large shirt” that hung loosely to about the middle of the thigh. It had large sleeves and was open in the front to the stomach exposing the neck. Wealthy Moorish men wore finer qualities of cotton cloth in a wider variety of colors and patterns. Finally, he noted that kings also wore a large robe made of a fine wool, or sometimes woven of camel or goat hair that gave them a “noble and graceful appearance” even as its looseness left the body free and unconfined. Berber/Arab Moorish women wore two large pieces of indigo-dyed cloth, one that hung from their shoulders to their knees and a second wrapped around the waist that extended to the ankle. Such eye-witness descriptions of everyday clothing only hints at the broader uses of indigo-dyed cloth in the region and the range of meanings and social values attached to it. However, it does suggest the large regional consumer base for indigo-dyed cloth whether local or imported. If any African industry was being negatively impacted by competition from imported cotton cloth from India or

36 Ibid., 302.
Europe, it would have been specifically the indigo-dyeing sector of the industry operated by
women. There are signs, however, that their output remained healthy in the absence of war or
environmental crisis.

**Islamic reform movement of the late 18th century**

In the 1770s, the Islamic reform movement across the Futa Toro led by clerics and the
followers called the “toorodbe” took shape amid tensions between pastoralists and farmers on
either side of the Senegal river. As had occurred during a similar “tubenan” movement almost a
century earlier, when the Berber cleric, Nasir al-Din, began to preach to communities on both sides
of the river, the late 18th movement began with the itinerant preaching of another cleric, Suleiman
Bal. He traveled around the region denouncing the depredations of the Denyanke ruler of the Futa
Toro, called Satigi.38 Bal decried the Satigi’s pillaging, enslavement and sale of his own subjects,
especially Muslims, and he encouraged peasants to show dissent from a status quo that accepted
the Satigi’s authority.39 These had also been themes of the *tubenan* movement. The 18th century
toroodbe jihadists of Futa Toro shared with their 17th century *tubenan* predecessors some aspects
of a political vision that wanted to replace the status quo with a centralized Islamic state governed
by sharia.

However, both sets of reformers also had to contend with the market relations that
maintained a social order within the region. Boubacar Barry has argued that the late 17th century
jihad led by Nasr al-Din emerged partially from concerns Berber/Arab zwaya clerics had about the
potential draw of trade to European-controlled Saint Louis, away from Sahara-oriented networks

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38 Satigi is a contraction of the Mande-language word Siratigi, literally owner of the path or road master, referring in
some cases to the leader of a caravan, also used to refer to political rulers. In English sources for the Gambia and
Sierra Leone to the south, siratigi appears as “sleeve.”
39 Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa.*
they controlled. James Webb has pointed out this move did not imply a rejection of enslavement but rather an attempt by al-Din and the zwaya clerics to advance their own interests. Similar dynamics were also in play during the expansion of the Tukulor clerical state in the late 18th century.

These processes were informed by their articulation with the dominant legal and religious codes operative within the local environmental constraints. These in turn affected which people could occupy particular lands and how much they could produce in them. Searing has pointed out that those Wolof-speaking areas of Cayor to the west of Futa Toro that became centers of rebellion and secessionist sentiment against corrupt rulers had been “deeply affected” by their commercial ties to Atlantic ports and products obtained from European ships. The political transformations they experienced can not be fully explained without reference to the Atlantic commerce and its global linkages. That said, dynamics internal to northern Senegambia were also key to the economic practices of cultivating enslaved and serf (tribute) labor, as well as their changes over time. Political and clerical elites relied on the labor of the enslaved, the indentured and of serfs to feed, clothe and protect them, freeing these elites to produce scholarship or to pursue state and institution-building projects. Given the generally high ratio of land to labor in western Africa, and the difficulty of controlling labor when land was abundant, Africans relied on the control of dependents and enslaved people to acquire power and wealth, and to overcome constraints on local production. Mungo Park observed residents in several communities east of Futa Toro spinning

thread and, weaving cloth, and wrote that weavers could be either enslaved or free and that they worked on commission for buyers who supplied them thread who had rights to sell the cloth they produced. He estimated that an average woman could spin enough yarn to weave six to nine garments per year that she could sell on the market for between one and two minkali, or quantities of gold dust equal to ten silver shillings. These descriptions suggest a high degree of social complexity (such as the co-existence of free and enslaved labor), as well as a highly differentiated market of consumers with distinct needs for and interest in a variety of textiles. Historical change in the region might be said to result from the articulation of internal and external dynamics.

This was true of the Islamic reformist campaigns in Futa Toro of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and of developments in the coastal kingdoms such as Cayor, Waalo, Bawol and others. Both reformist campaigns began in the context of a political economy entangled with Atlantic and Saharan commerce. Both movements sought to purify Islamic practices thought to be incorrect or oppressive; and both sought to bolster their claim by pointing to the same social ill as an example of a degraded, un-Islamic status quo: corrupt political leaders who preyed on their own subjects and permitted the enslavement of Muslims to Christians. The motives of the Tukulor reformists of Futa Toro were in opposition with those secessionists of the western Cayor region who sought to maintain independence from the expanding Tukulor clerical state. Yet political unrest in both regions, and the willingness of large numbers of people to be persuaded by calls to reform or to rebel, indicate the degree to which social relations in both regions were entangled with global market exchanges, access to which was at stake in any outcome.

The increasing physical presence of Europeans in the region was another factor animating dynamics, as it likely reinforced the notion of an expanding and powerful Atlantic trade. In 1771,

Charles O'Hara, the British governor at Saint Lewis began construction of a fort at Podor, 130 miles up river from the Atlantic, to serve as a trading station near sources of a “variety of different kinds of corn, likewise rice, tobacco, indigo and cotton.” O'Hara planned for the fort to be but one stage of an expanding British colonial presence on the Senegal that would eventually include attracting white colonists to settle hundreds of miles upriver.45 There is no evidence that he pursued this idea very far, but even construction of the fort would have signaled to local stakeholders the commitment of Europeans to expand their commerce in the region. The gum trade sought by O'Hara, and well as other European competitors, was tied to the slave raiding practiced by ceddo and both Moorish armies that sometimes sold captured Muslims into servitude and enflamed local political dynamics.

At about the time O'Hara was building the fort at Podor, Tukulor cleric Suleiman Bal led an early military victory over the Trarza Moors that succeeded in abolishing an annual tribute payment of millet imposed on Futa farmers by the Moors. Bal himself was killed during the battle, however, and his death set off a crisis over succession. A group of torodbe clerics chose Abdul Qader Kan to follow Bal as the new leader of the imamate at a critical moment. Kan was a highly regarded Islamic scholar and teacher whose father had studied Islamic sciences at the holy city of Jakha.46 Kan's lineage and scholarly ties connected him to some of the most important scholars and Muslim holy places in western Africa. He had been a quranic student in the southwest Sahara of a woman considered by many of her peers as the foremost scholar of grammar, theology and

46 It is unclear whether this refers to Jakhaba, a community on the Bafing river, or the older and still more prestigious community of the same name near Jenne/Massina.
law, Khadija bint Muhammad al-Aqil. Also, Kan and Suleiman Bal had been students together at a celebrated quranic school in the village of Pir in Wolof-speaking Cayor. The school at Pir drew students from across the region; two members of Kan's cohort weavers who had traveled from Nioro in Bamana-speaking Kaarta, several hundred kilometers away to study there.

When the leading Tukulor clerics of Futa Toro called on Kan to serve as imam he had been teaching students at a quranic school in Bundu, along the eastern stretches of the Senegal river, closer to the Bafing river and the Bambuk goldmines.

Figure 3 Image of Diai Boukari, a Tukulor marabout who guided French explorer Gaspard Mollien through the Futa Toro and Bundu in the early 19th century

The physical itineraries of scholars like Kan criss-crossing the region give a sense of the great distances connected by networks of quranic teachers and students, with advanced students moving to multiple communities to reside temporarily over the course of their lives. Scholars built bonds of trust and affiliation across these scholar-merchant networks that facilitated the exchange of information as well as of commerce. Such trading networks were formed through linkages across a diaspora of Jakhanke clerics and traders who settled in diverse ethnic communities across Senegambia. They organized annual caravans from the cotton-rich areas around Jakhaba, their principal settlement on the Bafing river, to sell their own cotton textiles in markets along the Gambia river in exchange for salt, glass beads and paper.

A regional diaspora of Jakhanke clerical settlements had spread westward over the long

50 See Curtin for a discussion of Jahanke and Juula traders
duree of centuries from Jakhaba on the Bafing into parts of Bundu, Wuuli and locations along the Gambia river. Across neighboring Futa Toro, many of the juula traders were Tukulor Futakobe who circulated throughout the region. As a governor, Almamy Kan established a policy of building mosques and Quranic schools throughout the central Futa Toro. This had implications for the spatial organization of villages, where these structures became central foci of activity and authority, and for the organization of agricultural labor performed by quranic students, free peasants or enslaved people. The potential productivity of all such laborers would have been facilitated by the physical security promised in lands controlled by the new state, a factor that had drawn peasants from Wolof and Manding-speaking areas to settle there. The establishment of more schools would have been consistent with a developing weaving industry because schools were also often sites of instruction to children in the basic skills of spinning and weaving, as well as for the gendering of these tasks. Porches or covered outdoor spaces adjacent to mosques were similarly sites where elder men might practice and teach embroidery, and these mosque sites had often themselves been chosen for their centrality and visibility within a given community. Presumably, access to good farm land and the absence of war raids during the dry season favored local cloth production and, along with an increased number of workers available to practice the craft, would have significantly added to the circulation of imported cloth available from commerce with Saint Louis and with some Saharan networks.

Rudolph Ware has recently argued for the importance of Qur'anic schooling in western Africa that promulgated Islamic ideals about educating the whole human being through embodied practices. The role of thread spinning and cloth weaving among these embodied practices as

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53 Ware, The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa.
well as those of dressing the body in cloth is one that should be properly historicized with particular regional studies, a task that falls outside the scope of this current chapter. However, the elevation of a respected cleric (rather than a military leader) to political leadership at a time of crisis in the Futa Toro underscores centrality of these embodied practices to the aspired for social transformation. The investiture of the clerical scholar Kan was an occasion of symbolic importance that was likely attended with special attention to ritualized forms of dress and adornment.

It is difficult to state the degree to which Suleiyman Bal, Abdul Qadir Kan and other key shapers of the 18th century reformist Tukulor state advanced sartorial humility as a public policy and what specific forms of expression that included, and under what circumstances. Only broad outlines are indicated in written sources with inferences drawn from nearby examples. Certainly manner of dress, adornment and personal grooming were all ways that individuals could visibly project a submission to Islam in general or to the leaders of the Futa Toro imamate in particular. Pursuing questions about consumption and how people used commodities or sought to regulate their use, further grounds Africanist historians in the specifics of place. For western Africa, this method facilitates closer analysis of a range of social actors as differentiated characters rather than homogenized forms grouped within larger structures or processes invisible to the people themselves. It gets underneath the homogenizing tendency of descriptive terms used by historians such as “Africans” or “West Africans” while also avoiding the pitfalls of extrapolating from the narrow experience of a single, bounded ethnic or religious group category as a synecdoche for diverse experience across the region. It foregrounds attention to how people in a given area used the goods they obtained or produced to construct their own social relations, to assert forms of belonging and to project hegemonic power; and it attempts to discern the degree to which these were changing over time.
For example, one noteworthy element of Nasr al-Din's seventeenth century “tubenan” reform movement was its explicit and implicit anti-consumerism as al-Din preached the virtues of simplicity and humility in contrast to decadent rulers. He reportedly embodied this facet of his critique of Islamic practices of current rulers with his plain attire and shaved head, according to Chambonneau's written account of 1673.

The Negroes listened to him. They saw someone who was not even thirty years old, who preached penitence naked, disdaining clothes and with his head shaved, who spoke only of God's law and of their well-being and liberty. Hearing this speech, their loyalty began to crumble…They tore up their clothes, shaved their heads, redoubled their prayers…Then they cried against their king, that he is a tyrant and must be deposed.\textsuperscript{54}

As Robinson notes, there is ambiguity in Chambonneau's use of the term “naked” (“\textit{tout nud}”) to describe the Muslim cleric which might be taken to mean “simply attired” or “minimally clothed.” In any case, it is evident that al-Din's vision of a changed Muslim society included a certain sartorial politics that seemed to reject the accumulation of goods and their wanton display. The same is likely true of the leader of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century torodbe movement Suleiyman Bal, whose movement in other respects was thought to take up the major concerns of its 17\textsuperscript{th} century predecessor.\textsuperscript{55} As will be shown below, however, the circulation of imported and local cloth and other commodities, both Atlantic and Saharan, continued throughout the period with only episodic interruption.

The inferences about the type and quality of these cloths, and any garments made from them, are drawn from European written descriptions and visual sources rather than direct


examination of any material or garments from the time and place. Material sources from Senegambia of this period are limited and rare. British and French museums, such as the Musee d'Histoire de Nantes (Chateau des Ducs de Bretagne) hold some samples of 18th-century European-made cloths intended for trade in Africa, including samples of cloth imitating Indian cloths.

Nantes, an important Atlantic port of the French slave trade, saw the emergence of a large textile industry producing French-made versions of painted Indian cloth, called *indiennes*, that were sold in both Europe and in Africa. One notable Nantes manufacturer of *indiennes*, Fabre Petitpierre, produced a book of print designs for cloth it intended for trading in Africa, ostensibly designs that might appeal to its African buyers but beyond this evidence, it is unclear whether these specific designs were ever produced and traded anywhere in Africa.

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56 Bertrand Guillet, *La Marie-Séraphique, navire négrier* (Nantes: Memo; Nantes, 2009).
Figure 4 Images of 18th century sample textile prints of Favre, Petitpierre published in La Marie Seraphique: Navire negrier by Bertrand Guillet
There is much about the company and its specific operations in particular African ports that remains unclear. Eighteenth-century pattern books produced by European traders contain swatches of cloth, including Guinee cloth, and many varieties of checks and stripes, but those books used in the African trade are difficult to find. One such pattern book created by the manufacturing firm of John and Benjamin Browser of Manchester, England in 1771 was associated with their brigantine named Havannah that likely traded in Africa, although it is difficult to determine exactly where. Matching ships and their contents to particular ports and dates in western Africa is a sleuthing challenge that can only produce a fragmented picture. However, there is some indication that the same French ships trading in India and returned to French Atlantic ports such as Nantes and Orient to sell off some of their Asian merchandise, then continued to western Africa with remaining assortments of Asian cloth for markets there. Similarly, from western Africa, whole pieces of cloth, much less finished garments that can be accurately dated and sourced are even more difficult to find. These challenges stem from the attempt in this study to conceive of widening the historians archival base to include material objects, in this case textiles and fragments scattered across a range of institutions, that could be brought into play with written sources, visual images and oral narratives to provide another, tactile mode in which to consider historical context and change in this part of the world. Some of these challenges can be simply overcome with additional research. At this stage, however, the current study draws from written description and visual imagery rather than particular physical examples. Descriptions of western African clothing and adornment represent on their own some evidence how some Africans themselves interacted with these global exchanges of material, labor and ideas. Eye-witness descriptions of the region contained in travel accounts of the period do open a window into the
material conditions of life in western Africa that reveals a wider diversity and complexity of engagement than permitted within the lens of European/African binary. They retain an indication of how different Senegambian populations marked themselves as distinct in an ethnically and religiously diverse context through the development of particular clothing styles. I define clothing or dress broadly along the lines outlined by the anthropologist Karen Hansen, citing Eicher and Roach-Higgins, as “an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements.”  

Throughout the multi-cultural, multi-lingual landscape of Senegambia, dress was a critical means of self-identification and affiliation where Berber/Arab, Fulbe, Serakhulle, Jakhanke and other Mande-speaking groups lived in close proximity, sometimes clustering in densely settled trade towns and sometimes dispersed across small rural villages. The malleability of clothing styles, and the ability of individuals to adapt or change clothing styles to assert affiliation or belonging within a given social group seems particularly relevant to historical processes in late 18th century western Africa where the violent disruptions of war and slave raiding kept populations on the move and ethnic identity in flux. Historian Daniel Roche has suggested the relevance of clothing as historical evidence by describing clothing as “a social fact of communication which also expresses the evolution of the culture, sensibility and intelligence of the producers and the tolerance of the consumers.”

Given this insight, it would be instructive to reflect upon the clothing that might have been worn by Almamy Qader Kan, perhaps chosen by him or for him on the occasion of his investiture. If, as scholars have argued, the ceremony marking Kan's investiture as Almamy (imam) contained

elements of similar rituals practiced in the Futa Jalon region, he would have been secluded for a number of days to emerge publicly wearing a freshly made bubu, a staff, and a bright red cap. Scarlet wool cloth, and also sometimes red worsted wool caps, continued to be a regular item listed on inventories of British and French ships for both customs payments and general sale at regional Atlantic ports. Red wool caps manufactured in Morocco also reached the region across the Sahara through markets at Timbuktu. The red wool caps wool caps suggest affiliation with their North African sources and manifested linkages between material practices on both sides of the Sahara, which were also unified by Islamic faith, networks of Muslim brotherhoods and quranic scholarship. Meanwhile, French and British traders both sold scarlet wool cloth through Atlantic ports that could be used to make caps, as well as put to a range of other uses for clothing, adornment and embroidery when unravelled for its yarn.

Clothing for elite figures such the Almamy, even in a context in which clerics promoted humility through modest forms of dress, would likely have been distinguished by particular forms of tailoring and embroidery not worn by commoners, or by people less accomplished in Islamic scholarship. This was the case only a few years later in Hausaland, when Sheikh Usman dan Fodio believed he had received divine support to wage holy war against the rulers of Hausa city-states in part through a dream in which the founder of the Qadiriya brotherhood, Abd al-Qadir, personally presented him a green robe of honor embroidered with the phrase, “their is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger.”

Robes of distinction have been used as official garments throughout the Islamic world, and described in accounts of West Africa written by Arab visitors

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61 {Liverpool, ms10.49, Spitfire}
as early as the eleventh century. Colleen Kriger has shown how, in the Sokoto Caliphate established by dan Fodio in 1810, the robe of honor worn was used to signify official status within the Caliphate administration and eventually gained a broader consumer base while remaining an indicator of high status or prestige. The situation for dan Fodio in Hausaland was different from that of Qader Kan in the Futa Toro in that Usuman dan Fodio and his followers alleged direct repression from the Hausa ruler of Gobir forbidding the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam and the wearing of turbans or veils. In Futa Toro, the dispute was rather between Fula Muslims over administration of the territory. Qader Kan had become the leader of a movement that had intervened against a weakened Fula Denyanke regime, then continued to advance with aggressions against Wolof and Berber/Arab communities. I have not as yet discovered a contemporary account of Kan's investiture, though it is likely that if he wore a bubu the bubu Kan wore would likely have had embroidery that reinforced visually the Almamy's scholarly and lineage ties to Muslim communities of Maacina, in the upper Sahel.

In addition to distinguishing itself from other forms of local indigenous clothing styles, the embroidered robe of honor and turban would also have presented a stark visual contrast to the more European-influenced clothing styles of the habitants of Saint Louis, some of their enslaved and wage workers, and his European antagonists traveling the length of the Senegal river between Saint Louis and Galam. This might have included items such as tricorn hats, waistcoats, trousers, handkerchiefs or jackets. In the context of the adoption of certain foreign-produced clothing and

64 Colleen E. Kriger, “Robes of the Sokoto Caliphate,” *African Arts* 21, no. 3 (May 1988).
65 Ibid.
accessories available in coastal markets and exchanged through regional networks, it is possible to imagine a process by which the Almamy's sartorial choices may have become further legitimated and 'indigenized' as a specifically local expression of power and authority as a viable alternative to those represented by Europe and the Atlantic.

In the investiture ceremony, a senior scholar would likely have wrapped the Almamy's head seven times with a white cloth to create a turban, symbol of his authority. In Islamic traditions, white turbans had served as protection and a mark of achievement and distinction. They are worn by Quranic scholars whose depth of knowledge has been tested by a group of clerics.68

Once installed, Almamy Kan would confer white turbans to trusted local officials as a symbol of allegiance to him, thus lending them an additional political significance. In 1786, Almamy Qader Kan sent a white cloth to the Damel of Cayor, Amari Ngoone Ndeela, demanding that he shave his head and wear the turban to symbolize submission to the Almamy's authority and that he cease his personal consumption of trade liquor, eau de vie.69 When the Damel refused these commands, the Almamy led a massive military campaign, accompanied by 30,000 partisans, women men and children who he planned to permanently settle onto the Damel's territory, as a means of claiming control of the land. However, this attack met fierce resistance and scorched earth tactics from the Damel's soldiers before the Almamy's fighters were famously routed at Bunguye. Hundreds of the Tukulor fighters were reportedly killed, sold into slavery through Saint Louis, or scattered in defeat, while the Almamy himself was taken captive.70 The Wolof ruler held

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the defeated Almamy captive for three months, according to Mungo Park who heard an account of
the events several months later from local jeliw or griots who sang the Damel's praises near the
Bafing river in the foothills of the Futa Jallon.\(^71\)

As has been pointed out by Searing, the conflict between the rulers of Waalo and Tukulor
stemmed from two divergent governance strategies, representing a pattern of conflict that could
be found across a vast region, from Waalo, Cayor and the Futa Toro regions in the west to Kaarta
and Segu on the Niger river in the east, and many other areas. Throughout, local aristocracies or
controlling groups accumulated wealth and power from the booty captured in raids by their
enslaved or dependent soldiers on vulnerable peasants. This governance strategy was increasingly
in conflict with Muslim reformers who sought to expand peaceful commerce and offered
protection from raids, but on the condition of villagers accepting Islam, being governed by clerics
interpreting sharia, and paying annual tribute in goods or labor. Local aristocracies typically
sought to maintain their political independence from Muslim clerics, even as they also accepted
them as advisors and allowed them to settle in villages in their lands. In the Wolof states, local
aristocracies owed their status, wealth and authority to the numbers of enslaved soldiers [“ceddo”],
enslaved and other dependent workers they accumulated over time. The ceddo soldiers supervised
the field work of enslaved people who grew food that supported the households of the aristocracy
but also generated a surplus that was sold in market exchanges with the Saharan Moors and the
European trading settlement at Saint Louis\(^72\). But from at the late \(^17\)th century onward, the Wolof
aristocracy faced repeated opposition, principally from free Muslim peasants.\(^73\) Clerical elites
disdained the ceddo soldiers as “pagans” [kafr] who drank heavily of the alcohol imported into the

\(^73\) Ibid.
region on European ships. The *ceddo* soldiers would have been consumers of a large variety of cloth goods that constituted part of their payment and were distributed in Waalo by the Damel and his officials.

In 1775, the ascent to power of clerics in the Futa Toro drew a response from then-British governor Charles O’Hara who was alarmed at a potential interruption in slave trading. O’Hara reportedly gave *guinee* cloth and guns as payment to the Trarza Moors to support their raids on villages inside the kingdom of Waalo to procure slaves. These campaigns resulted in the destruction of dozens of villages and in the enslavement of thousands, including Tukulor Muslims resident in these areas, enraging the Tukulor priests.\(^4\) O’Hara's actions only hardened the resolve of the newly elected Almamy Abdul Qader Kan to cut off all slave trading with Fort Saint Lewis and to establish sovereign governance under sharia throughout Futa Toro, as was pointed out by Clarkson and other contemporary abolitionists. O’Hara handed the Almamy not only a victory that abolitionists in Britain could portray as moral opposition to slavery, but also a victory in the regional politics of the Senegal river valley as he attracted the allegiance of more people to his vision of a society that promised protection from raiding. Once in power, the Kan sought to expand territorial control with attacks on the independence of their neighbors such as the attack on Waalo in 1786. Thus, in addition to feeding into these recriminating internecine wars, with their corresponding destruction to crops and to housing, O’Hara's actions ultimately appeared to strengthen Muslim political authority and influence across a larger portion of the central Senegal river valley.

Some European commentators of the period conflated Kan's bid to end slavery within the Futa Toro with the positions held by some (but not all) Christian abolitionists of Britain and British

\(^4\) Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, 123.
North America to immediately end all forms of slavery.\textsuperscript{75} For the present analysis, however, it is more productive to characterize Almamy Kan's embargo as a bid to control regional markets, including the market for slaves, rather than as an idealistic move against all forms of slavery per se. Thomas Clarkson, citing reports from Wadstrom and Dr. Spaartman who had been in Senegal where they witnessed events, wrote that Almamy Kan's embargo threatened financial disaster for the French Senegal Company in 1787 by preventing the passage of slaves purchased at Galam through its territory to the coast. Clarkson wrote that French officials paid costly bribes to Moorish chiefs to conduct raids for slaves from areas nearer the coast, although even this failed to procure enough captives to cover their costs to the French. However, Clarkson claimed that the French were saved from financial ruin that year by an exceptional crop of gum arabic that was salable in Europe.\textsuperscript{76} This suggests that Moorish chiefs may have been among the greatest beneficiaries of Almamy Kan's embargo since there was a greater demand than usual from the gum resin collected by their enslaved laborers. In the central Futa Toro, some farmers sowed rice that they sold to feed residents of Saint Louis, as well as to provision slave ships. A cessation of slave trading would have possibly led to a lower demand for such provisions. However, it is difficult to ascertain in much detail how the economy of the central Futa Toro might have been affected by a halt in slave trading during the years of Kan's embargo.

The question of the positions taken by Kan and the governing Futa Toro clerics on enslavement, particularly of non-Muslims and of girls, is a vital one that must be traced out as they evolved over time. The Evangelical Christian revivalism shaping British and British American abolitionist sentiment overlapped in interesting ways with the revivalist Muslim reform movements that swept vast portions of the West African savannah eastward through to Lake Chad.

\textsuperscript{75} Clarkson, \textit{Letters on the Slave-Trade}.
\textsuperscript{76} 12.131, “Letter Addressed to the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Clarkson.”
But it is important that the similarities and differences between these religious movements—both as ideology and in terms of how each was played out in actual communities—be carefully teased out and examined. Kan's embargo, came as a strategic response to the Atlantic and global markets, but not on terms that fit neatly with abolitionist discourse of Britain and English-speaking North America focused narrowly on the issues of slave trading and of slavery.

In 1783, Britain and France re-negotiated imperial zones of commerce around the globe with the Treaty of Paris that formally ended the American War of Independence. In West Africa, Britain returned control over the entrepôt islands of Saint Louis and Goree to France, keeping for itself exclusive trading rights in the Gambia river and the right to free trade in Gum Arabic at Portendick on the coast of contemporary Mauritania. Inikori has argued that the considerations of British textile manufacturers largely influenced the British decision to cede the two islands and the Senegal river to France.77 Advisors to Lord Shelbourne determined that Saint Lewis and the Senegal river were more valuable for access to the gum resin trade than for the trade in enslaved persons but that British merchants could continue to obtain Gum Arabic through trade on the Mauritanian coast north of Saint Louis. For Inikori, British concern to support manufacturing, particularly textile manufacturing viewed as central to British “national interests”, drove government decisions about imperial expansion in the late 18th century. This implies that in considering geographic location for commerce in Africa, it was important for Britain to balance access to sources of raw materials needed for British industry with access to consumer markets where it could exchange manufactured goods for desirable commodities, including enslaved persons. This decision to cede territory brought an end to the short-lived Senegambia colony.

Britain's first colonial experiment in West Africa. As the territorial arrangements made in the treaty remained largely in place for decades afterwards, they also began to mark out regional distinctions and patterns of African interaction with colonial governments that gradually became more pronounced later in the nineteenth century.

By 1785, Almamy Qader Kan had effectively withdrawn lands under his domain in the central Senegal river valley as sources of enslaved labor for both the Europeans on the coast and the Moors above the Senegal river. He was also in a position of strength to negotiate a treaty with the French who, having resumed commercial control of Saint Louis, also wanted to resume commerce to Serakhulle-controlled Galam on the Upper Senegal river. That treaty allowed French riverine passage through the Futa Toro on the conditions that Muslims not be sold into slavery and the payment of annual customs and usage fees for vessels trading on the river. Under the agreement, French officials were to meet officials of the Almamy in the central Futa each year at the start of the high-water season to pay annual customs duties. These payments were mostly in cloth and weapons that Robinson has shown amounted to 900 pounds sterling by 1789.

Records show that the French paid higher amounts in customary fees to the Brakna and Trarza Moorish chiefs than they paid to the Almamy and his officials. But the Futa Toro officials also charged the French merchants more in customs than they charged habitant merchants from Saint Louis. The Tukulor also imposed a tax or fee on individual vessels passing to Galam, in addition to the lump sum paid annually to the Alcati, the Almamy's designated official. The Tukulor officials thus earned as much or sometimes more from the commerce than the Moorish

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78 Ibid.
populations downriver.\textsuperscript{81} The Alcati was a close relative to Almamy Kan, Tapsir Sawa Kudi Kan,\textsuperscript{82} and also a key figure within the Almamy's ruling structure who traveled frequently between the central Futa Toro and Saint Louis, kept informed of market conditions and interacted regularly with French officials and traders.

The taxes imposed by the 1785 agreement represented a steep increase in customs duties charged by the earlier Denyanke Satigi rulers of Futa Toro whom the Almamy replaced in power. It is significant that the higher duties sometimes had the effect of discouraging trips upriver for sales in favor of simply purchasing millet in the Futa Toro and returning to the coast. This suggests that the Almamy's stated intention to block the slave trade took the economic form of what might be termed disincentivizing taxation—a strategy not dissimilar to the imposition of import duties in Britain and France to discourage unwanted trade in India cloth goods. Each of the respective centralized state authorities involved in this exchange across a long commodity chain extending from south Asia to Europe and Africa maneuvered to gain the most benefit for themselves from the trade as possible. In Futa Toro, Almamy and the Alcati distributed the additional merchandise obtained in higher duties paid by French officials and merchants, including India cloth goods, which helped to sustain their authority and influence throughout the region. The processes included evolving commercial and quasi-commercial negotiations over credit, taxes, and gifts which, for the Futa Toro clerics, became mechanisms that shielded certain parties from risk, guaranteed income, and symbolized their higher social status. There were frequent disputes between the French and the Tukulor officials over alleged violations of the agreement on both sides. Disruptions caused by the French Revolution prevented the shipment of goods upriver from Saint Louis several times during the 1790s. This turbulent and sometimes rancorous process of global

\textsuperscript{81} Barry, \textit{Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade}, 103.

\textsuperscript{82} Curtin, \textit{Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade}, 293.
exchange, and its relationship to sustaining social hierarchies locally, was similarly evident in the
dynamics described between the Waalo rulers, the Damel, and their clients to whom the Damel
distributed gifts of imported commodities to reinscribe their status as powerful, wealthy and
generous.

There are records of what material goods were included in the negotiated customs
payments that give a sense of the “global” provenance of the commodities circulating into the
Senegal river from the Atlantic. A copy of one 1785 treaty made between the Senegal Company's
Durand and the Trarza chief Ali-Kawri lists forty officials of the Moorish ruler by name, and the
specific customs to be paid to each annually by the French.83 Among the items listed for Ali-
Kawri himself, the first is two hundred pieces of guinee cloth, two two-shot pistols, along with an
array of textiles such as 30 lengths (coudees = the length between the elbow and finger of an adult)
of scarlet cloth, one piece of muslin, ten pieces of platilles (or linens from the Silesia region of
central Europe) and other goods such as mirrors, scissors, combs, locks and snuff boxes.84 The
quantity of “guinee cloth” alone was equal to over three thousand yards of cotton cloth,85 which
gives a sense of the large amount of capital collected by the chief in customs duty. An
accompanying memoire from the same year stipulates that only “superior quality” guinee cloths
from India would be acceptable in the gum trade and that the French imitation guinees then
available were “absolutely impossible to use for commerce in Senegal, especially not for the gum
trade, much less to use to pay customs.”86 The preference for the deep-dyed Indian made indigo
cloth over the French cloth perhaps makes sense when it is remembered that the imported guinees

83 C6/18, “Traite Passe Entre Sr Durand et Alikoury,” August 1785, ANOM.
84 Ibid.
85 I calculated the actual figure of 3,700 yards from the standard guinee length reported by J. P. Duchon-Doris,
Commerce Des Toiles Bleues Dites Guinees De L’industrie Francaise de Pondichery et de La Metropole Dans Les
Rapports Avec Le Senegal, L’ile de Bourbon et L’etranger (Paris: Imprimerie de Wittersheim, 8 Rue Montmorency,
1842), 4.
86 C6/19, “Memoire,” January 14, 1786, ANOM.
would have been compared to their nearest local competitors, West African indigo-dyed cotton cloths that had achieved a similar intensity of color as the cloths from India. The next lower rank of officials beginning with Ali-Kawri's translator (maitre de langue) received 25 guinees, while others received 12 guinees and so on down the line. Better paid officials received, similar to Ali-Kawri, a range of textiles that included muslins, woolens and linens in addition to a set number of guinee cloths while presumably lower ranking individuals received only guinee cloths.

In addition to the above-cited treaty, two other archival documents shed light on the breadth of textiles the French were importing to Saint Louis in the mid-1780s that go beyond those guinees outlined for official customs payments. One document from 1786, lists thirty-five trade items to be shipped aboard a trade convoy to Galam to be used for paying customs and gifts to local rulers as well as to purchase foodstuffs. Among the half-dozen textile and clothing items listed were perpetuana wool cloth, a coarse cloth from Brittany and hats with brims. A second document listing the comparative total value of exports from France to French colonies in the Americas and to “Senegal and Guinea” in 1786 and 1787 provides an even more expansive sample of the goods being imported during these years, including hosiery, lace, ribbons, varieties of linens, woolen, cotton muslins from both India and Europe as well as a variety of printed and loom-patterned handkerchiefs from India. This document unfortunately does not detail how many of these goods were sent to Futa Toro. Yet read in the context of the Tukulor clerics professed commitment to sartorial humility, these sources suggest the need for an expanded view of the region's interaction with global markets. A variety of West Africans were to acquire these imported goods, either via redistribution from influential persons or from purchases in a market, and incorporate them into

87 Mungo Park, Dominique Lamiral and several other European observers found the indigo of the Indian and West African cloths to be comparable.
88 C6/19, “Memoire.”
89 Ibid.
their daily lives. The varieties of imported textiles and clothing introduced novelty into western Africa, but in a way that was different from the European context where imported cotton textiles from Asia at this same period also transformative effects on society as cotton garments were being adopted by more people who had previously worn mostly woolen and linen clothing.  

In the West African context, cotton itself as a dominant textile was not so much the novelty as was the wider variety of cloths and accessories, available through import, with an aesthetic that was complementary to local tastes despite its novelty. The tastes of these African consumers were shaped dynamically through exchange networks reaching into parts of Europe, south Asia and the Americas.

The Almamy granted fertile land on the south side of the river to his supporters, partly as a reward for their loyalty to him, partly as a defense against possible future raids from the north side. In the absence of detailed records or written observations, it is difficult to know what impact these developments may have had on weavers and dyers in the Futa Toro of these years. Imported cloth continued to be available during years when slave trading was banned in the region. Saugnier reported that Tukulor buyers traveled to Saint Louis mostly to purchase iron and wool, which suggests that the Atlantic ports also supported some portion of local industry.  

As the Almamy regime did not oppose the enslavement of non-Muslims, some Tukulor families acquired groups of enslaved people in these years, although these were not housed in separate villages as was the practice in Futa Jallon, where slaves were apparently more numerous. It is not clear from the evidence how much of that labor within the Futa Toro of the late 18th century was enslaved as both

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free client-based household production took place along side slave production in the region. Both enslaved and free peasant workers would have been employed for weaving as a dry season activity. Contemporary ethnographic accounts have found that many Fuulbe considered weavers as a socially distinct endogamous group known as *maabube* (sing. *maabo*) whose separateness within Fuulbe society also stemmed from their roles as minstrels. This “outsider” was of lower social status comparable with that of an enslaved person (also necessarily an “outsider”).

Some free peasants migrated over considerable distances to hire themselves out as weavers to individual local buyers, where they were paid in food surplus or with a portion of their own cloth. Others migrated to join the workshop of a master weaver whose workshops produced cloth for regional markets, as was common in Bundu. Golbery writes that in the 1780s Bundu had a significant weaving and dyeing industry that supplied consumers in the gold-mining region of nearby Bambuk across the Falémé river. Bundu weavers produced lengths of cloth that were dyed with colors such as red, yellow and blue that women in Bambuk paid for with small amounts of gold dust and used for wraparound dresses that hung from the waist to their ankles. Men in Bambuk reportedly purchased Bundu cloth of a slightly lower quality that was dyed “deep blue.”

The producers and merchants of Bundu supplied markets in Bambuk with both textiles and salt (which they obtained from Moorish merchants some of whom also traded directly with Bambuk) in exchange for gold. Golbery notes that consumers in Bambuk purchased African goods such as cloth, salt, and “plates of worked silver” but also goods evidently imported from overseas such as “glass ornaments, cloves, tobacco, silks, or brandy.” Thus the production of local weavers and dyers was being consumed alongside new commodities imported from distant global markets that

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93 Stilwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History.*
96 Ibid., 304.
circulated hundreds of miles from the Atlantic coast.

**Soldiers and Slaves**

In addition to indigo-dyed cloth for everyday wear, the clothing of soldiers and cavalrymen constituted another major consumer market for local textile producers across the Futa Toro and elsewhere throughout the Senegal river valley. Almamy Kan's soldiers and cavalrymen were depicted in visual representations accompanying published European narratives as dressed in distinctive in knee-length white garments and white turbans. The Damel of nearby Cayor was described as having three to four thousand cavalry men who wore garments similar to those of the Futanke, although Durand and Shoberl said they were mostly dyed either orange or blue.  

In notes describing what he learned from the Swedish naturalist Karl Wadstrom, Thomas Clarkson wrote that the orange and brown color of soldiers' uniforms was produced by “vegetable substances which are of such abundance in the Dominions of the Damel that his whole army is dressed in the cloth that is dyed from these.” This region between the Senegal and Gambia rivers was also the source of a bean which produced a dye that was sought after in markets north of the Sahara, “these beans…are gathered for this purpose and sent on camels in large quantities to Morocco as an article of trade.” Several contemporary drawings of Senegambian soldiers on foot and on horseback represent the uniforms in similar ways, although allowances must be made for the possibility that graphic artists in each case copied from an invented image or misrepresentation rather than attempt to create an original drawing from first hand observation or description. The representation show no conformity across multiple texts, although they do suggest a basic garment

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97 *Africa: Containing a Description of the Manners and Customs, with Some Historical Particulars of the Moors of the Zahara and of the Negro Nations between the Rivers Senegal and Gambia* (Printed for R. Ackermann, 1821), 41.
98 12,131, “Letter Addressed to the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Clarkson.”
99 Ibid.
that could be dyed either an orange/light brown color, blue or “white” or an undyed natural color.

Figure 5 18th Century European Images of Senegambian soldiers
Figure 6  Continued, 18th Century European Images of Senegambian soldiers

The light brown color described by contemporary witnesses is consistent with what might work as camouflage in the dry, dusty natural environment of the savannah and Sahel. Sometimes warriors appear wearing knee-length pants rather than the loose-fitting tunic-like garments worn by most cavalry. The engravings and drawings are generally not helpful in determining whether imported cloth became routinely incorporated into military clothing, but that does not mean it didn't occur. Several images of soldiers depict them wearing beads, a commodity that, like textiles, Africans heavily imported from Atlantic ports. While traveling towards the Gambia river in
southern Bundu, Mungo Park reported passing an armed caravan of twenty-seven people carrying muskets and wearing “broad belts of scarlet cloth over their shoulders and European hats upon their heads.”\textsuperscript{100} It is not clear from the description whether the soldiers combined the scarlet cloth with other garments, such as locally made tunics or pants. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the Atlantic provenance of these adornments, along with the imported weapons and a range of other accessories, marked the caravaners as distinct from their captives and local peasants. Such descriptions indicate some of the ways in which Africans incorporated imported goods into repertoires of clothing styles specific to occupations and social rank. Providing clothing was one way rulers compensated soldiers in their army, as the particular styles and imported novelties marked them as distinct from commoners and created a reciprocal sense of belonging between the army and their sovereign. Distinctive, exotic and sometimes luxury import cloths served this purpose.

Although soldiers were often the enslaved dependents of a local king, they played critical roles in both the capturing and policing of other people who were enslaved in order to be sold overseas or to be worked in local agriculture.\textsuperscript{101} In contrast to soldiers and other higher status adults, enslaved persons and children are frequently represented in contemporary European written accounts and visual images of the region as either nude or near nude. In many cases, the act of enslavement involved removing clothing from a captive, or else removing personal adornments such as gris-gris waist belt worn by Wolof called a guignobaye that was considered a symbol of one's ancestors that ordinarily was not to be removed before a person's death. “It was to cause them

\textsuperscript{100} Park, \textit{Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa : Performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797. By Mungo Park, Surgeon}, 350.

\textsuperscript{101} Stilwell, \textit{Slavery and Slaving in African History}.
infinite pain to remove that from them,” wrote Lamiral of this moment in the process of enslavement. Such examples also show the ways in which clothing and bodily adornment could hold symbolic non-economic value and served to construct an affective sense of belonging between members of a community. As enslavement meant separation from a community of belonging among free people protected by lineage affiliations, removing all or most clothes from enslaved people followed the logic of clothing as a marker of social status. By contrast, images of signares and marabouts from Saint Louis typically feature them swathed in multiple layers of cloth that cover most parts of the upper and lower body.

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As merchants and as socialites, signares occupied a prominent social category among the Eur-African and African residents of Saint Louis known as *habitants*, of Saint Louis who were playing a significant role in regional dynamics of the 1780s. Brooks and others have shown that they supported the return of the French to Saint Louis after a bitter relationship with the British governor O'Hara. The return of the French brought the return of Catholicism, in which many of

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103 Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century.*
the habitants had been baptized, as well as the continued promise of European private property rights and the ability for the habitants to pass on wealth directly to their descendants. These developments were welcomed by a population whose wealth and influence had grown in preceding decades as they positioned themselves as intermediaries between trading partners and cultural groups. An indication of the networks established by the habitants is the experience of members of the Eur-African Thevenot family. During the British occupation of Saint Louis after the Seven Years war with France, Saint Louis habitant Charles Thevenot lived for seven years in Paris and upon his return was elected “mayor” or the representative of habitants of Saint Louis to the British governor on the island. He also served as a priest to the island's Catholic community which suggests his likely familiarity with church vestments appropriate to that role, in addition to the European clothing he likely wore on many occasions upon his return to Senegal from France. Figures like Thevenot typically had both kinship and business ties with some of the signaires merchants who were married to European traders residing in Saint Louis. Habitants there often spoke Wolof and their familiarity with the region and local customs made them valuable partners to or difficult competitors with European traders. Golbery describes “a mulatto of the island of Saint Louis, named Thevenot”\(^\text{104}\) as having acted to rescue a number of French traders who were attacked several dozen miles inland from Saint Louis at their trading post at Guerouf by Tukulor Fuulbe angered because these traders had supposedly favored the Moors over them. Thevenot, who “knew so well how to resist and repel the rage of the Foulhas,” commandeered an armed boat, gathered several attack survivors onboard and sailed safely downriver back to Saint Louis,\(^\text{105}\) where he was celebrated for his exploits.

The family and business networks of habitants on Saint Louis extended into both France

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 170.
and Britain. Thevenot is described as having a brother in-law who lived in London for a period while the island was under British control, and another relative, identified only as Lejuge, who had traveled in other parts of Europe and to India. This passing mention reminds historians of the small but noteworthy presence of Africans and Eur-Africans traveling as crew members or guests (rather than as enslaved captives) on European vessels that traded throughout both the Atlantic and Indian ocean networks in the late 18th century.

In 1789, the habitants of Senegal inserted themselves into French Revolutionary debates at the Estates General with a document Dominique Lamiral presented on their behalf, declaring their loyalty to France while asserting claims to equal protection under French law. In doing so, the habitants declared themselves against the mercantilist policies favoring the exclusive trade of the Compagnie du Senegal, aligning themselves with Lamiral, a slave trader who wanted to see France allow more private European traders access to West African markets. Lamiral criticized the Company's failure to persuade its African partners to trade exclusively with it in gum resin simply by raising the prices it paid for the gum and the customs payments it made for the right to trade. Even after tripling the price paid in guinee cloth per quintal of gum and quadrupling the customs payment, the Company could not dissuade Africans from also selling quantities of gum to their English competitors at Portendick. He argued therefore that the market should be open to all private traders. That the habitants entered this debate by asserting claims to French citizenship and as such deserving access to trade speaks to the contingent nature of political alliances in western Africa, as well as to the habitants' unique position in the Atlantic world at this

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conjuncture. However, it also speaks volumes about their independence from both competing African and European constituencies, and to the general self-interest motivating all parties in this multi-lateral exchange. As a result of the habitants' complaints, the French government did open the Senegal trade to them, rescinding the exclusive rights of the Company. Curtin wrote that the subsequent agreements with African officials along the river for trade to Galam often extended more favorable customs duties to the habitants than to representatives of the Compagnie.

**Dressing Habitants**

The emergence of mixed-race residents on Saint Louis created a space for the circulation of French styles of clothing and the material culture of 18th century Catholic France, even as these may have been inflected with West African clothing practices, adornment or personal objects. Signares were generally matriarchs over large households supporting their own children and a coterie of domestic laborers and other dependents typically inside a walled compound area with multiple dwellings. The enslaved and other dependents labored to maintain the signare's personal household but also frequently performed skilled tasks such as blacksmithing, carpentry, masonry and weaving that generated income for the signare. These households were mostly to be found on one side of the stone-built European fort at the center of the long narrow island where its Catholic and other Christian residents built compounds. Muslim Africans generally occupied the area on the opposite side of the European fort, although some Christian merchants lived there as well. Signares high social status was displayed performatively as they famously walked the sandy streets between two story colonial buildings of Saint Louis and Goree Island, dressed elaborately in a French-tailored shirt, layers of imported taffeta or muslin cotton clothes, earrings, necklaces and other jewelry made of gold purchased in Galam, Moroccan leather slippers signares and a distinctively tall or cone-shaped turban head wrap which became synonymous with their public
image. Lamiral wrote that the turbans were typically made of “handkerchiefs from the Indies or of cambric (European linen), that they circle with ribbon, in the form of a spiral such that the headdress resembles a tiara with a triple crown.” Variations of the tall turbans by which signares of Senegal became associated were also popular in the late 18th century among some elite women in France, and in the Caribbean which has led some scholars to attribute the “new” style to the excitement around Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt, or the expansion of European Orientalism of the period. However, the “origin” of the style is harder to fix with precision. The location of Saint Louis in the “global” or trans-continental circulation of textiles and other commodities, and the embodied practices of the signares, speak to the multiple influences shaping the “tastes” of Eur-African and African elites of the period.

Signares never went out alone but were accompanied by one or more of young domestic servants who shielded their patron from the sun with umbrellas made of ostrich plumes, and who were themselves usually nude from the waist-up and otherwise dressed in their patron's jewelry and cloth wrapper as if to extend through embodiment their patron's wealth and extravagance. Signares walking with their servants in public were likely to be serenaded by praise signares who in lauding them hoped to win the favor of a small payment. As slaveholders and merchants, signares rented out the labor of their slaves to Europeans resident in Senegal and also sent their slaves on long distance trips to Galam to conduct trade on their behalf. Physical descriptions of these workers are not as frequent as those of political rulers and prominent merchants, but there is some indication that their clothing styles mixed African and European material and accessories. Their circulation throughout the region, as well as their mode of wage employment connecting

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108 Ibid., 47.
them to European and Eur-African traders on the coast, “advertised” new modes of living and forms of dress but it is likely their influence was limited.

Thus the signare households and compounds of Saint Louis formed part of a continuum of slaveholding arrangements to be found across western Africa in the late 18th century, where elites in a variety of local contexts gained wealth and power according to their ability to control dependent workers. Within their coastal enclaves at Saint Louis and Goree, many habitants constructed a physical persona for themselves that embodied their roles as commercial intermediaries. As residents of trading outposts, and migrant commercial agents, they occupied a social space that both functioned to both promote and to domesticate European clothing, accessories, architecture, household goods, food and drink into a western African context. Communities of mixed race and bi-cultural merchants similar to the habitants and signares of Saint Louis could be found in enclaves along the entire length of West Africa: including Goree, Rufisque, Cacheu, Bissau, Freetown, Anomabo, Cape Coast, Ouidah and Bonny, among others.

Unraveling European discourses of ‘regeneration’ and ‘civilization’ in 18th century sources

Traveling in the central Futa Toro in the 1780s, Lamiral reported seeing fields of cotton and indigo that he believed to be growing spontaneously, rather than farmed110 and he described in general terms how local people dyed their cloth indigo blue. His testimony offers some detail about the complex social and economic dynamics of the region but like similar accounts from European visitors at the time, it can also be a problematic source for historians of the period. He

criticized the manner in which local Tukulor prepared the indigo dye, claiming that the process used in the French Caribbean colonies was better. This complaint belonged to a pattern of complaints Lamiral expressed throughout his account about African farming techniques, technology and work habits (he found fault with both tobacco and rice cultivation practices as well). The narrative of deficiency that runs through Lamiral's text expresses his apparent contempt for African productive capacities in a way that both justified his slave trading activities, and the possibility of increased French colonization of Senegal, which he advocated to introduce more productive and rational farming systems. Yet the arguments for colonization advanced by Lamiral, the slave trader, overlapped with those made by abolitionists in Europe and North America many of whom saw colonization in terms of the ‘regeneration of Africa’, a discursive trope of late 18th century abolitionists that referred to a variety of Christian missionary-led campaigns to ‘help' Africans ‘advance' in technological, political and social terms, as has been analyzed by Francois Manchuelle. Such ideas then run through most if not all of the published and unpublished writings of European visitors to Senegambia — abolitionists, missionaries, and slave traders (sometimes an individual writer inhabited each of those categories at different periods of the writer's life) — which also constitute the bulk of the written evidence for western Africa in the late 18th century.

Beyond his characterizations of African capacity, however, Lamiral's description of clothing also does open a window into regional styles and the specificity of local sartorial expression. He observed that men of Futa Toro often wore locally made cone-shaped cloth caps whose long narrow sides hung down their cheeks. “The bonnets were so large and beastly that they

made your heart jump when you saw them." Tall bonnets worn by Tukulor men mark another example of tall head gear described in late 18th century accounts of the region, mentioned at the opening of this chapter. The context of central Futa Toro was evidently different from that of the Saint Louis signares or of the Nova Scotian settlers of African descent in Freetown, although the hats' effective purpose of signifying high status, confidence and power might be similar in all three cases. Lamiral held out Fuulbe women of Futa Toro as even more beautiful and stylish (‘there was something more elegant and more original about their outfits’) than the Wolof and other African women he'd met at Saint Louis. He said Fuulbe women of the region wore locally made wrappers (‘pagnes’) that he claimed were of a higher quality from those worn by other women. The Fuulbe wrapper was “a light and floating muslin made by themselves that resembled the belt of Venus,” he wrote, while comparing the women's clothing to that of the Three Graces of Greek mythology. He also noted that their outfits often included a head-dress adorned with glass, amber and coral beads. Such beads were common articles obtained in bundles of goods exchanged with Europeans, thus Lamiral's description provides evidence of the region's connections to global markets, as well as the process of domesticating foreign objects into local context. By following the trajectories of foreign and local textile commodities consumed in Senegambia, as much as they are discernible from fragmented sources, historians gain insight into the intricate linkages between local consumers and global markets, the cultural logics shaping commercial choices, and how these objects held to create, legitimate and sustain a variety of social orders or social hierarchies.

113 Ibid., 300.
114 Ibid.
115 François G. Richard, “Recharting Atlantic Encounters. Object Trajectories and Histories of Value in the Siin (Senegal) and Senegambia,” Archaeological Dialogues 17, no. 01 (June 2010): 1–27.
Gaining such insight is complicated by the sometimes hostile nature of the extant written sources. Taken together, Lamiral's observations about the Fuulbe and other Africans form part of a racialist discourse of the period that sought to explain Africans and African societies by fitting them into a racial typology, in which they were arranged hierarchically in comparison to other people around the world. In this instance, Lamiral did so by marking Fuulbe out as physically and culturally superior to other Africans (even their robes were said to be “more galant, more original” than their neighbors)\(^{116}\) although he continued to insist on a fundamental civilizational difference between Fuulbe and Europeans. Although Lamiral's narrative constructs group characteristics for the Tukulor Fulbe, the Tukulor Fulbe and other literate Muslim guides also shaped the way French visitors like Lamiral understood the diverse ethnic landscape of the region. Marie Perinbam shows for example how 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) century Fulbe guides in the western Sudan, along with Fulbe clerics, tended to characterize a variety of communities in negative terms because they did not conform to particular notions of religious orthodoxy. As part of this process, the Fulbe Tukulor, Serakhulle and other Muslim Africans discursively homogenized non-Muslim Africans by simply referring to them as ‘pagan', ‘dolo-drinker', ‘slave', etc., a practice that also informed a developing French racial discourse about Africans in the 18\(^{th}\) century.\(^{117}\) Thus the differentiation made by Lamiral between Fuulbe and other Africans, though seemingly complimentary, formed part of a late 18\(^{th}\) century discourse of racial typology that separated out certain Africans as the ultimate non-Christian Other. It was part of a more generalized negative view of African technology and social life that Lamiral used to support his pro-slave trade arguments. He characterized “the Negroes”


\(^{117}\) Mirjam de Bruijn, Han van Dijk, and Mande Studies Association, Peuls et Mandingues : dialectiques des constructions identitaires / Mirjam de Bruijn & Han van Dijk (éd.) ; préface de Jean-Loup Amselle., Hommes et sociétés (Leyde: Afrika-Studiecentrum ; Paris, 1997).
(les Negres) as “lazy and having failed to develop their abundant resources despite exposure to knowledge gained from contact with Egyptians and Arabs.”

Historian Michael Adas has pointed out that European travel narratives of the late 18th century often featured detailed descriptions of African tools and use of technology, reflecting the European intellectual preoccupation of the period with science, technology and rationality as a means of assessing the natural world. These descriptions became evidentiary fodder in debates about the slave trade and abolition as well as discursive elements in the construction of “race” using Africans' alleged physical, intellectual and cultural difference from or similarity to Europeans. Antagonists in these debates drew different conclusions from the generally agreed upon premise that African social and technological development was low and unimpressive: pro-slave trade advocates found proof of African inferiority that justified enslavement while abolitionists blamed the violence of slave trading for impeding development. In an early work, Philip Curtin argued that as a group European visitors (including slave traders) to Africa were less likely to explain social and cultural differences with Africans in racial terms than were those who had never visited Africa. He noted that none of sixteen recent visitors who testified to the Privy Council in 1789 “mentioned an assumed African racial inferiority as a bar to future development.” However, that assessment should readily be tempered with the fact that some of these witnesses did condemn in general terms African social and cultural practices as inferior as a pretext for colonization. This European discourse overlapped in powerful ways with a late 18th century western African discourse, espoused by many Muslim West Africans, about ‘kafr’ or

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121 Ibid.
The 1789 testimony of John Barnes, former governor of British Senegambia, to the Privy Council provides another example of the developing European discourse on the productive capacity of western Africa of the period. Initially as a merchant, then as a governor of Fort Saint Lewis between 1763 and 1766, Barnes was primarily interested to ensure successful trading in enslaved people and in gum arabic. Rival Dutch, French and English powers had competed in Senegambia since the late 17th century for access to markets for the gum resin harvested from acacia trees of the western desert and Sahel. Even during the peak years of slave trading, Senegambian ports supplied only a minor percentage of all enslaved Africans sold to European traders, forming not more than twelve percent of the total for any period. However, the region north of the Gambia river to Mauritania and the western Sahara provided one of the largest sources of this resin in the world. James Webb has suggested that the value of the gum exported from the desert coasts exceeded that of enslaved people sold from across the Atlantic from the Senegal river valley for several years in the late 17th century. By the 1720s, the value of slaves surpassed all other commodities for much of the century, after 1790, gum again became the most valuable commodity traded from northern Senegambia.¹²²

During his testimony before the House of Commons in 1789, Barnes was asked to comment on the assertion that West African merchants and cultivators might be more profitably encouraged to replace slave trading with trade in “legitimate” commodities such as rice, gum arabic and cotton. Barnes had by then returned to live in England, but remained involved with Atlantic trade in Africa through a business in shipping Madeira wine. He stated to the Council that he was doubtful African-raised cotton for export to Britain could ever become a viable replacement

¹²² Webb, Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850, 107, 109.
for slave trading. In addition to the region's unreliable rainfall and vulnerability to environmental devastation, Barnes cited the lack of secure property rights, the limited ability of political rulers to control land use and the absence of internal roads to transport produce over long distances as impediments to the possibility of a non-slave based export economy in Senegambia. The combined weakness of property rights and uncertainty of climate conditions meant that a Senegambian farmer who had the opportunity to do so would rather sell slaves than invest in future commercial crops. In this context, Barnes claimed that cotton production in Senegal and along the Gambia river, though of high quality, could effectively only be grown for local consumption. He said that he had tried but had been unable to buy quantities of raw cotton at Saint Lewis. Vulnerability to plagues of locusts made it unprofitable for farmers in the Senegal river valley to invest in planting cotton on a large scale.\textsuperscript{123}

In addition, Barnes argued that the general lack of secure property rights across the region meant that farmers could not plant over a wide area without fear of theft. He argued that African landlords or elites could not sufficiently control labor and land use to produce more than subsistence levels of cotton.

I do not know precisely what the lands of the Prince are. In the town where the Prince lives, the circumjacent lands are cultivated for the use of the town at large; each inhabitant has his little district for the produce of his grain or cotton or tobacco, or what he has occasion to plant on it. This extends but a very little way from the town. The Prince, I conceive, could not deprive the inhabitants of that benefit; and if he or any of his subjects were to carry their plantation to a more remote distance, I do not believe his property would be secure.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{123} Great Britain Parliament, House of Commons and Board of Trade, \textit{Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations : Submitting to His Majesty’s Consideration the Evidence and Information They Have Collected in Consequence of His Majesty’s Order in Council Dated the 11th of February 1788, Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa, and Particularly the Trade in Slaves.}

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 14.
It is not clear which “prince” Barnes may have had in mind, but he did claim to limit his assertions to the region between the Senegal and Gambia rivers. Barnes claimed that the trade in local cloth was limited because a lengthy production process made them expensive to purchase. He said he had once seen two cloths priced at the value of two slaves.\textsuperscript{125} This in his view discouraged cloth purchases in the market and instead favored household production for personal use. Barnes estimated that most Senegambian men and women consumed about two cloth wrappers per year. Finally, Barnes did not believe Africans could sustain an export market in raw cotton, or any other agricultural commodity, using enslaved labor because they were “too indolent” and because “that is an appropriation which I believe could only be practiced in a more civilized country.”\textsuperscript{126}

Accounts from other witnesses contradict some of Barnes' assertions, as do some of his own statements. For example, his claim that weaving was performed by male artisans who could be either free or enslaved suggests a level of economic organization existed to extract benefit from both forms labor. His testimony ignores the reality that cloth was a prime commodity exchanged across the savannah-desert ecological zones, thus Africans were already actively engaged in an “export” trade even as he claimed to Parliament that they were incapable of doing so. It also seems to ignore the reality of enslaved labor organized to supply both Atlantic and Saharan markets with gum resin. Barnes rather incredulously denied ever hearing of any occasion of Moorish cavalry slave raids on farmers south of the river (“I never heard of such a practice; on the contrary, I know there is no such practice”)\textsuperscript{127} — perhaps indicating his awareness of the potential political uses of his testimony for those opposed to the slave trade. Although emerging out of the context of trans-

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 14.
Saharan relations, these raids were connected to Atlantic trading in at least two ways: either to sell captives to Europeans at Atlantic ports or to use captive labor for collecting the resin of acacia trees (gum arabic) for sale to Europeans at Atlantic ports. Denying the existence of the raids would be tantamount to pleading ignorance about how enslaved people came to be marketed at Saint Lewis.

Thus experienced-based testimony of Barnes, Lamiral and other European visitors to Senegambia, was very much informed by their respective interests and subject positions as merchants or agents invested in certain outcomes there. Whether their accounts were published to popular audiences or circulated within more limited legal, political or business networks, they worked to shape Africa discursively in particular ways. Throughout the 18th century, these discourses were often informed by sources on enslaved and free Africans in Caribbean and American slave colonies as well as on West Africa, a process of circulation that conflated distinctions between the two regions to create a generalized notion of “African” character. This civilizationist discourse shared some of the same premises of the emerging discourse on human racial difference, born with the Linnean classificatory system in 1735 and developed throughout the 18th century in the disparate fields of philosophy, literature, and in biology. Indeed, these fields could, and often were, interpenetrating and mutually constituting as for example when botanists Michel Adanson of France and Adam Afzelius of Sweden who authored “travel” texts meant to advance European scientific knowledge by conveying specific information about African plants, environmental conditions and agricultural practices. The naturalist discourse of biology flourished at the same period in which the conceptual “noble savage” reigned as a prominent figure in English literature.128 This was the context in which the notion of a feminized, racialized (“black” or “dark”)

African continent took shape in European and American discourses of the late eighteenth century. In writing specifically about Anglo-American observers and editors in the late 18th century, Anthony Barker has noted they shared an ethnocentrism expressed in writing about West Africa that emerged from a failure to view African societies holistically on their own terms, rather than critiquing individual aspects of a given society (such as architecture, farming, or craft production) in an isolated comparison to its counterpart in Europe. When discussion turned to West African cloth production in many observers' accounts, there was frequent acknowledgement of the technical and visual quality of the work as well as the variety of locally woven cloths available. But such judgements sat uncomfortably with the accompanying conclusion that 'Africans' had failed to make improvements to their looms or to improve spinning techniques, that would increase the speed and expand the amount of production for larger markets, such as was occurring in Europe.

Despite these deficiencies, the published and unpublished accounts of European travelers, traders, scientists, clerics and other visitors represent a vast archive of data about the daily life and material practices of the places they visited and people they interacted with in western Africa. Sometimes detailed narrative descriptions of prominent figures, trading partners, local communities, interesting characters and public and semi-public events such as weddings, funerals, age-grade ceremonies are recorded. The scattered and fragmentary nature of these accounts make it difficult to answer many historical questions about 18th century western African societies with much precision or depth. But with regard to cloth trading and cloth consumption, as well as other questions related to African material and economic life, they do present a significant minefield of data that can be better exploited by historians seeking to understand how western African societies

interacted with one another and how their political economies interacted with global markets. In the next section, I will demonstrate that this kind of critical reading can be combined with a deployment of other types of sources, including quantitative sources, to present another perspective on ultimately what can only be gleaned from the fragmentary historical record.

Map 6 Locator Map: western Africa [map by author]

France imported ever larger amounts of textiles into Senegambia during the last quarter of the 18th century, with Indian cottons making up the majority, 52.4 percent, of textiles, and European textiles were 24.9 percent of the total. \(^{130}\) During the same period, despite Futa Toro's ban on slave trading, the numbers of enslaved persons the French exported from Senegambia quadrupled during the 1780s, in tandem with a generalized increase in slave exports on French ships from Africa in

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\(^{130}\) Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 88 Supplemental Evidence.
the growth years before the start of the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{131}

Marion Johnson's study of British records for the period indicated that the amount of cloth exported to Africa (including all areas of British trade) reached the equivalent of two million wrapper lengths a year by the 1770s, suggesting that the consumption of imported cloth was at a greater than as a mere luxury item. Johnson's overall numbers support other findings that the African consumer preference for the India cloths appeared to hold, as the percentage of these goods increased between the 1770s and the 1790s even though they still cost a little more than the European-made cloths.\textsuperscript{132} For example, Kriger has shown that, in general, plain, dyed or loom-patterned cloth, such as check-pattern varieties from India were consistently more popular in West Africa than painted India cloths, indicating that these were in the main a supplement to local textile production with similar aesthetic qualities, rather than novelties.\textsuperscript{133} Inikori found that cotton-linen check-patterns comprised the dominant segment of English-made cloths exported to West Africa in the second half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, with this sector also being that branch of English textile manufacturing most focused on producing viable imitations of India-made cloths. The American Revolutionary War interrupted the English export of these check-pattern cloths to West Africa, and in the war's immediate aftermath, Inikori found that the sale of India-made cloth in West Africa initially outpaced the English-made varieties, even as demand continued to grow and English production improved.

It is clear that English cloths lost ground to East India cloths from 1786 to 1792, except for the sudden swell of English cloths in 1792. Export of East India cloths rose significantly in 1790, 1791, and 1792. When we turn to the qualitative evidence, however, we discover that, at least in 1790, 1791 and 1792, English cotton manufacturers producing African goods had more orders than they could

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 61 Supplemental Evidence.
\textsuperscript{133} Kriger, “Mapping the History of Cotton Textile Production in Precolonial West Africa,” 107.
Inikori is especially focused on import data for the Bight of Biafra region of southeastern Nigeria where he found that late 18th century British imports competed successfully with India-made textiles. He goes further to argue that the heavy importation of these British manufactured textiles was accompanied by the social and political disruptions which ultimately impeded what he calls proto-industrialization in that region. Having constructed her own database of all commodities exported from the UK to any port in Africa during the 18th century, Marion Johnson disagreed with Inikori. Scholars have used Johnson's data, based on tens of thousands of goods traded between Britain and ports in Africa during the 18th century, to establish the changing balance of trade between England and 'Africa' taken broadly. In working with the portion of the data on textiles, about 30,000 records, I examined them separately by region to determine whether there were any discernible patterns over time. This process was frustrated by the fact that many records lacked information about the specific port or ports in Africa to which the goods were shipped. Further, the records for the ports of 'Senegal' and 'Sierra Leone' are extremely uneven in Johnson's published dataset, with only one decade of records available for Sierra Leone, 1798-1808, and one year, 1808, for Senegal. The scarcity of import data for Sierra Leone does not match up with my own reading of British Royal Africa Company Accounts Journals and Customs books from the early and mid 18th century, referenced in earlier chapters, which show, for example, regular payments of imported cloth to company employees and clients in Sierra Leone. This anomaly is but one example of the fragile nature of seeking to understand historical consumption.

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patterns in quantitative terms because of the incompleteness of data. That said, the textiles imported by Britain to Africa were recorded by name, origin, quantity and value in British pounds, information that preserves the enormous variety of goods, as well as provide a sense of large quantities of goods purchased over time.

It is significant that 1808 is the only year that appears in the dataset with records of textiles imported to Senegal as that was a year Britain regained control of Saint Louis in the context of a protracted war with France. Warfare, economic and political conditions far from western Africa affected its consumers ability to access goods available through global exchange processes. These conditions impacted not only the circulation of goods from year to year but also the production and maintenance of records of these exchanges. In this context, the 1808 data for Senegal appears as a stark snapshot of textiles imported by Britain in what was a more extended negotiation between Senegalese consumers and global suppliers. In that year, the vast majority of textiles imported to Saint Lewis, Senegal (86%) were “unrated India goods” produced in India, with much smaller percentage of British produced cotton blends (13%). In terms of the value of the imported goods purchased, Africans in Saint Lewis spent the most on India goods but also spent on imported wool cloth and accessories such as felt and beaver hats. The latter two items, felt and beaver hats, do not appear frequently in narrative accounts of Saint Lewis/Louis, although they do so in these shipping records. Despite the fragmentary nature of this data, we see glimpses of the global sources of the goods imported to the Senegambia region which were not limited to Britain or Europe but included, Russia, India, and Canada (where the English obtained beaver pelts used to make the hats sold at Saint Lewis). It also indicates this preference even during a period in which British textiles were increasingly being mass produced in factories, and this suggests that the predominance of industrial textiles took place gradually, and was contingent upon a number of
factors that together offered no predictable guarantee of success.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the circumstances attending to the rise of the Futa Toro imamate in 1776 and its struggles with the European traders at Saint Louis over slave trading and commercial customs duties in the region. Almamy Kan's standoff with the French was resolved by conditioning French commercial traffic through his territories on the payment of taxes and enforcing a prohibition on the enslavement of Muslims many of which were paid for with imported textiles. This chapter has departed from the circumstance of this temporary embargo and its
resolution, as emblematic of the negotiated nature of African engagements with overseas trade, to explore the role of textile production and consumption across various segments of the societies interacting with global trade via the Atlantic maritime and Saharan caravan routes. Analysis across written narrative, archival, visual and quantitative sources support the conclusion that Africans in late eighteenth century Senegambia accessed imported textiles from multiple regions of the world and incorporated them into daily use in a variety of ways. The trade and consumption of these imports, especially the indigo-dyed “guinea cloths” that dominated exchanges in Saint Louis, interacted with local textile production and finishing industries including indigo dyeing performed by enslaved and free women laborers. European traveler accounts from the period testify to an active industry in several parts of the region.

The 30 year-long administration of Almamy Qader Kan as the head of this centralized clerical state had a large and lasting impact on the region, although it faced a series of difficult internal challenges almost from the beginning. Analyzing the role of enslaved and dependent women laborers in domestic, agricultural and craft production within this state that is apparent in sources related to cloth would be a critical lens through which to consider claims that the Tukulor reformist state sought to achieve abolition as a permanent condition for its constituents. Both free and enslaved women likely labored in local industries dyeing indigo cloth for regional markets. But there remained plenty of tedious and low status tasks that were performed by enslaved or dependent women and girls as growers and cleaners of cotton, spinners of thread, gatherers of wood, preparers of dye and as cloth dyers. Enslaved girls and young women continued to be sold in regional markets.

The abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, engaging in debates focused on ending the British slave trade in Africa, and wishing to point out African dissatisfaction with and resistance to European
slave trading, lionized Kan's embargo on slave trading to members of the British Parliament. Clarkson framed his position in moral terms, noting that Kan also prohibited the enslavement of Muslims within territory he controlled. Historian Rudolph Ware has found that evidence from Clarkson's letters, supported by accounts other European observers such as Villeneuve, Pommegorge and Saugnier, suggests that the Muslim state of Futa Toro ended slave trading and slavery earlier than did the British, French or United States governments did. Peasants migrated to the central Futa Toro in the 1780s in search of good farmland in a landscape parched from drought, and safety from slave razzias promised in Almamy's domain, under the adjudication of sharia. Ware reads from the limited sources available the possibility that Almamy Kan strategically attracted such settlement by offering land and freedom to those enslaved ceddo soldiers of his regional enemies who could read (or perhaps recite) a passage of the Quran. In addition to weakening popular support for his rivals, Almamy Kan thus effectively converted these new settlers into loyal defenders, whether by resisting incursions from outside the territory or joining military campaigns that helped to consolidate the Almamy's power as a sovereign ruler. When one adds to this reading, the fact that farming communities in Futa Toro turned increasingly to producing surplus grain for sale to Saint Louis, a (perhaps misleading) picture begins to emerge of a Tukulor imamate seeking to construct a peaceful alternative to the turbulent predations of slave trading.

Ware makes an important historiographical intervention by highlighting a West African Muslim polity in opposing slavery at a conjuncture when abolitionist discourse was circulating.


around the Atlantic. The voluminous literature on the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade makes little room for exploration of African examples of opposition to the commerce in human laborers, a major oversight. However, it reasonable to ask how far one can push the significance of these examples given an array of complicating factors. It is doubtful, for example, whether the concept of “freedom” espoused by Kan and his clerics might be productively viewed as synonymous with Christian male autonomous individual who served as the premise of advocates like Clarkson. Both abolitionists and slave trade apologists often elided distinctions between slave systems in different geographic, political and economic contexts. But there were significant differences between the organization of slave production (and reproduction) across the Americas and Africa as well as important differences within each region over time. It is not clear what system of social organization Kan proposed to replace forms of bonded domestic and agricultural labor already thoroughly established throughout northern Senegambia region he controlled. As this chapter has shown, this historical circumstance had much to do with the convergence of environmental conditions with low population densities and the resulting high ratio of land to labor found across the region. Effective abolition in any part of the world would require more than moral pronouncements or ideological positions but rather a fundamental reorganization of relations of production and of the social relationships attending to them.

That the taxes were paid in imported textiles which suggests the degree to which Kan's vision of an Islamic state governed by Islamic law and free of slavery, to the extent that it is discernible, nevertheless remained enmeshed in a global textile economy whose links with slavery were growing through the period that saw the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, rather disappearing altogether.
[Dumbuya] expressed his desire to have an English loom and an English weaver and also to adopt the West Indian mode of cultivation on his estates, especially with regard to cotton and coffee.

— Richard Bright, describing the statements of a leading Maninka merchant he met in a town on the Upper Guinea coast, 1802

“The common dress of the men among the Timanees and Bulloms consists in a shirt, trowsers, and a woollen cap or hat, which they buy of Europeans. When at work in their plantations, they seldom wear more than a piece of cloth wrapped round the waist. Those who can afford it are fond of indulging their vanity in imitating the European mode of dress, and of displaying all the finery they can procure. They love to deck themselves in tawdry embroidered silk clothers, with a profusion of gold and silver tinsel, which often give to the wearers a very ludicrous appearance.”

— Thomas Winterbottom, An account of the native Africans in the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, 1803

The Manchester and Scotch manufacture have rose to great perfection in imitating India goods;...all the plaid patterns are much admired by the Natives and sell the same as India, tho’ they well know the difference.

— Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Company’s ship Calypso, 1796

Introduction

The 1780s had been flush years at Timbo, capital of the theocratic state in the Futa Jalon plateau 3,500 feet above sea level and 250 miles from the densely forested Guinea coast. Its soldiers were fighting expansionist wars to the east that sent thousands of enslaved captives to coastal Sierra Leone and Guinea and returned wealth in the form of saleable commodities to its
ruler, Almamy Sadu, and his many political clients. He resided at Timbo, a town of set on the base of a hill where an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 residents lived in mud-brick homes with thatched roofs that were protected from public view by fences taller than an average adult. Near the town entrance stood a mosque that was on one side of a central open area from which streets trailed off in different directions. On the far side of this open space sat Sadu’s walled compound, a distinguishing feature of which was an imposing sixteen foot tall square tower sitting atop a mud structure that was thirty feet tall. The tower had been built by a client of Sadu’s father who modeled it on a tower he had seen in England many years earlier.  

Since the 1720s, the ruling clerical lineages of Futa Jalon fought bitter internecine struggles to consolidate power within the context of a theocratic state. These struggles had settled by the 1780s into a tenuous power sharing agreement between the two lineages. Years of war with the non-Muslim populations in the Sankaran and Wasulu regions, as well as further east in Solimana, with populations of non-Muslim Jallonke farmers who had been displaced from the Futa Jalon, further consolidated centralized state power at places like Timbo, and enriched their principals with war booty. Military victories expanded Fula clerical authority over a wider space. This expansion was also supported by communities of Maninka Muslims settled throughout the Futa Jallon and nearby who all benefited from increased Muslim power in the region. In Timbo and nearby, wealthy slave owners used enslaved workers to raise cows and horses and to farm cotton, rice and other produce traded to the coast that was about eight days away on foot.

The English planter James Watt experienced Sadu’s confident power directly, having been

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sent on a diplomatic mission from the struggling abolitionist settlement on the coast at Freetown to negotiate a cooperative trade relationship with the Fula state at Timbo. Watt had been an overseer of enslaved workers on a plantation in Dominica in the Caribbean, and had come to Sierra Leone a few years before with the intent to establish plantations of cotton, sugar, tobacco, coffee and rice there when governor Zachary Macaulay chose him for this assignment. Freetown needed to carve out a commercial space for itself in the midst of a coastal economy centered on slave trading such as at the active nearby Bunce Island fort and elsewhere because it needed to obtain food for its residents and it sought to prove that it could generate wealth without trading in slaves. Watt was to propose developing a trade in cotton or tobacco, as primary alternatives to trading in slaves, but he was also to be open to discuss other possibilities. Watt traveled to Timbo by joining one of the ruler’s caravans returning from the coast.

Watt’s journal is one of a number of sources that provide some window into the internal dynamics between the Futa Jallon and a diverse array of actors on the coast, showing the multiple linkages of the region to global cloth markets and its ambivalent ties to emerging global markets for raw cotton and other agricultural commodities. In Timbo, Watt was struck by the apparent wealth of many local Fula women who he said were “always well dressed” and typically wore several silver bracelets on each arm, as well as gold rings, earrings and necklaces. The implication from his account is that elite and wealthy residents at Timbo wore the best of imported and locally made cloth, such as the flower print robe of fine imported muslin that Sadu’s father gave as a gift to Timbo’s leading cleric. Yet the linkages of regional and Atlantic slavery and slave trading to this process of global exchange are also evident throughout Watt’s account as, for instance, when he is confronted on the street by an old man seeking to redeem a son captured by Portuguese slavers.

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four years prior while returning from trading at Rio Pongo on the coast and sold onto an Atlantic ship.⁴

When introduced to Almamy (Imam) Sadu, Watt presented him with the following bonya or customary gift, “a gun, pistols, a sword, a military coat, a waistcoat, two ruffled shirts, a piece of Irish linen, a dozen pieces of tamboured (embroidered) muslins, a piece of fine India chintz, 10 dollars, 10 half dollars, 10 and 20 cent pieces.”⁵ These carefully chosen diplomatic gifts of luxury cloths and finished garments such as the military coat, symbolically and physically re-inscribed certain power relations and aspirations. As a stand-in for hoped for trade, they also represented the ways in which African consumers of the period were being linked to distant markets and being transformed by global processes. They would be followed over the course of Watt’s visit with a series of less formal, smaller gifts he made to Sadu’s relatives, officials and other local people of scarlet cloth, Indian chintz, his pocket handkerchief, the gold-braided shoulder knot of his military jacket, beads, buttons and coins.⁶

For Sadu, the audience with a representative of the British settlement at Sierra Leone was likely appealing as a possible alternative to the European merchants he had been feuding with along the Rio Nunez, Rio Pongo and at Bunce Island, Sierra Leone. Watt learned during his visit that Sadu was at that moment imposing an embargo on all slave trading with Europeans and American merchants on the coast because prices for slaves had fallen to level he found unacceptable. A European factor reported that African merchants throughout the region “from Cape Verga to Cape Mount” refused to accept low prices for slaves offered in 1794 and instead employed them locally to cultivate rice, cotton and other crops. The ban on trade imposed by rulers

⁴ Ibid., 40.
⁵ Watt, Journal of James Watt: Expedition to Timbo, Capital of the Fula Empire in 1794.
⁶ Ibid.
of the Futa Jallon in Timbo may have been the largest such action by a state power on the Upper Guinea coast in the 1790s, though it was not the only one. But Watt’s proposals to Sadu that the Fula state cease trading in slaves in favor of an exclusive arrangement with the Freetown settlement in a range of agricultural and animal products were not the opening Sadu had been hoping for. They were alternately greeted with incredulity, ignored, and rebuffed. Sadu finally reached a limited trade agreement with Watt, who returned to the coast with some of Sadu’s officials, but the hoped-for trade linkages between Futa Jallon and Freetown were further sabotaged by the bitter intransigence of slave traders on the coast and ongoing hostilities between England and France.

The two-year long embargo and its related context encapsulate some characteristics of West African engagement with Atlantic and global trade that will be further explored in this chapter by showing instances of Africans’ quick adaptation to market conditions, shrewd bargaining and diversification of agriculture for market. Along with the slave embargo imposed at Futa Toro, the 1794 embargo on the Guinea coast reveals a political and economic landscape in which a centralized African state sought to control various aspects of trade with Europeans within its ability to shape or take advantage of favorable conditions. However, these actions were taken not only by states throughout the region, but form part of broader range of Africans and Eur-Africans — including those living in acephalous communities, small “city-states” and communities of self-emancipated slaves — who opted in and out of slave trading over time. The chapter proceeds with a brief discussion of economies of cloth production, trade and consumption within the context of Futa Jallon’s wars with Wasulu and with Solimana that raged until the early 1790s. It then considers the efforts of British merchants on the coast to attract regional cloth buyers with particular goods, before moving on to consider the competing operation of a prominent African merchant who owned hundreds of slaves and held great influence and the impact of late
18th century Islamic Mahdism on coastal political dynamics. The chapter then considers how a series of rebellions undertaken by enslaved people on the coast contributed to the already fragmented political and productive landscape of the region before exploring the roles played by EurAfrican and African descended settlers at Sierra Leone within the region’s social economy and concluding with comparisons drawn between this region and northern Senegambia.

Sometime during the 1770s, a group of Maninka-speaking Muslim settlements that had flourished in the savannah lands along the Milo river three hundred kilometers northeast of the Futa Jallon, fell under attack from non-Muslim army from the neighboring Wasulu armies led by Birama Konde\textsuperscript{7}. The Wasulu region was a wide area of savannah grasslands east of the Futa Jalon highlands and crossed by branches of the Niger river. It was primarily settled by Bamana and Maninka-speaking farmers and fishers who lived in dispersed settlements, with flexible political

structures and polytheistic religious practices. The area readily accepted migrants from conflicts in other parts of the region and in time became identified largely with non-Muslim Fula (called Pulli), who are thought to have migrated there after the arrival of Muslim Fulbe from Maasina had the effect of pushing them out of the highlands into the eastern savannah under the protection of the Maninka. These non-Muslim Pulli settled in Maninka-speaking Wasulu villages and over time became primarily Maninka speakers, suggesting the ways in which newcomers were assimilated into an established set of social relations.

During the 18th century, residents of the Wasulu savannah found themselves vulnerable to the predations of two expansive states: the armies of the Futa Jallon Muslim theocratic state raided Wasulu from the southwest for captives while those of the non-Muslim Bamana state at Segu raided parts of the region from the northeast. Sections of the Wasulu paid annual tribute to the rulers of Segu several hundred kilometers to the northeast, while other areas within Wasulu were subjected to raids from Segu. Remnants of some of the walled settlements built and occupied during the 18th century remain visible in 21st Guinea on the outskirts of regional towns such as Faralako in the Mandiana Prefecture. An abandoned settlement called Balama, a nine-foot tall crenelated defensive wall made of a dense clay and gravel mixture similar to concrete, and featuring port holes for firing weapons, testify to the security concerns of that period.
But perhaps the specific antecedent of Wasulu attacks on the Bate were annual raids visited upon the region by the armies of the Futa Jallon who, in coming to power in the 1720s were rejecting long-standing patterns in western Africa of Muslims living peaceably alongside non-Muslims much less under the authority of polytheist chiefs. These raids had come to be resisted by the residents of Wasulu in the years before Konde Birama’s offensive against the theocratic state at Futa Jallon. As Birama began to win small battles against the Fula army, he was able to build a temporary coalition of a larger fighting force of soldiers from the predominately animist regions of the Sankaran, located between the Futa Jalon and Wasulu, and that of Solimana located southeast of the Futa highlands.  

The Sankaran region of contemporary Guinea, home to Maninka-speaking farmers, had a reputation within the region for producing high quality cloths. Laing passing through Sankaran in

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8 Fyle, *The Solima Yalunka Kingdom*.
the early 19th century described the cloths made there as “very handsome and large”, “highly prized”, and “an important article of trade among the interior nations.” Laing reported that Sankaran weavers sold their manufactures to markets in the gold-mining region of Bure to the northeast, and used the gold they obtained from these sales to buy goods in neighboring regions closer to the coast: such as the Futa Jallon and Solimana to the southeast. In exchange for gold, Sankaran merchants obtained commodities from coastal markets at Sierra Leone that likely included varieties of textiles whose prices had risen as much as 200 percent during the transit inland. Laing also notes that Sankaran cloth was among the goods, including tobacco and salt, used to purchase enslaved people brought to market from the Kissi region.

As mentioned, Solimana and Sankaran maintained frequent commercial exchanges. Within Solimana, Laing claimed markets were tightly monitored and taxed by the ruler, who maintained public trading houses where merchants sold their goods and paid a percentage of the sale to the ruler or to his representatives. In this way, Solimana consumers obtained cloth, flints, gun powder, beads and other goods from the Atlantic markets as well as gold and horses from Sankaran. Laing described sections of Solimana as deriving great benefit from the production of textiles and their exchange with markets in Bure and along the coast. For clothing, local residents preferred to wear cloth that had been dyed very black after a local fashion that used “pitch water and iron ore” to produce that color or else dyed yellow from the bark of the net tree. Laing claimed that when Solimanah had been on friendlier terms with the Futa Jalon, residents there dressed as did Fula Muslims, but ceased to do so once relations soured. Instead, they sought to distinguish themselves in dress and bodily adornment from the Muslims of the Futa. He noted that Solimanah women in some cases wore copious amounts of gold earrings in order to avoid the possibility that

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9 Laing and Sabine, Travels in the Timannee, Kooranko, and Soolima Countries, in Western Africa, 81.
10 Ibid., 357.
their difference in dress from the Fula Muslims might be misconstrued as a sign of poverty.

Within the Solimanah, settlements of Kooranko weavers supplied an ever receptive regional consumer market despite the general coarseness of their cloth. Laing claimed that these weavers would produce up to five yards of cloth a day from their self-constructed looms, but that spinners could generally not produce thread quickly enough\(^\text{11}\). However, African merchants on the coast gained as much as three times more profit from these cloths made in the interior than the weavers themselves. They did so by purchasing the cloths with imported tobacco, a luxury which they could sell at high prices inland, and selling them at high prices on the coast to local rice producers.

Sources on the Sankaran and Solimana areas thus present in schematic outline the linkages of a regional economy in which textiles, both local and imported, occupied a critical place. Rather than indicating that imported cloth replaced local production, these examples suggest the ways in which local production supported the consumption of foreign goods, which may have been for both luxury and daily use. However, all players did not benefit in the same way, as better positioned merchants earned a greater profit from the exchange of cloth than did the producers. Also, this regional economy operated in the late 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century within the context of expanding warfare largely between Muslims and non-Muslims. Both the Sankaran and Solimana areas had been engaged in complex relations with the rulers of the theocratic rulers of the Futa Jalon, and were vulnerable to raids from its armies, when they joined forces with Konde Birama of Wasulu to oppose the Futa armies and its supporters in the 1770s.

Prominent among these were the otherwise pacifist clerical rulers of the Bate whose community had been established in the late 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century by Serakhulle from Diafunu, an old and

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 202.
important clerical town near the Sahara that was a center of Suwarian Islam. Named for Al Hajj Al Salim Suwari, an African Muslim who is thought to have lived around the 15th century, and who is thought to have spent part of his life in Diafunu, Suwarian Islam promoted pacifism, tolerance and study. Suwari’s teachings emphasized that it was for God, not human beings, to effect the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, and his adherents therefore generally did not proselytize their faith, sought to persuade by example, and rejected militant forms of jihad that used violence. Bate oral traditions recount that the children of the cleric Kaba Laye of Diafunu, Abdurahmane and Maramagbe Kaba, established a settlement and lived peaceably among non-Muslim farmers through bonds of inter-marriage (a Muslim Kaba man married a non-Muslim Conde woman) and by agreeing to live in separate villages. In a process similar to the one described for the Pulli migrants to the Wasulu region, the Serakhulle Muslims from Diafunu who settled in the Bate assimilated into local social structure even as they asserted their distinct religious identities. In time, they became speakers of Maninka and adopted a new title evocative of their new home, the Maninka-Mori.

Thus the attack from fighters led by Konde Birama caused a great crisis, by drawing the isolationist Bate into a larger regional conflict between the Fula imamate and its neighbors, and upsetting a tenuous accommodation between groups. The Muslim clerics of Bate differed in opinion on the use of violence from their co-religionists in the Futa Jallon, but nevertheless identified with and empathized with them as Muslims. It is unclear from the oral narratives what the specific nature of relations between the Bate and Wassulu had been prior to the attack, but the forces of Konde Birama seem to have concluded that the Bate’s ties to the clerics at Futa Jalon made them a target. Birama’s army forced many Bate villagers, including the clerical elites families to flee the Fula capital at Timbo, about three hundred kilometers west. Birama’s armies
pursued the refugees and continued to advance into Fula territory all the way to Timbo where they burned buildings, libraries and a mosque. An attack on the Futa Jallon clerical town of Fugoumba was repelled, marking the beginning of the end for Birama’s advance. It set the stage for series of military campaigns by the Futa Jallon state against Wasulu that finally defeated Konde Birama in 1792, while in the interim sending thousands of slaves to Atlantic ports near Sierra Leone. This event has left a large imprint in the oral historiography of the Bate, as the clerical city of Kankan, in some versions, was founded when Alfred Kabine Kaba led refugees from the Bate back to the area from Timbo after Konde Birama’s defeat. Written documents and oral accounts of enslaved Africans in Jamaica and the United States captured in the region testify both to the tumultuousness of the period and to the nature of the economic relations interrupted by warfare. In 1834, Mohammed Kaba Saghanugu, an elderly enslaved man on a Jamaican coffee plantation, penned a document in Arabic script that reflected his early quranic school education in either the Futa Jallon or in the Bate region. Historian Paul Lovejoy suggested that Kaba likely hailed from a family of Jakhanke clerics who were active in the Futa Jallon, while Emily Osborn has suggested that his name more likely indicates ties to the Bate region of the savannah. In either case, he is thought to have become enslaved when attacked on a journey from his home to more schooling at Timbuktu. His sale abroad gravely usurped his elite upbringing in a clerical environment where, as in so many similar locales across the region, cotton cultivation and weaving were a fundament of local activity and commerce. Kaba spoke of this background to Richard Robert Madden, an Irish doctor and abolitionist:

His father was a substantial yeoman, possessing 140 slaves, several cows and horses, and grounds producing quantities of cotton, rice and provisions which he

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exchanged for European and other commodities brought from the coast by Higglers.\textsuperscript{14}

In the British-dominated trade region of the Guinea coast between Iles de Los and Freetown, there was a correspondence between high levels of imported cloth and exports of enslaved people which increased in the decade between 1780 and 1792, when the war between the Futa Jalon imamate and the Wasulu ended. The Futa Jallon clerical state exercised authority over some areas of the coast, such as near the Rio Nunez and Rio Pongo rivers, where local headmen owed tribute to them. Its rulers regularly sent representatives to collect tribute taxes from subject peoples along its trade routes to the coast. During the dry season, it also organized armed caravans of slaves and other commodities to the coast for sale to eager European buyers. From the Europeans, the Fulani traders purchased guns, gunpowder, salt and cotton textiles from Europe and India.\textsuperscript{15}

But they were only one of several African players on the coast, including Maninka-speaking immigrants from the eastern savannah, Susu, Baga, Nalu, Landouma, Temne and other groups living in riverine, mangrove and forested areas south of the Iles de Los. These populations are thought to have themselves migrated over a long period from drier savannah or highland areas into the difficult disease environment of the tropical forest where draft animals were rare because trypanosomiasis or “sleeping sickness” spread by the region’s tsetse flies was fatal to them, and where malaria, because of mosquitoes, was common. Ancestors of these groups inhabiting the coast in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century had arrived over varying sequences of time fleeing conditions such as war, slave raiding, the imposition of Muslim legal codes and excessive drought.

\textsuperscript{14} Madden, A Twelvemonth’s Residence in the West Indies, during the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship : With Incidental Notices of the State of Society, Prospects, and Natural Resources of Jamaica and Other Islands, 197. \textsuperscript{15} Bruce L. Mouser, ””Walking Caravans” of Nineteenth Century Fuuta Jaloo, Western Africa,” Mande Studies 12(2012).
These small islands facing contemporary Conakry, Guinea were watering, restocking and trade settlements of British, Eur-African and African merchants interacting with ports along the rivers of the Guinea mainland, including with caravans from the Futa Jallon. In 1794, French naval ships bombed the Iles de Los, as well as British operations at Bance Island (then still an active slave trading fort) and Freetown, Sierra Leone as an extension of the declared war between France and Britain in 1793. The timing of the French attacks was disastrous for the struggling British abolitionist colony hoping to support itself and advance its mission through successful commercial relations with local partners such as those in the Futa Jallon. French and British merchants had long competed for access to regional markets in this region, and the cloth products of their respective textile industries based largely at Rouen and at Manchester were a key arena of that competition in West Africa.

For successful seaborne trading voyages on the West African coast, it was critical to have a good assortment of goods, including varieties of textiles, in the necessary quantities, as reported by E.L. Parfitt, a supercargo for the Sierra Leone company after a prospecting trip along the coast between Freetown, Sierra Leone and Cape Lopez, Gabon in 1796. Parfitt opposed the slave trade and sailed the coast to gather information from various ports that might potentially allow the Company to compete with slave traders for West African export commodities. He is thus very aware that trading in enslaved people is the focus of most coastal commerce, but can only face that reality by offering trade in essentially the same goods used to acquire slaves.

He recommended that crews on merchant ships plying the West African coast should build for convenience a small cabinet with shelves and doors with a lock in order to hold cloth and other

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16 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Company’s ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
assorted goods at the back of their vessel near the quarter deck where on-board trading took place. He said that care should be taken in the order in which goods were packed into the cabinet so that items needed for particular markets were easily reachable. Parfitt’s detailed notes refer a good amount to cloth trading, whether it is giving instructions on proportions of European versus India cloth to sell in specific places, or engaging in a coasting trade by buying varieties of African cloth in one port and selling them in another. He notes for example that merchants may make a good profit by purchasing large deep blue-striped “Jebbu cloths” at Lagos (presumably made in or by people from the Ijebu region) for one gold ounce and selling them in Gabon or on Sao Tome, sometimes in exchange for “Portuguese” tobacco, with 10 cloths exchangeable for one roll of tobacco. This shows that the coasting trade between West African ports remained an important network for European and African merchants operating alongside, and helping to extend the reach of, the larger transcontinental commerce.

There is a sense in Parfitt’s notes that the British themselves were the ones establishing novel linkages between some coastal markets, experimenting to see what might work where as when he writes about refashioning some of the products of the Upper Guinea coast for sale in markets further east:

I am apt to think if Rio Pongas, Rio Nunez Blue High cloth were cut into their lengths and sewed together, they would be liked. I had not a good opportunity to try them, they must be sewed which might be done by the sailors onboard

Parfitt’s notes give some insight into consumer preferences and trade dynamics along the entire west coast, as well as distinctive uses of cloth. He described for example the local production and use of bark cloth between Grand Bassam in contemporary Ivory Coast and Appollonia on the

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17 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Companys ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
Gold Coast. Made from the bark of a tree common in the area that Parfitt called “Tuddaroosk”, buyers properly obtained the cloth by first making an offer to the tree’s spirits through the cloth maker chosen as the intermediary. The cloth maker would present the offering and ask the tree provide enough bark to make a good cloth before scraping off the bark, beating it, and weaving it into a thin layer that was worn about the shoulders like a blanket.\textsuperscript{18}

In terms of other consumer preferences, it appears, for example, that varieties of woven plaid patterned-cloth were in demand in many markets along the coast, and that this one sector of the market that English and Scottish had become competitive:

the Manchester and Scotch manufacture have rose to great perfection in imitating India goods, if good I do not know they are cheaper but all the plaid patterns are admired by the Natives and sell the much as India though they well know the difference\textsuperscript{19}

It is significant that Parfitt indicates that the Scotch and English plaids were copies of Indian varieties that were already popular among West African consumers. Versions of these plaids were apparently numerous and could fall in and out of demand. Parfitt included sketches of two plaid patterned India cloths, called Bijautapauts, currently popular.

\textsuperscript{18} BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Companys ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
\textsuperscript{19} BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Companys ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
That European producers had more success in West African buyers with some factory produced cloths than with others, speaks to the specificity of consumer taste in shaping the market. It also suggests the need to look carefully at the development of factory textile production in late 18th-century Britain (and later in France) as a process that would have differing impacts on African consumers and industries.

Although African customers generally preferred to trade for the more expensive India
goods, Parfitt advised traders that they could sometimes succeed in passing off a greater quantity of lower-cost Manchester cloths at a greater advantage to the Company. This suggests another means by which European textiles gained acceptance among African consumers by “piggy-backing” on the sale of Asian cloth. Parfitt claimed this was possible because Africans could be persuaded to accept an exchange by increasing the quantity of goods offered, even if some of those goods were less desirable. “With the natives in general, it is quantity, not quality,” he wrote.

Parfitt passed on information to the Company’s traders about the nature of bargaining on the coasts and on the practice of paying custom fees or “dashes” to initiate a larger series of sales. Satin stripe cloth (possibly of Asian manufacture) was to be used only for making dashes to trading partners. Traders were to negotiate by giving their next to last price first, then going down one step only. They were to seek to give as little as acceptable or advantageous in any given instance.

The length (of cloth) is not always exactly the same, never increase but reduce if possible tho’ you must comply with the customs going, if they require one sort of cloth don’t give it if you can help it, unless it is in your favor, nor then if your assortment will not admit of it.20

Beyond untailored cloth, Parfitt’s notes indicate that European-made hats, caps, blankets and men’s and women’s garments and accessories were in high demand at particular ports. An extensive list of saleable clothing items appears for the Gold Coast that is not repeated for other areas of West Africa that suggests perhaps the relative wealth that region vis a vis others and the scale of trading operations there. Parfitt wrote that apparel sent to market in forts along the Gold Coast should include:

Good fashionable coat pieces, buttons not metal, silk and twist, waistcoat pieces, muslin for waistcoats, a little kersey for breeches, a few good round black hats, cambric, good Irish linen, muslin for neck handkerchiefs, plain and sprigged, etc.,

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20 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Companys ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
and a few silk and good cotton stockings, some slippers, good hair ribbon, good pocket handkerchiefs, needles, thread, button mould, shirt buttons not wire, silk and cotton umbrellas, striped gingham and good printed cottons, light sprig chintz patterns.

Such an extensive list indicates that the targeted consumers were diverse in terms of gender and class and that they had a variety of needs. For trading at Lagos, Parfitt reports that women and boys were the biggest buyers of cloths from the Europeans.21

Meanwhile for trade operations at Bance Island, the slave trading fort at Sierra Leone, Indian textiles were an essential commodity needed for bargaining and the demand for varieties of India cloth across West Africa outstripped what the English East India Company brought to sale at its London headquarters. John Sargent, one of the proprietors of Sargent, Chambers and Co., and one of the main investors in trade operations at Bance Island Sierra Leone, co-authored a memorial to the British Royal Treasury complaining that the performance of the East India Company was driving up of the cost of doing business in an otherwise profitable West African trade century.22 Sargent’s company claimed to draw upon eighty years of experience in the African trade and at that point was trading at ports throughout the entire region at: the Windward Coast, the Gold Coast, Bonny, Calabar and the Bight of Biafra. Sargent complained that the East India Company was not bringing enough of the right kinds of Indian textiles to its sales, forcing buyers for an extensive Africa trade to purchase goods at competing markets in Holland, France and Europe adding costs and delays.23 In his petition to the Treasury commissioners, Sargent estimated that the total value of European goods bartered for trade on the west African coast, including goods from all nations trading, was £2.5 million annually, a trade valuable enough that it was in the

21 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Extract of a Diary kept by E.L. Parfitt on board the Sierra Leone Company’s ship Calypso, William Cole Master from the River Sierra Leone to the River Gaboon & back commencing 17th June & terminating the 29th December 1796, ff. 136r-156r.
23 Ibid.
“interest of the nation” for “wise government” to protect and promote. The English East India Company was not bringing in enough cloth to meet the demands of this trade in Africa, Sargent complained. Purchases in West Africa were made through a process of assortment bargaining, in which an assortment of agreed upon imported goods could be exchanged for a set value of African goods. In many African ports, according to Sargent, all goods required by the African parties for the assortment had to be offered jointly in order to complete the exchange. If a ship was missing some of the agreed upon items, it was required to wait until another ship carrying could make up the difference. In the meantime, Africans continued to solicit buyers from competing ships who might have the correct assortment of goods. In these circumstances, ships that arrived with the correct assortment of goods could conduct business quickly, reducing the amount of time that a ship spent waiting on the coast. Time spent on the coast was a crucial factor in the success of a slaving voyage as delays increased the possibility of disease and mortality among the enslaved held on ship or of the enslaved attempting to escape.

A number of European-made cloth, brass pans and other goods typically made up the assortments, “but the part of the assortment which is most important is the India goods,” Sargent wrote. He estimated that the East India Company could meet the demand in African markets for India cloth with annual ships of four cargoes from Madras on the Coromandel Coast and four ship cargoes from Bombay for re-export from Britain, but said the Company’s actual shipments fell below that number. In detailing the scale of the deficiency, and giving a sense of the profits lost, he gave the example of Indian cotton roman handkerchiefs that were sold throughout West Africa in bundles of 15 handkerchiefs.

Like Parfitt, Sargent added that traders could make use imitations of these handkerchiefs

24 Ibid.
produced in Manchester, in making up the deficiency in the supply of romal handkerchiefs. But he claimed that these lower-cost imitations could not ever replace the Indian because West African buyers would only accept the Manchester imitation as a supplement to the India-made cloths.

Our manufacture may assist the sale of the other as forming part of the assortment, but the Africans will not suffer the Manchester goods to be substituted for those of India, although they will at times receive the last.  

He estimated that seventy-five thousand pieces of these might be sold annually at West African ports with: 3,000 pieces at the Windward Coast, 42,000 pieces on the Gold Coast, 15,000 pieces at Bonny, 10,000 pieces at Callabar and 5,000 pieces in the Bight of Biafra. Another 45,000 pieces of them could be resold in Europe each year, but that of the total 120,000 pieces needed by his company, Sargent complained that the East India Company then had only 22,000 pieces of romal handkerchiefs available to sell.

In the context of competition for the African trade, and war with France, Sargent asked the government to either impose upon the East India Company to increase its importation of Indian cloth in order to supply the needs of re-exporters or to remove obstacles to English ships purchasing the necessary goods in other European ports. By refusing to act, Sargent claimed that the government would force companies like his to continually search outside Britain for the goods necessary for Africa, as they could generally be found cheaper and better suited for the trade elsewhere, an outcome that would be harmful to British manufacturing.

Cotton romal handkerchiefs from India would have been but one popular variety of textiles among the dozens imported by European merchants trading in West Africa. These brightly colored and durable cloths would have likely have been affordable to more than just wealthy buyers and

\[25\] Ibid.
\[26\] Ibid.
have been used in a variety of contexts. Sargent’s complaint was that the British government wasn’t taking better advantage of the East India Company’s access to Indian markets to insure that Indian goods transported on British merchant ships also served to give them an advantage in the Africa trade. His petition, although likely framed in the most sympathetic light to him, nevertheless gives insight into the place of British textile manufactures in West Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century, from the point of view of one major trading company. Even in a period in which British textile factories were able to mass produce a cheaper product, British textiles continued in some cases to play a secondary role to other cloths preferred by African buyers.

As both the examples from Parfitt’s report and Sargent’s letter show, West African consumers at different ports were attracted to particular goods, and these choices, as mundane as they might seem, affected the outcome of business operations and concerns far outside Africa’s shores. Delays in accessing enslaved labor in Africa had far reaching consequences for the success of a series of inter-related operations in the Americas, Europe and south Asia, and avoiding these required coordination and communication across major obstacles of time and space. Complex business engagements remained dependent on the important variable of consumer choice.

Cotton textile production, exchange and consumption animated commerce between people across regional and transregional economies. The Portuguese and Luso-Africans of Cape Verde maintained their otherwise diminished trade linkages with mainland Guinea by dint of the slave-produced textiles produced on Cape Verde and sold at Bissau. A British visitor to Bissau in 1791 wrote that the local Papel farmers were the primary consumers of these goods, as they commonly were seen with tattooed upper bodies and dressed “in different kinds of St. Jago cloths, tied round
their middle, some of which sell for 60 bars.”27 In addition to buying these imports, the Papel also manufactured a coarse cotton strip cloth used for currency, “twenty stripes of about a yard long being reckoned at a bar.”28

On the coast south from the Portuguese strongholds at Bissau, the British had become the dominant European trading presence since the expansion of slave trading at Bance Island. But French traders continued to challenge British merchants in the region. The loss of the American colonies occasioned a process of re-imagining of Britain’s trade engagement with Africa. The decade of the 1780s saw the contradictory developments of increased abolitionist activism and a period of increased British slave trading before the eventual triumph of the abolitionists in Parliament. These two countervailing forces seemed to converge physically with the establishment in 1787 of Freetown, an experimental abolitionist colony founded by evangelist-minded philanthropists and supported financially in part by British cotton manufacturers within a few miles of the slave trading fort of Bance Island. London cloth merchants Thomas Bridge and John Walker gave 300 pounds to the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor in 1786, the year the first group of African and African-descended indigent Londoners sailed from Britain to become among the first Freetown settlers. Likewise, among key financial investors in the Sierra Leone Company organized by the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson were British cloth merchants such as William Rathbone of Liverpool (like Clarkson, an abolitionist) and Sir Richard Arkwright, a Derbyshire cotton mill owner credited with improving mechanical methods of carding raw and spinning thread. In 1792, a competing group of Lancashire investors purchased up to four thousand acres of land on Bulama Island on which they hoped to grow cotton for export, although the project

28 Ibid., 25.
ended quickly in failure.\textsuperscript{29}

The focus of these abolition-oriented investors on profits to be won from cotton growing schemes in Africa and on the extraction of raw materials used in textile manufacturing in Europe was not itself an innovation. Many of those invested in slave trading had long pursued similar schemes in western Africa. Further, investors pursued these schemes in the same historical moment when commercialized cotton agriculture using enslaved labor expanded rapidly in the Caribbean, Brazil, and especially the southern United States. In the decade after the end of the American Revolution, British cotton mills were adapting labor saving technology and were hungry for ever larger amounts of raw cotton to be processed and sold to an expanding consumer market.

**African merchants on the coast**

Within a few dozen miles on the coast north of Freetown, Fendan Dumbuya controlled hundreds of enslaved laborers who grew rice, cotton and tobacco on his land for sale to European, American and African buyers. He corresponded equally at ease with foreign slave traders and the governor of the Sierra Leone colony, using scribes to compose his thoughts on paper in European languages, signing his name in Arabic\textsuperscript{30} and receiving foreign guests in his roomy apartments where he served them on English-made dishes.\textsuperscript{31} One of the largest Maninka merchants on the coast, he controlled a number of settlements between the Iles de Los and Freetown. As a powerful merchant and slave owner, he had a reputation among some as more liberal and indulgent toward

\textsuperscript{29} \{1996, Brooks\}


his enslaved dependents than other owners like him, occasionally giving them rum and tobacco and earning their loyalty in return. At the same time, he prosecuted a thirteen-year-long war of attrition against a settlement of self-emancipated slaves who fled from his lands on the coast to the nearby Yanghekori hills.32

Dumbuya’s father migrated from his native Bambuk to the Kissi region of the coast where he traded in enslaved people, ivory and gold, receiving in exchange for quantities of cloth, a scarlet cloth imported from Europe and a locally-made cloth called Aurungas33 as well as beads. Dumbuya carried on his father’s activities in nearby Wonkafong after his father died and was buried there. The family was part of a larger migration of Maninka-speaking Muslims drawn by Atlantic trade opportunities from savannah settlements from the north and northeast of the forested coast and inserted themselves into coastal polities. The entire coastal region, viewed from the Atlantic as a “frontier” or “periphery,” might equally be viewed as the “hinterland” for the larger populations and the bigger markets of the savannah that had been previously oriented northward to trans-Saharan trade and only gradually drifted toward more emphasis on the coast. This process was more important demographically in areas on the Guinea rivers coast than it had been on the coast in northern Senegambia. There appears to have been a greater diversity of local peoples who acted as hosts for the coastal newcomers, as well as diversity of origin within western Africa among the settlers themselves who were sometimes sizable in number. For example, contemporary oral traditions at nearby Forecaria, a clerical town that came to surpass Wonkafong in size and importance, claim the town was founded by ancestors of Almamy Daouda Toure who migrated

from the Bate region of Kankan in the 18th century. The genealogy briefed outlined by Toure during an interview suggests the gradual movement of his Muslim ancestors over a few centuries from north to south, growing at several steps along the way through intermarriage with local groups. “Our parents told us that our ancestor was a Moroccan who settled in Kankan, the Maninkas gave him a wife by the name of Worigbe,” he said. A descendant of this couple, Fode Katibi Toure, was then said to migrate south first to Timbo, then to Kindia, marrying a local woman offered him by elder leaders in each region, before ultimately reaching an area near the coast where he settled among the Mandenyi people building a mosque and establishing a town that would be named for him, Fodekatibiya. In this narrative, the Toures are said to have welcomed successive arrivals of additional Maninka-speaking settlers from the savannah to Forecaria including the Dafe from Woulada, the Cisse and the Soumah from the Bate and eastern savannah. The Toures, like most residents of Forecaria today, speak Susu rather than the Maninka of their ancestors which suggests the process of mutual accommodation between the migrants and people on the coast or between “landlords” and “strangers” generally across a broad region. Since the word Fode in the Susu language refers to a religious title and “kitab” is Arabic for book, it is apparent that this ancestor’s remembered name recalls more the role he played in the community than any other individualized characteristics.

Another example of the impact of savannah migrants on coastal communities comes from Faringhia, one of a group of trading posts in the far inland reaches of the Rio Pongo. Here the narratives are not of settlement founders but rather of a merchant and a laborer with clear ties to

34 Author interview at Forecaria, Guinea, March 2013
35 Author interview at Forecaria, Guinea, March 2013
36 The town of Kindia was founded during the colonial period. The region to which Toure referred may have been known by a different name.
37 Author interview at Forecaria, Guinea, March 2013
the savannah interior who nonetheless are featured as important figures in 18th-century coastal communities. The settlement is said by some locals to have been founded by Niara Bely, the daughter of Luso-African trader Emmanuel Gomez who later married an American trader, Louis Lightburn of South Carolina. The name “Niara” is reminiscent of the senhora title that was given to mixed-race women merchants (‘signares’) along the length of the coast and, as in the case of Fode Katibi, seems to recall more of her role in the community than a personal trait. Niara Bely purportedly allowed a migrant from the Konian region of the eastern savannah, Kanfory Mansa Conte, to settle in Faringhia where he distinguished himself as a cloth weaver and a salt merchant. He also controlled Bely’s slave barracoon located in an area of the town known as Balandougou where he is said to have exercised “magical” powers to prevent the enslaved from running away. Also at Faringhia, another migrant from the savannah in the late 18th century, Sekou Amadou Soumah, ran a trading post in an area called Gore that attracted Fula caravans from the Futa Jallon and worked with Louis Lightburn.

Thus traders, clerics, skilled artisans and their dependents gradually resettled from the interior to coastal villages throughout the 18th century, either marrying into local host communities or, when their numbers could support it, establishing separate polities, such as Forecaria and Moria, which were both centers of trade and religious study. Fula traders and clerics tended to live only temporarily on the coast, as part of temporary caravans, rather than settle in significant numbers. Controlling pathways between the highlands and markets on the coast by which it sent trade caravans, the Fula theocratic state commanded annual tribute from some communities along

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40 Ibid.
41 The names of both towns are based on titles given to Muslim scholars.
the route, sometimes coming into conflict with groups who sought to resist.\textsuperscript{42} It appears that the efforts of the state to extend its power concentrated along the parallel axes of the Rio Pongo and Rio Nunez rivers both of which ran southwest from the highlands towards the coast, but seemed less certain towards the southeast and Freetown. Thus the reach of the state was contested along the coast more effectively in some areas more than others. In this way, the Futa highlands state was similar to other expansionist inland polities across West Africa of this period such as Asante, Dahomey, Kaabu who sought greater control over commerce on the coast. It expanded within the constraints of what was possible within the specific local context.

Upper Guinea coastal trade towns such as Wonkapong, Freetown, Bangalan and many other trade settlements in the region concentrated heterogeneous residents with origins as distinct as from as the cities and settlements of Timbo, Liverpool, Kankan, Timbuktu, La Rochelle, Boston, Charleston, Nova Scotia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Segu. Just as they did with these migrants from the interior, the Africans on the Upper Guinea coast incorporated small numbers of European traders, and their Eur-African descendants into a well-established pattern of social relations in the region. Thus, trade between Europeans and Africans expanded steadily but in accordance with local kinship logics that formalized commercial ties through marriage and reproduction while also managing risk and debt.\textsuperscript{43} This made these West African trading settlements and nascent towns, along with similar iterations along much of the African Atlantic coast, where the dominant social order for both ‘newcomers’ and ‘first-comers’ alike was organized around the social norms and priorities of African landlords, in contrast to the rest of the urbanizing urban Atlantic of the late


18th century. These coastal settlements and towns in Upper Guinea were nonetheless being transformed through the convergence of economic forces also affecting other parts of the Atlantic world through the migration and commingling of peoples in new ways. An English trader in the Rio Pongo north of Freetown reported doing business there with an “Arab” trader from “far in the interior” who did not speak local languages or calculate prices using the local currency of iron bars. This merchant had slaves and a black pepper-like spice to sell but would only accept cloth and beads in exchange for them. This trader, like other free migrants and visitors to the coast from these far away places, brought with him to the coast notions and conventions about dress as a representation of social status, propriety and morality.

On the other hand, the subjection of slaves who commonly wore minimal clothing such as a tattered waistcloth defined the limits of respectability in local terms. In settlements like Moria, slaves accounted for as much as 80 percent of a population that produced surplus rice, salt, cotton, and woven cloth for the market. Thus slave trading and slave-based farming (which, among other things, produced the rice used to feed caravaners) were integrated activities that were vital to economic and social life along the coast. These villages profited by receiving slaves from the interior and selling them abroad, but local headmen also accumulated slaves for their own use. Indeed it was the commodification of slave labor that made other exchanges possible.

Such was the case at Dumbuya’s Wonkapong settlement which, with its hundreds of slaves then rivaled the size of the neighboring abolitionist project at Freetown struggling to stabilize itself as an outpost of “free” wage labor and inter-continental trade. During the year that James Watt traveled on behalf of the Sierra Leone Company to Timbo, Fendan Dumbuya and his son Dala

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44 Bright et al., Guinea Journals : Journeys into Guinea-Conakry During the Sierra Leone Phase, 1800-1821.
Modu Dumbuya were busy building commercial linkages with Freetown, with their fleet of canoes becoming a dominant presence along a north-south corridor between the Iles de Los and Freetown. Fendan Dumbuya’s children or younger relatives were positioned as either local headmen of these towns or, if female, wives of local chiefs in up to as many as a dozen such ports tacked into the many rivers north of Freetown. As part of their pursuit of commercial ties, the Dumbuyas developed a friendly rapport with the Freetown governor and became a reliable source of information on local matters for the Company. Dala Modu and a group of his family and clients moved to Freetown in 1799, and later came to the Company’s aid after a group of Nova Scotian settlers and Temne chief King Tom led a failed attack on the settlement in 1801.

Around that time, Fendan Dumbuya told Richard Bright, visiting on a diplomatic mission from Freetown, that at Wonkafong and other territories his enslaved workers produced “100 tons of salt and 100 tons of rice” annually along with “360 beyles” of cotton and a “considerable quantity” of coffee. He expressed interest in receiving technical assistance from the British if Freetown could arrange it. Specifically, he welcomed Bright’s suggestion that his son Dala Modu might travel to Britain and return with a “black Overseer of good character from the West Indies, if such a one could be engaged on liberal terms for a certain period.”

He expressed his desire to have an English loom and an English weaver and also to adopt the West Indian mode of cultivation on his estates, especially with regard to cotton and coffee.

Perhaps even more explicitly than was the case for the Futa Toro and Bundu, the available sources for this region suggest that the production of Dumbuya’s agricultural estates seemed

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47 Ibid.
48 Bright et al., Guinea Journals: Journeys into Guinea-Conakry during the Sierra Leone Phase, 1800-1821.
49 Ibid., 81.
organized for “long-distance” or at least regional markets. Even the settlement’s location — along a river that opened to the Atlantic Ocean, but far enough inland to facilitate exchange with land-based traffic from the interior highlands— suggests its role as entrepôt. Dumbuya sent cloth made by his weavers inland to markets at Benna, in the Futa Jallon, in Solimana and elsewhere in exchange for slaves, gold, ivory and cattle. Fula herders reportedly believed their cattle preferred the salt panned on the coast by suppliers like Dumbuya to rock salt available from desert sources.

Similar Maninka Muslim settlements proliferated along the coast competing with one another in their separate interactions with caravans from the interior. In the 1790s, the Swedish botanist Adam Afzelius traveled throughout the coast and described the festive public observances marking the end of Ramadan at Maliguia, a town of white-washed stone buildings that, like Wonkapong, set inland from a river of the same name that flowed to the ocean. He saw two to three hundred men in brightly colored “Mandingo clothes,”—50 or loose-fitting, embroidered garments favored by male authority figures, merchants and clerics — parading to an open air mosque where they sat on reed mats for a public service. Some of the men were armed with guns and others carried a kind of machete sheathed in a leather scabbard frequently worn by Maninka men. These leather scabbards were made by local specialists among the Kuranko, a related group from within Solimana who were migrants to the coast where they often worked as servants and craftsmen to Maninka benefactors. The local headman and top cleric walked at the head of the procession watched by Afzelius, dressed all in white and their heads wrapped in white turbans. A large majority walked hands-free behind the nobles to an open plain on the eastern side of the town for a ceremony. There, seated behind the crowd of men were about 50 women with their heads

covered in white cloth veils, and some children without mats of their own seated on the ground\textsuperscript{51}. At the climax of the service, the leading cleric called forward several other nobles to the front of the crowd, covered them with a large cloth under which he delivered a long sermon, after which the assembly broke bread for the first time\textsuperscript{52}

The above-described scene suggests some of the ways that textiles produced, imported and exchanged along the Guinea coast became incorporated into local displays of social status, social values, wealth and authority. In keeping with the ethnic, linguistic and religious plurality of population groups resident on the coast, sartorial displays of “status” took a variety of forms beyond the ones primarily visible at Muslim religious gatherings. On one occasion, Fenian Modu brought Bright to a central square at Wonkapong to view the public performance of a “Maray”, one of a class of elite, professional warriors from Solimana with specialist skills that reportedly made them fearsome. A masked dancer carrying a sword appeared at the center of a crowd performing martial moves intended to display his strength and agility.

His dress consisted of a close jacket with sleeves and pantaloons of a uniform color being a rust brown marked with black annular spots. His head and face were completely covered with a hood, the forepart of which was made of scarlet cloth ornamented with rows of cowries and provided with sight-holes encircled with the same kind of shell. The scarlet was tipped with fur…His waist and ankles were encircled with leathern belts to which small bells were fastened which sounded as he moved\textsuperscript{53}

This Maray had once been enslaved but having been redeemed by Dumbuya from a prior owner, became a mercenary working in military campaigns against his new patron’s enemies. The prominence of Maray as fighters (they were entitled to a larger share of the spoils of war than

\textsuperscript{52} Adam Afzelius and Alexander Peter ed Kup, \textit{Sierra Leone Journal 1795-1796}, vol. 27, Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia 27 (Uppsala: Inst. för allm. och jämförande etnografi, 1967), 140.
\textsuperscript{53} Bright et al., \textit{Guinea Journals : Journeys into Guinea-Conakry during the Sierra Leone Phase, 1800-1821}. 
average fighters) as expressed through such public displays suggest how Muslim elites on the coast drew on the visual and sartorial practices of non-Muslim peoples to enact their own state building ambitions. The multi-ethnic community on the tiny, nearby Banana Islands offers another version of the coastal region’s diversity of expression. Inhabited by a branch of the Bullom people, it was also home to Eur-African merchant James Cleveland, as well as Maninka and Fula residents and traders. There, on a festive occasion Afzelius watched as a ceremonial dancer entertained spectators wearing a multi-colored straw skirt and “several pounds of iron” around his ankles.

He danced very nimbly and for a long while in the middle of the sun, surrounded by women on one side, and by men on the other, who in their turn intermixed in the circle and between these incursions joined in singing and clapping their hands together… Such dancers are very much beloved by the women, whatever he likes — even the mothers don’t deny their daughters to sleep with them.54

The purpose and context of this performance in that local Banana Islands community are not clear from the passing mention in Afzelius’ journal, but it indicates the diversity of cultural expression amid the heterogenous population of settlements on the coast. The Banana Islands were located south of Freetown, a region where Sierra Leone Company also sent representatives to establish or maintain cooperative relations with potential African trading partners in the 1790s. This included James Watt who, the year after his return from Timbo, governor Zachary Macaulay dispatched along with accountant John Gray to survey commercial possibilities for camwood, ivory and cattle southeast of Freetown along the Kamaranka river, especially with one of that region’s most prominent traders, a Maninka merchant named Furry Cannaba. Like Fendan Dumbuya to the north of Freetown, Cannaba was a Maninka trader with ties to the savannah who had come to control several towns in the region where enslaved people panned for salt and grew

produce and cotton and raised cattle.\footnote{BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and ‘Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795’} Along the way to reach Cannaba, Watt and Gray passed a series of trading towns controlled alternately by African, Eur-African and European-headed trading families tucked along the serpentine rivers and creeks of the coastal mangroves. They met people such as Tom Walker, “a black man [who] speaks tolerable good English,”\footnote{BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and ‘Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795’} who was headman of a settlement of about two dozen houses set on a rise above the mangroves along the Karamanka. Walker had housed another Briton, David Ford, in his town when Freetown was being attacked by the French. Similarly, he offered Gray and Watts a place to stay overnight and told them he wanted the Sierra Leone Company to set a small trading post at his town.\footnote{BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and ‘Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795’}

On their journey, Watt and Gray traversed a landscape of small farming settlements whose commercial activity was marked by the productive labor of enslaved people. One town, Patungwa, which Watt reported mean “town of slaves” (possibly in Susu), laborers produced great quantities of rice. At another town, Walla, they noted that women were highly visible among the laborers.

On walking about the Town we found all the Women busily employed. Some were preparing the Bamboo Palm to make baskets and matts. Some were weaving the matts and making dish covers others were preparing and burning the plantain stocks to make soap, while there were others again spinning cotton so that of the females there were none idle.

Watt does not specifically identify these laborers as enslaved, but African slave holders generally preferred to retain enslaved women rather than men. Whether free or enslaved, women were important to coastal economic life as both producers and consumers. Women could also be counted among the region’s slave holders and chief merchants as Watt and Gray observed elsewhere in their travels. The male headman of Walla, Pa Taffoni arrived at the town’s palaver house (meeting house) to meet Gray and Watt dressed in white robes and a “neat linen cap with a
small frill” (although it is not clear that his clothing signified any particular religious identity). Watt recorded this impression:

This is a neat African dress and is far more becoming than that of our Sierra Leone chiefs who deck themselves out in the cast [sic] birthday suits of the peers of Great Britain while they frequently have at the same time large holes in their coarse thread stockings and shoes on their feet which ploughmen would be ashamed to wear.  

Watt and Gray extended to Pa Taffoni a customary payment of a fathom (about two yards) of baft (cloth) and in exchange were fed and housed overnight. Their reception at every town, however, was not always so warm. On one night, they stopped at another village called Walla, that was headed by a “mulatto woman” who was married to Stephen Caulker who lived in another town upriver and who had a cousin Harris who was a headman in a village on nearby Sherbro island. The Caulkers were prominent Eur-African traders on the nearby Plantain Islands who sent two sons, Stephen George and John to London where they studied for several years at an African Academy established at Clapham Common for the children of elite Africans by the Society for the Education of Africans. In Sierra Leone, Gray noted that the head woman who was married into the Caulker family was not generous in her hospitality to her visitors (Watt was ill at that point with some sort of stomach virus) that she charged them for most provisions. Watt said that she accepted they visitors’ customary gift of tobacco, intended to sow good will, with “the most unmeaning indifference.”

Robaina was the first of Fury Canaba’s villages that Gray and Watt reached, though he was away when they arrived. On the following day, an assistant to Cannaba came to walk the men

58 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”
60 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”
to meet Cannaba to whom they presented a gift of printed chintz and a case of gin. Cannaba was described as man about 70 years of age with a “yellowish” complexion and dressed in a gold lace hat, matching waistcoat, a ruffled shirt, and “a pair of country cloth trousers, with stockings on his legs and shoes on his feet.” In his home, Fury Cannaba displayed the gift of an earlier visitor: a brass-barrelled gun that was mounted with silver onto which his name was engraved that had been given to him by an agent of Bance Island, Capt. Bowie. As a wealthy merchant in an area populated largely by ethnically distinct Bullom people, Cannaba was a powerful man who, during the course of the visit, administered sales from a caravan from the interior that arrived in town selling rice and camwood and, on another occasion, performed as judge in the case of local headman accused of improperly selling a man into slavery for alleged adultery with “one of his women.”

Cannaba had extensive dealings with the English, was open to the Company’s proposal to establish a trading post at Robaina and also wanted to attract skilled settlers—such as women who knew how to churn butter—from Freetown to move there. Gray and Watt seemed optimistic about the Company establishing commercial linkages with Cannaba, noting his ability to access cattle, salt, mats and baskets. Gray even reported enthusiastically that Cannaba was ripe for conversion to Christianity, even though he was an observant Muslim. Gray alleged in his journal that Cannaba drank gin in private, deceiving the people of his town, citing this as reason he might be successfully missionized. In the short term, Cannaba had a list of goods that he wanted Gray and Watt to procure for him from Freetown, a list that reveals something of the material culture of the town, at least for a small elite. “Cannaba asked for: sugar, butter, cheese, flour, ear rings, small

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61 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal” and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”
62 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal” and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”
63 BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal” and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”

231
bells, manillas, one dozen Windsor chairs, a French horn, nutmeg, a tea kettle, a gold-laced hat, a
gold-headed cane (with no alloy in it), coral, and an Alderman’s old gown.\textsuperscript{64}

Figure 10 18th Century Alderman’s Gown

The items Cannaba is reported to have requested (as well as the garments he was reported
to have worn) reflect an eclectic, cosmopolitan taste for foreign luxuries, including food, furniture,
accessories and clothing. In the request for a gold-headed cane and the Alderman’s gown, it is easy
to imagine that they were to be used to further project his wealth and power. The presence of Fury
Cannaba in Sierra Leone Company documents of the period presents a different image from that
projected by his contemporary Dumbuya a few dozen miles to the north. Unlike Dumbuya,
Cannaba is recorded as being dressed in western clothing, and allegedly drinking gin, a practice
anathema to most West African Muslims. As powerful figures in their respective communities,

\textsuperscript{64} BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal’ and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”
both men projected their status in part through their public display of clothing that was not available to many commoners. In Cannaba’s case, contemporary European witnesses suggest that some Temne and other peasant farmers also purchased and wore European clothing, with a particular taste for bright colors, fringes and tassels or glittery surfaces, so that his own tastes reflected that of those in his community who could afford imported goods. His own clothing was likely among the best of what was considered fashionable, desirable and available in that context. The examples of Dumbuya and Cannaba reflect the diversity of sartorial approaches among coastal Muslims, as each person drew of differing visual vocabularies in order to project their status, cosmopolitan ethos, and their openness to trade with all foreign comers.

Coastal traders such as Fury Cannaba, Fendan Dumbuya, their respective lineage affiliates
and clients operated independently of the will of the imamate at Futa Jallon, and also competed with one another for commercial position. The same was certainly no less true for the European and Eur-African merchants, thus limiting Futa Jallon’s influence to areas such as that near the Rio Pongo. The turn of the 19th century on the Judeo-Christian calendar was the thirteenth century for Muslims who were anticipating the arrival of a God-sent messenger or “Mahdi” to redress injustices and renew the faith worldwide. On the Upper Guinea coast, there were many pretenders to the title and role of Mahdi over these years. In the 1780s, an African Islamic cleric who the available sources name only as “Fatta”, arrived on the coast from the savannah with a large, militant following of up to 15,000 people, presenting himself as the “Mahdi.” This self-proclaimed reformer arrived at the head of an army that had marched hundreds of miles from the interior, gathering converts and conscripts along the way, on a mission to expand and to “purify” the practice of Islam throughout the region. His authority over many people lay in his supposed advanced knowledge of the Qur’an and, his claim of supernatural powers that protected him against injury from weapons. The Mahdi’s arrival threw the coastal rivers region into social crisis, with several European traders sending him gifts and seeking to remain in his favor. Even Fendan Dumbuya felt obliged to send a ‘bonya’ to the Mahdi worth thousands of iron bars (about 650 pounds sterling), and to crawl on his hands and knees into the Mahdi’s presence as a sign of submission. The Mahdi’s critique of the supposed laxity of Muslims in villages across the region, and of the supposed offense of non-Muslim religious practices (both African and Christian), expressed itself as a critique of immodest or inappropriate clothing. As a sign of submission, the Mahdi required his followers to change their style of dress to a simple, standard uniform that was

65 Mouser, "Insurrection as Socioeconomic Change: Three Rebellions in Guinea/Sierra Leone in the 18th Century."
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
a cotton garment dyed yellow with a local bark— a visual rebuke to the more varied choices then commonly in use by coastal Muslims. The Mahdi’s claim of invincibility would be successfully challenged with fatal results for him when he was bludgeoned two years later in 1785). Had his vision been realized, the Mahdi’s choice of garment likely had implications for production in terms of organizing an economy that could amply reproduce such garments. It is unclear how this policy might have interacted with the considerable profits gained by selling imported cloth that was a key source of revenue for many local sellers. But the Mahdi’s unsuccessful maneuver reveals how clothing, in this case locally grown and produced cotton garments, represented an imaginative expression of power that was contested by various actors and groups of actors on the coast.

The Market On One’s Own Terms: Rebel Slaves and Muslim reformers

Around 1783, a group of slaves who worked as domestics, craftworkers and farmers for their Mande Muslim owners in and around Dumbuya’s Wonkapong took advantage of the departure of the local militia for a mission outside the area to escape to nearby hills. Infighting among the Mande slaveholders kept them from immediately combining their efforts to put down the rebellion. Instead, the rebel settlers built walls for their protection and survived for years under the cloud of a tenuous truce with their erstwhile owners. In that time, the community became a magnet for runaway slaves from throughout the coast who swelled its population. Significantly, these self-emancipated settlers planted extensive fields of rice and cotton outside their walls. Contemporary accounts of the rebel settlement suggest that these settlers grew the crops for their

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68 Winterbottom, An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone : To Which Is Added an Account of the Present State of Medicine among Them ; with a New Introd. By John D. Hargreaves and E. Maurice Backett, no. 52.
69 Ibid.
own use. But it should be noted that they also sought to supply and protect themselves by purchasing certain foods and guns on the market and this typically would have involved cloth as a currency of exchange. For as long as this community remained independent, it effectively became one of a number of polities seeking to control land and labor through the exchange of cotton and cloth.

The Yangheekori rebel settlement, which in the Americas would be referred to as a maroon community, was apparently one of several communities controlled by groups of self-emancipated slaves on the Upper Guinea coast, although such African examples are rarely included in Atlantic literature on maroons. In one instance, a formerly enslaved man called Mambee led about 600 formerly enslaved men and women followers to establish a settlement in the Benna region that still inhabited in the late 18th century. In the river Capatches, there was another settlement called Fula Coundingi inhabited by self-emancipated people formerly enslaved by the Fula. Laing recorded mention of Kondeah, a settlement of formerly enslaved people established north of Timbo in the Futa Jallon that repulsed repeated attacks from the Futa Jallon state and from Solimana. In 1794, a map of the Sierra Leone peninsula published in the Company reported indicates the location of an unnamed town southwest of Freetown called simply “Town of Runaway Slaves.”

In addition to forming “maroon” settlements, enslaved individuals staged their escape, or

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attempted escape, from their owners on a regular basis at trading posts, which was of general concern to slave dealers. Afzelius learned of one instance during his time in the Rio Pongo area of contemporary Guinea in which four enslaved women ran away on the route coastward from Fula country, where they had been purchased by a slave dealer, Mr. Ferrie. The women had attempted to escape twice before three of them eventually succeeded; the fourth caught again only because her pregnancy made it difficult for her to flee. Those who got away were able to do so when one of them dressed herself in the expensive clothes of Ferrie’s wife, upon whom she waited during their march toward the coast. So disguised, the three ran off with the leader presenting herself to those they met on the way as one of Almamy Sadu’s wives returning from the coast to Timbo with two assistants (a claim that seemed to be confirmed by their humble attire).\textsuperscript{76} The episode suggests that it was at least plausible among local residents that the attire of one of Sadu’s wives might be equivalent to something that the European or Eur-African wife of a European trader on the coast might also wear, which speaks of the equivalence of their social status as wealthy and powerful.

For more than a decade, a peaceful detente obtained in the case of the settlement of self-emancipated people at Yanghekori in which they adopted a defensive position behind walls and produced surplus crops that they could use for commerce.\textsuperscript{77} Caught in a bitter conflict with their competitors at Moria, the rulers of Wonkapong had allowed the rebels to pass through a corridor in their territory to access European traders on the coast that allowed them to survive, as long as it frustrated Moria.\textsuperscript{78} Bruce Mouser has pointed out that the impact of Fatta’s reformist campaign on the coast had the unforeseen consequence of uniting a number of divergent Muslim interests to oppose his ambitions. This unified group found its footing to mount a combined effort of 2,500

\textsuperscript{76} BL, Sierra Leone, ‘Mr Gray’s Journal” and “Mr Watts Journal to Furry Canaba’s 31 January & 11 February 1795”

\textsuperscript{77} Mouser, “Rebellion, Marronage and Jihad: Strategies of Resistance to Slavery on the Sierra Leone Coast, C. 1783-1796.”

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
fighters against the settlement at Yanghekori. A five-month-long siege devolved into a stand-off when the last rebel leader, called Dangasago, was captured after being lured outside the settlement walls on false pretenses.  

Victorious at last, the elder and junior Dumbuya men shared the spoils with Susu slave owners he partnered with in the attack. They sold off some captives, who numbered in the hundreds and put others to work for themselves. Defeating the rebellion ended a symbolic threat to a social and economic order on the coast of which he was a large beneficiary. The examples of Yanghekori and other settlements of self-emancipated people underline the highly competitive and fluid nature of coastal society where a range of agents, both individuals, small corporations and large states grabbed openings to advance their interests as much as possible. In most instances, cotton weaving and trading were among the regular strategies these actors turned to when attempting to generate income and wealth. The prevalence of these maroon communities on the Guinea rivers coast appears to be greater than was the case in northern Senegambia (although such communities existed there as well). Their presence complicated the possibilities for the effectiveness of such sweeping gestures as the trade embargo instituted by the Futa Jallon state in 1794, as determined European traders almost always would have been able to find willing partners in the region.

Black settlers, Eur-Africans and Elite African consumption

On the coast, the Sierra Leone Company hired Thomas Cooper to run one of its stores and manage trade at a post on the Rio Pongo north of Freetown. Cooper was reportedly born in England of African parents, although it is not clear from the sources where exactly his parents were from.

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79 Ibid.
or how they came to be in England. But it is likely that Cooper was among London’s “black poor” who were a focus of the philanthropic efforts that led to the creation of the Sierra Leone Company. The black poor and about one thousand African-descended British Loyalists, who resettled from Nova Scotia in 1792, formed the initial group of settlers at Freetown. Their resettlement was beset with a number of serious problems. But what is relevant to this discussion of coastal populations is that many of these black settlers had been enslaved in American colonies like Georgia and Virginia before the Revolution, had experienced war and dislocation and had been motivated to “return” or migrate to Sierra Leone through the preaching of leaders in their Methodist and Baptist churches. Some of them had indeed left West Africa as younger people enslaved in this very region. Several were Koranko natives who had once been sold at nearby Bance Island. One settler reportedly reunited with her mother whom she found enslaved to a Temne chief. Another settler, Frank Peters, reportedly returned to the village of his birth after having been enslaved in South Carolina.81 Most if not all arrived as settlers infused with an evangelizing ideology, formed by their experiences of British empire in North America, that shaped their expectations of how to live as “free” civilized (and civilizing) Christians in Africa. In Freetown, they built clapboard homes for themselves unlike the wattle and daub, thatched structures built by Africans. They mostly wore western clothing and established a reliable consumer base for American products such as tobacco, rum and molasses. Some of these settlers circulated in riverine communities outside the colony and sometimes settled there, bringing with them their tastes for certain western clothing styles.82 Others accompanied Europeans traveling inland on exploratory missions, while

81 Ibid.
others inserted themselves more directly into the regional economy in which cloth was central commodity.

For Thomas Cooper, this meant securing a trading post as did all other comers, by first making a customary gift to his local African landlord, Mungo Kerefa—an English-made hat and shirt sent to Kerefa via Cooper from the Sierra Leone Company— and negotiating annual rents for the land. In August of 1795, Cooper wrote to the Council of the Sierra Leone colony that he was optimistic about the possibilities for commerce in the Rio Pongo area.

I wish that the high cloths may answer at Sierra Leone, for the purchase of these cloths have been greatly the means of establishing the factory and I have no doubt but that in a little time the company will find this a great place for trade. I am persuaded that it will save numbers from slavery.

The company responded by agreeing to support Cooper’s effort as best they could, sending one of their members to assist him with setting up the factory, encouraging him to keep his tenancy arrangements with the headman Kerefa in order, and to purchase other available commodities from such as raw cotton and pepper when prices were favorable. Cooper’s ongoing correspondence from the Rio Pongo to the council at Freetown reveals certain dynamics of the regional trade such as the entanglements between slave trading and the so-called “legitimate trade” that he and the company hoped to establish. Slaves, for example, were used as porters to carry the ivory, hides, wax and other goods that the company wanted to buy. Cooper described being aware that his purchase of ivory from a Fula caravan did little to diminish slave trading as the caravan leader sold the human porters to a willing buyer a few villages away. He also noted how African slaveholders used slaves to produce the “legitimate” commodities that the Sierra Leone Company most wanted.

83 CO 270/3 TNA, "Resolutions of Council at Sierra Leone Correspondence," 1794-1796.
84 CO 270/3 TNA, "Resolutions of Council at Sierra Leone Correspondence," 1794-1796.
to purchase. In another letter from 1796, he wrote that during a seven-month lull in ships arriving on the Pongo to buy slaves,

The natives…turned their slaves to the manufactory of strips of white cloth, which I bought in great quantity, neither did I hear of any dispute or wars in the country till a schooner had arrived from America and she was to carry two hundred slaves.  

Cooper’s statements form part of an abolitionist discourse of the period that alleged a direct connection between internal wars and trader demand for slaves on the coast. This Christian abolitionist discourse was generally silent about the underlying Islamic factor motivating war between the expanding Fula theocratic state and its neighbors beyond the mere presence of an American or European slave ship. Most historians’ treatment of this period on the coast understandably centers on the struggles and eventual failure of the Sierra Leone company to maintain a trading factory on the Rio Pongo as local slave traders, and African traders such as the Doula trader Mori Kanu, were successful in turning local populations against it. But setting aside the longer narrative of the demise of slave trading in West Africa momentarily, it is clear from sources such as this correspondence that many observers at the time—Cooper, the Company, local African slave holders and foreign slave traders alike—viewed cotton and cloth trading as a regular income producer and sought to develop their involvement with these commodities.

Apart from newcomers like Cooper, Eur-African long resident traders represented another constituency purveying western Christian clothing aesthetics although in some cases their commitment to evangelizing ideologies was complex. Betsy Heard, the daughter of an English man and an African woman, ran a trading post factory dealing in slaves and other commodities in the town of Bereira, and became influential because of her relative wealth and connections with

86 Ibid., 47.
European traders. Heard had been educated several years in Liverpool, England before returning to take over her father’s enterprise. She was a friend to Fendan Dumbuya, the djula cloth trader, and a regular presence at Wonkapong, which was not far away. Heard had positioned herself as the person through whom foreign traders new to the region contacted local African headmen and rulers, and she had personal ties with the governor of the Sierra Leone Company. She impressed visitors from Freetown with the relative comforts of her home outfitted with familiar English furnishings, linens and tableware. But she was also renowned for her knowledge of local herbal medicines and sometimes appears in English sources under her local name, Calaminna, a Mande-language name, which translates as the “learned one.” This suggests the extensive local linkages of this woman regarded simultaneously by British visitors as familiar with European customs in general and friendly to their interests in particular.

Other “mulatto” or Eur-African traders similarly moved alternately between western and African social systems. One of the most notorious slave traders on Bananas island was James Cleveland, a Eur-African who lived in an African style thatched roof buildings that he filled with European furnishings. He sometimes practiced local traditional religions involving the use of charms and the wearing of amulets, as well as initiating trials for those accused of witchcraft—a key legal mechanism in local terms for punishing “guilty” or hapless persons by selling them into slavery.

Among local Africans, those who could afford to incorporated foreign made cloths such as linens, Indian chintz, silk and taffeta into their own dress. At port towns from St. Louis, Senegal to Freetown, Sierra Leone, African and mixed race women traders called “signares” or “senhoras”

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89 Ibid.
used various cultural elements such as clothing, architecture, leisure practices and sexual relations to present themselves as unique in the region. Gender informed both the use of imported cloth and the appropriation of foreign clothing styles. Elite African men, both Muslim and non-Muslim, on the coast would often display their status by wearing European outfits and accessories such as walking sticks, silk stockings, hats and umbrellas, while their wives incorporated imported cloth into local clothing styles.

The number of a wealthy man’s wives was a key indicator of his status, but so too did the quality, assortment and public display of the women’s clothing add to his prestige. In the above image from a travel account published by Francis Spilsbury in 1805, the wives of an African ruler

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are represented wearing ample lengths of cloth that might be imported cotton prints or locally made cloths, and adorned with some type of beaded necklace. It is noteworthy that the local style of dress — a pagne and top cloth for adult women — appeared to be more frequently maintained for display by elite women who had access to the best imported cloth. This appeared to construct a gendered persona tied intimately to the local space, with local tastes represented by, if not defined by these women’s choices.

The sartorial posture of the male ruler in the image faces outward to a foreign world beyond Africa’s Atlantic coast. He is represented wearing an elite Englishman’s tailored long coat with tails, ruffled shirt knee-length breeches, embroidered stockings, shoes, large cap and a metal-tipped walking stick, all of which would have been ostentatious by their physical difference from local dress. The indication that the clothes were imported from Monmouth Street would have been recognizable to English readers at the time as a reference to an area of west London known for burgeoning slums, second-hand clothing shops, and hangouts for political balladeers and pamphleteers— and this information would likely have made the ruler’s imperious posture seem ridiculous, deluded or pitiable to some English readers.

Imported cloth or garments that might have been produced in one context in Europe with a particular use and social meaning intended, were often repurposed in an African context that confound predictable or simplistic readings. The foreign, novel quality of imported garments, as well as their association with powerful trading partners, likely embued them with value that extended beyond the question of whether they had been previously worn by another person. In a context in which it was common for people within a given family compound or community to borrow clothing, and less likely that most people owned more than one garment, it would not make sense to assume that “second-hand clothing” would be viewed negatively by these late 18th century
consumers. There is evidence that British merchants found that used clothing purchased on the market in London found a ready audience among western Africa consumers at the turn of the 19th century. Joseph Corry made such an observation while stopping in the Cape Verde island of St. Jago to obtain fresh water.

The commodities the natives require as payment may be purchased at Rag Fair, being extremely partial to cast off wearing apparel of every description.\textsuperscript{91}

What many outside observers in the late 18th century imagined as an expression of uniquely “African” style was already informed by a hybridity made possible through long-distance trade linkages which circulated new tastes and new commodities in western Africa whether in the form of European garments, accessories or untailored cloth from European and Asian sources. An English trader wrote that a well dressed local woman on the Guinea coast in the 1780s might wear a wrapper of locally made “country cloth” as an “under petticoat” over which she might layer a range of more expensive, imported cloths:

She wears one of red taffity; a black silk handkerchief tied by two corners round her neck, hangs down before like a child’s bib, and covers her bosom; another of the same color is tied round her head: she has gold earrings in her ears, round her neck a string of large coral; and a silver or gold locket and chain. On each wrist, two or three manillas, and five or six silver rings on each finger; her forehead is painted with various angles and triangles of white or red, and her hair neatly and curiously plaited; and sometimes close-shaved in small circular or crescent formed spots…Behind her follows her waiting-maids, (who are generally the prettiest girls she can procure from ten to fifteen years old) decorated with coral and beads, and a piece of taffity or fine chintz thrown over their left shoulders like a highlander’s plaid.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} Joseph Corry and Charles Grey Earl Grey, \textit{Observations upon the Windward Coast of Africa: The Religion, Character, Customs, &c., of the Natives: With a System upon Which They May Be civilized and a Knowledge Attained of the Interior of This Extraordinary Quarter of the Globe and upon the Natural and Commercial Resources of the Country Made in the Years 1805 and 1806} (London: Printed for G. and W. Nicol, 1807), 25.

\textsuperscript{92} Matthews, \textit{A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone, : On the Coast of Africa: Containing an Account of the Trade and Productions of the Country, and of the Civil and Religious Customs and Manners of the People; in a Series of Letters to a Friend in England. By John Matthews, ... With an Additional Letter on the Subject of the African Slave Trade. ... To Which Are Added, Eight Plates.}
The commercial linkages through which such consumption was made possible were deliberately created and maintained through the sociality between some African rulers and their European trading partners. In Sierra Leone, Naimbanna, a Temne ruler who had ceded land to the British to settle what became Freetown sent three of his sons to be educated with each of his biggest trading partners, the British, the French and the Fulani Imamate of the Futa Jallon. Each was to return with knowledge, cultural and religious insight about these regular visitors to ports near Sierra Leone. This strategy of sending children long distances to be educated in different religious and cultural setting was frequently pursued by West African patriarchs who could manage to do so. It suggests an open-ness to, and proactive engagement with the available alternatives to strengthen African communities that should be more widely acknowledged in the literature. The English religious writer and philanthropist Hannah More published an account of Naimbanna son who lived in England for two years between 1791 and 1793. Titled “The Black Prince”, the book features an image of the younger Naimbanna wearing an English gentleman’s outfit and waiting while another man handles what appears to be his well-dressed riding horse. In the account, More described Naimbanna as someone who quickly learned to speak English fluently, learned basic math skills and “acquired more courtesy and delicacy of manners, some degree of which was indeed natural to him, and the superstitious belief in witchcraft to which Africans are so prone, gradually left him.93” For all this, Naimbanna bristled at the representation of Africans’ character that he heard while attending Parliamentary debates on abolition of the slave trade and, as a result, refrained from discussing details of his home country to strangers and to expressing excessive

praise of English society. Nevertheless, Naimbanna’s educational trip to England was deemed successful by his abolitionist sponsors who were also among those invested in the Sierra Leone Company. Naimbanna sailed to Sierra Leone on a ship named for his family in 1793, but he became sick on board and died within hours of his return home.

Though the death of the Naimbanna was especially devastating within the context of the struggling but still hopeful settlement at Freetown, he was ultimately one of many young African elites from the Upper Guinea region who would return after extended visits to Europe for education. These men and women helped to establish European material culture and consumption in the region by introducing new tastes, accumulating and displaying foreign luxuries in their homes and on their bodies. As the preceding section has shown, they were joined in this endeavor by African elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and perhaps significant numbers of their less wealthy clients or dependents. They did so in a variety of ways, along a continuum from that went from the complete adoption of contemporary western outfits to the incorporation of just one accessory such as a hat, a handkerchief, or buttons.

The variety of consumers on the coast that has been revealed here also suggests the complexity of the situation facing the Futa Jallon state, or any single actor, that sought to unilaterally impose its will on coastal commerce. In this competitive environment, the imposition of a trade embargo such as the one pursued along the Rio Nunez by the Futa Jallon imamate could have only limited reach. Coastal Maninka Muslim traders seemed ready, willing and able to act independently of their Fula co-religionists when it was feasible to do so. Other independent actors included the communities of self-emancipated slaves active here and there in trade, and the trading posts of Eur-African merchants such as James Caulker and Betsy “Calaminna” Heard, who may have been affected by the Futa embargo but maintained alternate commercial contacts in the
interior. In this sense, the impact of the Futa Jallon embargo on the coastal trade does not appear to have been as threatening as was the case with the one imposed by Almamy Kan in Saint Louis, Senegal where trade depended heavily on the single transportation artery of the Senegal river. This section has shown that African elites on the Guinea rivers coast expressed themselves sartorially in a variety of styles that reflected their religious and ethnic diversity, the specific power relations within their local community, as well as their differential access to local and overseas textile markets. The growth of this diverse consumer market in western Africa was in tandem with that occurring elsewhere in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean perimeter.

**European speculators, visionaries and opportunists**

In 1793, a British slave trader at the river port town of Kakundy, about 200 miles north of Freetown, planned a cotton plantation of 100-acres in anticipation that Britain would abolish the slave trade as a means to divert the labor of slaves he might no longer be able to sell.\(^\text{94}\) This was a time when expanding English textile mills were ever more in need of raw cotton, and England had lost its hold on its North American colonies in the Revolutionary War. Speculators in London and on the Upper Guinea coast saw it as a region in which export agriculture might be developed with both slave and free labor either as a supplement to or replacement for slave-produced commodities in the Caribbean.\(^\text{95}\) In fact, Europeans had struggled for decades to develop the commercial export of cotton from various parts of the west African coast with only modest

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\(^95\) Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas in Action, 1780-1850*.
success. But there was a sense that as advocates for abolition of the slave trade gained increasing traction in the British Parliament, the moment had arrived to pursue these efforts more vigorously.

Proponents of such schemes as argued that Upper Guinea was a region in which to procure, “cotton, as fine as that from the East Indies, and tobacco as that of the Brazils…a species of indigo infinitely superior to that of the West and other drugs.” They argued that more cotton might be produced in western Africa at a lower price and at a shorter distance from Europe than was possible elsewhere. Bulama island, located about 300 miles north of Freetown near the Portuguese settlement at Bissao, had for years been in the designs variously of other English, French and Portuguese merchants and investors. Each of these efforts had stalled and failed for one reason or another but new attempts continued to be made towards the end of the century. In London, the Swedish entrepreneur Carl Wadstrom founded a church that was interested to establish an abolitionist ministry in Africa following the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a mystic who held grand ideas about “the African race” and the future of the Christian faith in Africa. Wadstrom published a detailed plan to set up a colony on Bulama Island that envisioned the use of free African wage labor to farm and trade in all goods except slaves. Wadstrom had reportedly invested money in textile factories in Manchester, and in his published plans he spoke glowingly of the potential for Bulama to produce cotton for English factories—noting that cotton seeds from well-liked varieties produced in the French island of Bourbon and Pernambuco, Brazil

96 developed in other chapters
99 Citation to come
100 Carl Bernhard Wadström, Observations on the Slave Trade, : And a Description of Some Part of the Coast of Guinea, During a Voyage, Made in 1787, and 1788, in Company with Doctor A. Sparrman and Captain Arrehenius, by C. B. Wadstrom, Chief Director of the Royal Assay and Refining Office; Member of the Royal Chamber of Commerce, and of the Royal Patriotic Society, for Improving Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce in Sweden(London: printed and sold by James Phillips, George-Yard, Lombard-Street, 1789).
could also be grown on Bulama. Wadstrom never traveled to Sierra Leone, however. The project floundered and he is said to have abandoned co-investors by fleeing to Paris.\(^{101}\)

Meanwhile, Philip Beaver, a British Naval officer and a Sierra Leone company official, Hugh Dalrymple, decided to turn from efforts at Freetown try to form their own colony of English settlers on Bulama in November 1791, a scheme that Beaver late wrote about extensively in an account published in 1805.

Many people doubt whether it be the interest of this country to extend her colonies or not; probably not, generally speaking, but so long as we continue to consume the same quantities of sugar and coffee, and to use in our manufactures as much cotton and indigo as we do at present, the one proposed will be of benefit to the mother country…In this colony, I should propose the culture of cotton, coffee, tobacco and indigo as the staple commodities, but chiefly the first; and in the course of time, when the planters may have cleared a sufficient quantity of ground, and have capital enough to undertake it, the cultivation of sugar cane.\(^{102}\)

Beaver and Dalrymple arrived on Bulama with 86 colonists (including 65 men, 24, women and 31 children) in November 1791. For all of their enthusiasm, it later seemed there was much about the colonization project that had not been carefully conceived beyond that it was to be a colony for European settlement and farming. Beaver arranged to purchase land on the investors’ behalf from Biafara villagers on Bulama with the help of John Bootle, a local Eur-African slave trader active in the area. Within the first weeks of having arrived on Bulama, however, most of the group led by Beaver deserted the project and fled back to Freetown complaining of hunger and illness. During their stay on Bulama, several colonists had died of unknown fevers. Beaver kept a grim tally of the steady number of sick and dead that sometimes ticked upwards but which rarely

\(^{101}\) Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, 42.

seemed to go down. He remained on the island with an ever-dwindling group of colonists before giving up eighteen months later. But in a letter to investors, Beaver blamed the project’s failure on circumstances that could be avoided in the future and remained optimistic about it. He argued that Bulama’s location, availability, and features such as good harbors and soil conditions made it an ideal place for settlement for farming cotton and trading in the region.  

Beaver was not the only English speculator who wrote optimistically about commercial possibilities in western Africa to backers in England. In December 1795, James Jackson, an English trader with experience in the markets of Algiers, in north Africa, penned a memorandum wrote to the governor of the Sierra Leone colony with reports of the profitability of trade at the desert side town of Timbuktu and a detailed list of the items most in demand there. Jackson thought the British suppliers could reach the Timbuktu markets faster from the Guinea coast than by crossing the desert from the north. He provided a list of items that the British could sell profitably in Timbuktu “and the adjacent country” that included amber, tobacco and salt.

I imagine the annual amount of merchandize carried from the Empire of Morocco to Timbuctoo maybe two hundred thousand pounds (unclear) for which they receive returns from Timbuctoowhich sell in Morocco and Fez for upwards of a million.  

Among the textiles he mentioned about half were European linens or blends and half were India-produced cottons including “blue linens, romans, cambricks, platillias, muslins, dimitries and calicoes.” They also included “thin scarlet cloths, superfine sky blue, fawn colour, black, chocolate, green and purple.” It is unclear from the document, but it may be that he identified these particular items because he already had experience exchanging them via caravans from north

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103 CO 267/10 TNA, "Sierra Leone Original Correspondence," 1793-1794.
104 267/10 TNA CO, "James Jackson on the Timbuctoo Trade," Sierra Leone Original Correspondence1795.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
Africa or that his choices were more speculative. Examples of the entrepreneurial efforts and visions of Beaver and Jackson occurred in the context in which Mungo Park traveled inland to Segu on the Niger, soon to be followed by numbers of other European explorers and merchants into the interior. An increase in the number of such efforts and enthusiasm for them at the turn of the 19th century suggests the expanding importance of cotton in global markets if not the unsettled questions of how West Africans would participate in those markets.

**Conclusion**

In 1806, the Acting Governor of the Sierra Leone Company, Thomas Ludlam accused Dala Modu of trading in slaves within the settlement in violation of Company laws and gave the African merchant an ultimatum of continuing to reside under the Company’s rules, and convert to Christianity, or else to leave. Insulted, Dalu Mohammed, having traded successfully with the settlement for years as the scion of a major commercial lineage on the coast, moved away from Freetown rather submit to Ludlam’s rules, taking along a group of followers to a new town they established at Lungi across the Sierra Leone River on the Bullom Shore. Mohammed had defended the Company’s interests a few years earlier after a group of settlers joined forces with some local Temne to attack it, by returning some of the fugitive main actors to Freetown for legal proceedings against them. Modu denied his involvement in slave trading and was incredulous at the practice of settlers and Company officials of redeeming enslaved people for slave vessels, and expecting those so redeemed to repay the cost of their purchase in labor, which he viewed as no different from slave trading.

At least some of Mohammed’s perspective on what amounts to an expulsion from Freetown was recorded three years later when he gave testimony at a trial called by Ludlam’s replacement,
Thomas Perronet Thompson, who was investigating charges that Ludlam himself had permitted slave trading to occur within the colony, in violation of its by-laws. The documentary record of the incident, published by Bruce Mouser, gives some sense of the period in which the African and European individuals involved advanced distinct but overlapping understandings of slavery and the rights of “landlords.”

Modu obeyed the governor in deference to local conventions governing the obligations of incoming migrants, or “strangers” toward host communities with prior claims to a given piece of land. Modu’s reaction to his expulsion encapsulated many of the issues discussed in this chapter concerning the dynamic interaction of culturally diverse actors on the coast through commerce, through marriage and through political and religious networks. This was an environment in which not only was cloth trading an important business (Modu’s family sold their weavers’ cloth along the coast and into the interior) but one in which clothing was a vital marker of culture, social status and wealth. People used the adoption of particular clothing styles to assert group belonging, social values and to negotiate social relationships and power between groups.

The confrontation between Ludlam and Mohammed over the alleged slave trading occurred in a church in Freetown where Mohammed had been summoned and Ludlam sat in judgement along with Warwick Francis, a “black man” who was his assistant. It was Francis who visited Mohammed a few days earlier with “a large sheet of paper written all over” to inform him of Ludlam’s complaint. Modu responded hotly to the demand he convert to Christianity in order to remain in the settlement, saying, “I did not understand it before; but now I understand it; if I am to change my religion, I had better go to the Governor tomorrow, & tell him to cut my throat, sooner

108 Ibid., 336.
than my countrymen shall hear it.”

Modu came to the church the next day dressed defiantly in what was recognizable in local terms as clothing associated with a Muslim leading cleric or ruler, including gris-gris amulets, a white turban “which is the mark of an Imam, & which none else may wear on high occasions.” Rather than signifying his achievement as a scholar, a council of elders award Modu the turban in a ceremony for his leading the fight against the rebel settlement of self-emancipated people at Yanghekoroi that resulted in the capture of hundreds in 1796. In his testimony recalling his arrival at the church a few years after the event, Modu portrayed himself as deliberately seeking to confront the English governor: “When I was in this church, people asked [who] I was, for nobody knew me, because I had my dress of a Chief. And I stood by myself, & none of my people were with me.”109

Dressed as a chief, Modu was unrecognizable to some in the Freetown church because he had previously been known to dress himself in the imported garments of English gentry, as did many Muslim and non-Muslim elite African actors within this region of the coast, as has been demonstrated in this chapter.

Before this happened, I used to dress in the English manner & follow English fashions; but when they talked about forcing me to be christened, I said ‘off with my head — before the chiefs in the country hear this thing I am to be christened; I cannot promise this thing; I must go to trial”110

Modu’s statement suggests that his prior embrace of European-style clothing had been an expression of association and identification with his European trading partners, as they shared in the material culture of global maritime commercial exchange which saw the consumption of Indian cottons alongside Chinese pottery, European woolens and brass pans, American tobacco and rum.

109 Ibid., 339.
110 Ibid.
around the Atlantic and Indian Ocean perimeters and beyond. Far from a submission to superior foreign tastes, it was thought of as a voluntary expression of shared bourgeois cultural values that did not imply either the adoption of Christianity or of other aspects of European secular culture.

By arriving at the English church dressed in local clothing reserved for symbolically important occasions, Modu appeared to be reasserting a claim for equity that Ludlam’s actions were threatening.

The long-term impact of Modu’s actions may have been limited because he continued to trade with both the Company and private traders from his new base across the Sierra Leone river at Lungi. However, by moving away and making a show of his rejecting English clothing, Modu was making a symbolic break with his English partners at Freetown. In particular, he was rejecting English law which he believed was selectively enforced, with the Company officials maintaining a permissive posture towards settlers, and a harsh scrutiny towards Africans like himself. He described these bitterly in a manuscript letter to his council of elders written in Maninka using Arabic script.

From what I have seen of English law, if a stranger lives among them, they will oppress him; but for their own people that live in the place, there is no law at all that I can see. For I have bought slaves myself in their town, from their own people, & yet every thing that I do, they must look into; but if their own people do it, they do not look after it.\footnote{Ibid., 340.}

Modu’s charges suggest his different understanding not only of what defined slavery but also of how the Company administered its own laws regarding slavery. By moving to another territory where he would be judge, rather than Ludlam, Modu re-asserted the sovereignty of local conventions governing enslavement. At Lungi, for example, he was able to judge whether the son of a man accused of murder could be sold into slavery as punishment to the murderer’s family, as
was permitted in local law. His appearance inside the church dressed in the robes and turban of a Muslim leader was meant to bridge the silences of cultural exchange, language translation and verbal comprehension. It represented his upholding of the local hegemonic practices of Maninka clerics as an alternative to that being promoted by the Sierra Leone Company.

At the same time, we have seen in this chapter that “African” assertions of a discrete cultural identification in relation to others were not limited to interactions between Africans and Europeans. A similar process was underway between Africans. The examples in this chapter of the reformist campaign of “Fatta,” the self-proclaimed Mahdi, as well as those from the Futa Jallon imamate suggest that Muslim state builders promulgated the use of certain styles of clothing as a strategy to advance a particular social order. Even in cases where Muslim political authority was dominant, the material practices of non-Muslim local culture remained visible and impactful, such as with the presence of the ritually attired “Maray” fighters who performed in public or masked performers associated with the Poro society. There were also instances in which some Africans widely rejected clothing styles associated with Muslims. When two formerly cooperating polities, Solimana and the imamate at Futa Jallon, fell into conflict, many Solimana residents reportedly ceased wearing garments that suggested affiliation with the Muslim state and instead began to adopt more regionally distinct forms of dress. Neither did adopting their new forms of dress exclude the possibility that these new styles might incorporate imported textiles from India and Europe, as this chapter has shown that these products were traded into Solimana and points further north. The multi-lateral nature of exchange, influence and competition within the rubric of Atlantic commerce is elided when historians overemphasize the exchanges between Europeans and Africans.

The presence of communities of self-emancipated people lends another layer of
complexity to social and economic dynamics on the coast. How did the few thousand people who
grew their own rice and cotton in the Yanghekori hills for over a decade and lived behind a
defensive wall conceive of themselves in relation to the market activity bustling around them,
including slave trading? What alternative networks of exchange might they have accessed to
sustain themselves, or perhaps even grow, in a context in which their hostile former owners sought
to recapture their labor and remove them as potential competitors. Answering such questions
requires historians to take seriously the multivalent character of the “response” of Africans on the
Upper Guinea coast to the opportunities and limitations of the period. As this chapter has outlined,
communities of the formerly enslaved were one of a number of coastal constituencies, including
European, Eur-African and African traders, abolitionists and slaveholders, for whom cotton and
cotton cloth were key to their strategies for economic survival and the production of wealth. Cloth
was as important to European traders—slave traders like Sargent and abolitionists such as Parfitt
—as it was to African and Eur-African merchants running coastwise trade or caravans to the
interior who purchased large quantities of textiles throughout the period, about half of which came
from Europe and half from Asia. As we have seen in this chapter, many of the buyers of imported
cloths were women and children, which suggests that historians must move beyond a focus on
male long-distance traders as the key players in European-African commerce to better account for
the ways in which gender and age may also have informed market exchanges as traders sought to
appeal to specific buyers.

Accounting for the diversity of coastal populations also puts into perspective the impact of
the ban imposed by Futa Jallon on the coast forbidding the trading of enslaved people for any price
below 160 bars. As in the case of the trade embargo imposed on Saint Louis by Futa Toro, the ban
represents an instance in which a large centralized African polity was powerful and confident
enough to successfully impose its will on regional commerce with Europeans. Significantly, the action of Almamy Sadu did not imply a rejection of European technology or of slave trading and other commercial contacts with Europeans to which he remained open. He welcomed the possibility of having one of his children travel to England to learn new methods of farming and craft production. He disagreed with Watt’s assertion that agricultural commerce could be extended to such a degree as to replace the wealth generated through slave trading, even as he agreed to explore opening a trade path from the highlands to Freetown on the coast. Sadu pursued these preliminary linkages with abolitionist Freetown, located to his southeast, at the same time he imposed a ban on slave trading at coastal ports to the southwest along Rio Pongo and the Rio Nunez. But this chapter has also shown that the reach of the state’s policy was limited to these areas, and failed to circumscribe the actions of all players in the region. This is in addition to the basic difference between these contrasting state actions wherein the stated goal in the Futa Toro case was to prevent the sale of Muslims to Christians, while the objectives in Futa Jallon centered on obtaining an acceptable price for the sale of enslaved people rather than on moral or legal questions. The ban imposed by Futa Jallon focused narrowly on slave trading but did not extend to other commodities, especially salt which highland pastoralists traditionally obtained from the coast. This suggests that, similar to the experience in Futa Toro, a halt to trading in slaves did not end all trading between Africans and Europeans which shows that, despite the dominance of slave trading in this period, African consumers were also linked to global commercial flows in a variety of ways.

African cloth consumption and taste for certain foreign cloths and other goods had been, along with the demand for slave labor in the Americas, critical to the trade relationships that had evolved between Europeans and Africans over centuries. These relationships took shape across
linkages between producers, traders and consumers on four continents. The mutuality of the exchange process was revealed, however, by the fact that the complex competing interests on the Upper Guinea coast were being transformed at the turn of the 19th century by circumstances they had helped to produce: the increasing demand on global markets for raw cotton and for mass-produced cotton textiles.
CHAPTER FIVE.
WESTERN AFRICAN EXPORTS SHIFT TO GROUNDNUTS, NOT COTTON OR COTTON TEXTILES

On the morning of May 14, 1827, a notable of the town Cambaya stood at the central area of the village firing off shots from a European-made musket. It was a signal for residents in the foothills southeast of the Futa Jallon plateau, and not far from the Tankisso river to gather at the center for some news.¹ The chief’s son, Ibrahim, had recently returned from Kakundy, a bustling trading center on the Rio Nunez near the Atlantic coast, an area populated by Landouma, Nalu and Baga farmers and British and French traders who ran commercial outlets there. Kakundy was the kind of place where Baga farmers, who on most days wore a locally made cotton wrapper for clothing, put on European trowsers and a hat to visit for trade or business, only to change back again once reaching home.² By the 1820s, commercial interactions between western Europeans and western Africans along the coast had entered a new period. With the formal conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in Europe at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Britain had the necessary leverage to compel a reluctant French government to impose a ban on slave trading. British anti-slaving vessels patrolled the West African coast from their base a Freetown, Sierra Leone, and the French acquiescence to the ban underlined the closure of the Atlantic commerce in slaves in many areas, forcing those remaining involved in it to do so surreptitiously and defensively. Freetown, Sierra Leone had a population that grew quickly in size and in ethnic diversity as British ships dropped off on its docks thousands of liberated Africans who had been intercepted on slave ships seeking to participate in an illicit slave trade that supplied expanding markets for enslaved labor in Cuba and Brazil. At Freetown, these new African arrivals had origins from a variety of regions along

² Ibid., 167.
the length of Atlantic Africa and made their own impact on an emerging Freetown society dominated by English colonial officials, merchants and a Christian, westernizing African elite. Where there was interest in commerce with either the British or the French, there was now a new ethos of “legitimate trade”, or the necessity to pursue commercial alternatives to slave trading.

Ibrahim returned to Cambaya with a caravan laden with trade goods, and had called people together to distribute gifts he had procured for them. To the old men of the local council, Ibrahim gave packets of tobacco, possibly American in origin, that had been folded into individual packets and made ready for distribution. He also gave each of his three wives pieces of indigo blue “Guinea cloth” that was esteemed by these women and onlookers who viewed the distribution of gifts and began to praise his generosity. Women danced in appreciation of Ibrahim and others shouted out prayers for his well being and prosperity. The exchange was the sign and symbol of Ibrahim’s successful commercial venture to the coast and his elevated social status as the son of Cambaya’s chief, and his ties to villagers who related to him as their patron.

Ibrahim’s caravan from the Rio Nunez occurred at a time when Bordeaux-based companies were setting up operations there to export groundnuts to France. The expansion of groundnut cultivation in the period before 1850 produced some new wealth in African economies but also helped to solidify a process by which Africans exported raw materials that advanced industrializing processes in Europe. Doing so extended European capacity to produce and ship an ever wider range of manufactured goods to Africa, where such industrializing processes were largely not taking place. This chapter extends this study’s focus on cloth trading and consumption in western Africa by considering them during the period when groundnut cultivation in western Africa appeared to offer the alternative to slave trading that many actors had been searching for, although it did little to replace slavery itself which remained a prominent feature of the new export-
oriented economy. It argues that the ability of local farmers to easily incorporate the crop into established farming practices without interfering with the cultivation of staple food crops promoted the expansion of groundnut cultivation across the region in the period up to 1850, and that profits from this export crop in some areas supported an even greater amount of imported textiles than in earlier periods. Neither of these developments diminished the production and exchange of local cotton textiles across the region which remained significant, suggesting the ways in which Africans selectively engaged overseas markets in the era after British ban on slave trading according to their own priorities and opportunities.

**Dressing the Part: From La Rochelle to the Rio Nunez**

Returning with Ibrahim in the caravan from the coast was a foreign guest with an unusual story: an Egyptian exile seeking to return to his homeland, after having been captured and forced into service by the French military that invaded Egypt in 1798 led by Napoleon. The traveler claimed that French officers subsequently took him to Saint Louis, Senegal where worked several years before gaining his freedom. Having made his way to Freetown from Saint Louis, then to the Rio Nunez, this “refugee”, who was in fact a 26-year-old French laborer Rene Caillie, presented himself to the people of Cambaya as an “Arab” who was returning via caravan to his Egyptian homeland by passing east to the clerical city of Kankan, and from thence to Timbuktu and eventually across the desert to Cairo. Readers of Caillie’s memoir are told that Caillie concocted this false personal narrative, inventing for himself an Arab lineage that was also by implication Muslim and possibly noble, in order to secure safe passage through the savannah to Timbuktu, a fabled city that no contemporary European had visited, as the region had been the focus of intensified, competitive European exploration. At that point, Caillie already had considerable experience in western Africa, having first arrived the French trading post at Saint Louis in 1815 as
a teenager from Mauze a small town near the Atlantic port city of La Rochelle. In Senegal, Caillie studied Islamic law with Brakna Moors, and participated in an exploratory mission to Bondou with the British. From that last mission which ended in failure, he concluded that traveling less ostentatiously as a European would better allow him safe passage through the region. To lend credence to his impersonation of an Egyptian, Caillie purchased what he described as an “Arabian costume” in Freetown that replaced his European-made clothing and stuffed its pockets with pages torn out of a Qur’an which he read and on which he wrote in the margins. He also made a public show of religious faith as a Muslim (while assuring his French readers of his remaining commitment to Christianity) such as by praying regularly with his African hosts such as at Cambaya, where he was housed with the elderly teacher of the local quranic school. The teacher had migrated there from Bondou, and at Cambaya taught boys and girls passages of the qur’an in exchange for the students labor maintaining the cleric’s home, cultivating his field and gathering his harvest. Over the course of his yearlong journey under this invented persona, Caillie was greeted alternately with suspicion, derision, contempt and an admiring respect on his travels that eventually lead him to Timbuktu, of which he provided a famous account, and from their northwards to Fez and Tangier. He was celebrated as the ‘first European’ to return alive from Timbuktu. But the narrative of his experience is striking in the way that, far from innovating, it seems to retrace routes traveled for centuries between commercial and clerical centers across western Africa, linking communities across ecological zones, and articulating the axis between the Saharan and Atlantic networks connecting the region to external global markets.

On that May morning in Cambaya in 1827, After Ibrahim had handed out gifts, and the celebrations concluded, he ate breakfast with Caillie then invited him on a short walk to an ourunde to view his enslaved laborers tilling the ground. Sitting under the shade of a tree, the two men
watched Ibrahim’s laborers prepare the ground for planting rice using curved iron hoes of local manufacture. The enslaved workers are described as farming five days a week for their owner, Ibrahim, mostly food crops such as yams, cassava, maize, small millet and a vegetable called foigne, and as having two days a week to tend their own crops. Caillie claimed that the enslaved working for Ibrahim “appeared to perform their tasks much better” than those he had seen working on European-operated plantations near Saint Louis. He had also spent eight months on the French Caribbean island colony of Guadeloupe where he likely viewed enslaved Africans working sugar and coffee plantations or, maybe women in Indian Madras-print head wraps selling foodstuffs in the market at Point a Pitre. With Ibrahim in Guinea, Caillie noted the exploitation of the enslaved.

The poor slaves work entirely naked, exposed to the heat of a burning sun. The presence of their master intimidates them, and the fear of punishment expedites the work; but they make themselves amends in his absence. The women, who had very little clothing, had their children tied to their backs. They were employed in collecting the dry grass, which being burnt, forms a kind of manure, indeed, the only kind they use.\(^3\)

Caillie’s narrative does not say so, but it likely the enslaved people observed by the two men were captives whose first language was not Ibrahima’s Maninka and who had been transported there over long distances from their respective homelands. The lack or poor condition of their clothing marked their lower status as dependent outsiders. By donning the clothing and persona of an ‘Arab’, Caillie chose to negotiate western African societies from a position of privilege within local terms, probably drawing on his experience among the Brakna Moors north of the Senegal river. His choice to pretend to be an Egyptian made sense in that it gave him room to provide an alternative explanation for his evident French background by tying it to a longer history of French engagement with Africa, and the awareness he anticipated that his West African

\(^3\) Ibid., 227.
hosts might have of that history. It is also noteworthy that his cover story presented him as a once-
forced laborer who had obtained his liberty and desired to live freely as a faithful Muslim in Egypt,
a narrative trajectory likely to gain sympathy in the region. Caillie offered almost no detailed
description of his clothing disguise beyond referring to it as ‘Arab,’ a designation that elides the
fact that he had the garment made in Freetown and the likelihood it was made according to local
styles. Nevertheless the published narrative of Caillie’s experiences, along with a variety of other
published and archival sources, offer significant details about the social, economic and political
dynamics across the Senegambia and Upper Guinea regions during a period of rapid change in the
region’s interactions with Europeans. A new generation of French and English traders became
active across the region between Saint Louis and Freetown, including for example, new
entrepreneurs from Bordeaux representing smaller firms that had not previously had such a
prominent role in the region. Caillie had been at Saint Louis during the period after the Napoleonic
wars when French and Eur-African habitants struggled to replace profits from a now defunct slave
trade with profits from cotton and indigo estates worked by enslaved Africans. These experiments
struggled to match French expectations, as the proprietors found unexpectedly difficult growing
conditions that limited the amount of cotton produced, and failed to establish a workable system
of wage laborers or indentured laborers. Most of the plantations survived only a few years. Some
of the new commercial operators experimented with a variety of potential export crops such as
coffee and peanuts, the latter of which gradually became the dominant export crop, as
entrepreneurial African growers planted groundnuts, and supplied these to Atlantic markets in
ways that they had not taken to the large-scale export of cotton.

A new way of doing business?

While forms of so-called legitimate trade struggled to take hold along the Rio Nunez, slave
traders remained a powerful presence along the more serpentine Rio Pongo, a few dozen kilometers south along the coast, with its many branches winding into thick mangroves making it more difficult to patrol. As has been shown throughout this study, slave trading took place alongside other commodity trading, and was even dependent upon the successful procurement of particular bundles of goods that responded to African consumers needs and interests. Thus the notion of “legitimate” commerce promoted by certain abolitionist and colonial interests of the period struck many actors on the African coast as false, and foolhardy given the profits generated by slaving and the supposedly intractable problem of securing labor necessary to produce export crops. Vessels flying the flag of Spain, and therefore presumably exempt from the British-led ban, were among those that continued to sail up the Rio Pongo with salable goods they hoped to exchanged for enslaved people obtained from seller resisting the ban, while British Navy patrol vessels attempted to intercept them. On land, an array of African, Eur-African and private European and American traders continued to acquire trade goods from arriving caravans from the interior, including slaves that they alternately employed on export crop production or sold to willing buyers sailing into their respective ports. As Bruce Mouser has shown, these traders—including British, French, American, Eur-African, Maninka, Susu traders and headmen—rejected the social and economic changes proposed by the governors of the Sierra Leone colony.\(^4\) They occasionally attacked British anti-slave trade patrol boats that entered the river and deliberately sought to undermine efforts of missionaries from the Colony to establish primary schools for children in the communities of the Rio Pongo, a major artery connecting the Futa Jalon and savannah interior with the Atlantic.

In April 1820, one such trader, Thomas Curtis, an American of African and English

descent, led a group of local fighters to attack the British brig, “The Thistle” which had arrived to claim the property of a deceased merchant based at the Iles de Los. [May 27] Led by Curtis, the attackers killed the vessel’s midshipman, a Mr. Inman, and five or six other crew members while Curtis took as many as eleven other sailors hostage. Sierra Leone governor Charles MacCarthy wrote in a letter about the incident that he believed that Curtis had migrated from the British North American colonies to the Sierra Leone colony in 1815 or 1816 with his brother and their father who was born near Boston in 1774, “prior to the Revolution.” At Sierra Leone, the three men claimed to be loyal British subjects and had sworn allegiance to Britain, but quickly migrated to the Rio Pongo, an area outside the colony, where they established themselves as slave traders. [May 27] These acts suggest the fluidity of claim-making and identity-making throughout the period, including for actors of African descent such as the Curtis’ who are referred to in other Company documents as “mulatto”.

The cause of the attack was not immediately clear to other British Navy officials who learned of it shortly afterwards and sent a flurry of letters back and forth to Freetown exchanging information about the condition of the ship and the hostages. Alarmed, Freetown governor Charles MacCarthy condemned Curtis as a “villanous wretch” and described the condition of the captured sailors as “a situation worse than slavery.” [May 9] He offered immediate though modest military assistance which included the service of experienced officers, troops from the Second West India Regiment and 150 bayonet weapons. [May 9] He ordered that Curtis and his fighters be captured, along with all the enslaved captives he held, who were to be brought to Freetown, and the merchandise in his factories, which was to be destroyed. He further instructed that, on arriving in the river, the British were to announce their intentions publicly to extend protection of the persons and property of Africans who had not been involved with Curtis’ attack and were not assisting
Three companies of the Second West India Regiment were among the troops sent on May 12 aboard Navy vessels sailing on McCarthy’s orders to the Rio Pongo to recover the captured sailors. Upon reaching the area of Curtis’ settlement along the river, they were fired upon by Curtis’ fighters who were stationed behind a mud wall on an embankment overlooking the river. The troops fighting for Britain returned fire and eventually forced Curtis’ fighters to flee into the surrounding forest, at which point they occupied the Curtis Town itself where they razed several buildings. Having learned that a neighboring ruler, Mungo Brima, had supported the original attack on the brig The Thistle, and deduced that Brima might be holding some remaining hostages, the British traveled to his town the next morning, met mild resistance and burned many houses there to the ground, as well as what they believed to be a large amount of Curtis’ merchandise. In the interim, another local ruler, Yanoo Coney, had intervened to secure the release of two sailors because he feared for the safety of his own community. Coney had the men sent to the British warship downriver in a canoe. In a similar vein, two neighboring British merchants, Wilson and John Ormond instigated the release of the four remaining sailors from Curtis, who remained nonetheless free himself. Having obtained release of the hostages, the British captain considered the mission complete and returned with them to Freetown.

The correspondence between McCarthy and British Naval officers discussed here provides only a fragmentary record of the volatile nature of this period of economic transformation in the early 19th century on the Guinea coast. Individual traders in areas such as the Rio Pongo who resisted the British ban on slavery fought to maintain their access to profits by seeking to uphold established commercial networks connecting the savannah interior with Atlantic and global markets.
Transition to Groundnut cultivation

As such battles over slave trading played out, groundnuts had become an export crop in ever greater demand. Some of the earliest French purchases of this crop occurred in 1833 and 1834 along the Gambia river. By 1841 exports had expanded in both directions along the coast to ports in Senegal and southward to Sierra Leone. Cultivation of the plant is more favorable in the light, sandy soils of northern Senegambia than in the Guinea rivers coast where there is much higher humidity. However, cultivators in the Guinea rivers adopted the plant readily despite these disadvantages because it could be easily integrated into established farming patterns, could be grown in fields of varying size, quickly paid returns on the labor invested in planting it. EurAfrican habitants on Goree were active in the early stages of this trade as they owned canoes that traveled to ports on the mainland along the Gambia river and south on the coast to Sierra Leone to pick up harvests of groundnuts to be brought to Goree before being shipped to France. However, these habitant merchants soon found themselves marginalized by competition from metropolitan French companies who larger organizations and vessels were more effective in transporting the export crops. Edouard Bouet Willaumez, the governor of Saint Louis who sent Raffenel to sail up the Senegal river, wrote that groundnut exports in the region between Cape Verde and Sierra Leone had more than quadrupled over four years, from 1,500 tons in 1842 to 6,700 tons in 1846. He noted in particular that French vessels were active along the coast between the Rio Nunez and Sierra Leone from which they returned directly to France, bypassing Goree Island. The combined advantages of metropolitan companies in transportation and the lack of

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6 Goerg, Commerce et colonisation en Guinee., 1850-1913, 41.
7 Bouët-Willaumez, Commerce et Traite Des Noirs Aux Côtes Occidentales d’Afrique : 1er Janvier 1848.
8 Ibid., 52.
interest from British competitors in groundnuts resulted in intensified French commercial presence throughout the Senegambia and Upper Guinea coastal regions in this period.9

Bouet-Willaumez was a naval officer who played an aggressively interventionist role within the region during these years, signing treaties with a number of communities from the Guinea rivers east to Assinie and Grand Bassam in the Ivory Coast and in Gabon. His account of the period are colored by his role in what amounted to a commercial expansion couched in the largely self-serving discourse of the civilizing mission. Nevertheless, he reported that the rapid increase in groundnut exports from the region was accompanied by increased importation of Asian and French manufactured goods, especially cotton textiles produced in Rouen. “There is cause to celebrate this growth of commerce that has taken over a branch of commerce so favorable to our navigation and our industry at the same time.”10

Bouet-Willaumez noted that Rouen manufactured textiles were then selling at a higher price than Indian textiles in West Africa, yet they still readily found buyers.11 He noted that cloth imports were especially sought after by Manding merchants in the Guinea rivers region north of Freetown, where French merchants trading groundnuts were gradually edging out earlier generations of English and Anglo-African merchants. He theorized that cloth sales could compensate for their inability to sell alcohol (another major French export) to “fervent Muslim sectarians.” There were two principal types cloth sales to be made in Africa, he wrote, fine cloths and trade cloths. Common or trade cloths were used to purchase wood or grains, while items such as gold, ivory and palm oil had to purchased using the fine cloths. The names India-produced cloths were listed in both categories. The names of fine luxury cloths mentioned suggest their

9 Goerg, Commerce et colonisation en Guinée, 1850-1913, 43.
10 Bouët-Willaumez, Commerce et Traite Des Noirs Aux Côtes Occidentales d’Afrique : 1er Janvier 1848, 52.
11 Ibid., 56.
global sources. There were: Indian Guinea cloths in either indigo or white, “limeneas, tom-coffee, sucretons, satin-streap, glasgow-danes, siamoise, printanieres, nicanees, bandanna, taffetas, antipod-danes.” These items represented for Bouet-Willaumez a key entry into African markets of the 1840s.

In 1843, the French monarch Louis Philippe signed a new ordinance governing the importation of India-made Guinea cloths into Senegal. The ordinance was meant to advance the French commercial position in the gum trade by confirming the high-quality of these originally-sourced goods critical to consumers in this market. This commercial maneuver, much like the expedition of Bouet Willaumez and Leopold to the Indian Ocean that ended not far east of the Senegal river, would fall far short of its intended goal. It nonetheless represents perhaps as signal event in the increasing French (and elsewhere British) intervention in African economies leading up to formal colonial rule, how cotton cloth remained a key arena of contact, exchange and struggle.

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CONCLUSION

This study began by describing Richard Jobson’s travel to the markets at Wuli on the Gambia river in the seventeenth century, and ends at a period when the French monarch Louis Philippe has signed laws regulating the quality control of India-made Guinea cloth imports to Senegal that were needed for the gum trade. The first chapter establishes that African production of cotton and cotton goods, as well as the consumption of foreign textiles, were critical elements facilitating the expansion of European trade in Africa through the period, though dwarfed by both the value of gold and ivory and the scale and human suffering of slave trading.

Chapter Two uses oral account of 18th century Kaarta to probe representations and meanings of cotton textiles within the narrative. It reads orature against European written sources and another oral account transcribed from different parts the same region at the turn of the 20th century. The analysis suggests that textile production and consumption were not only a part of everyday life but also appeared as meaningful symbols of transformation at important moments in the narrative. While the first part of the chapter explores the dynamics of cotton textile production and consumption in the middle of the 18th century savannah, the second part returns briefly to the Atlantic coast at Sierra Leone where the British engagement began an important new phase of expansion with the private purchase of Bance Island trading factory.

Chapter Three begins the first of a two-part consideration of deliberate attempts by African rulers to obtain commercial conditions favorable to their own interests by cutting off all trade with Europeans. In delineating the dynamics between the Tukulor Almamy Qader Kan and Europeans at Saint Louis, the chapter outlined the environmental constraints that aggravated competition and
conflict between agriculturalists and pastoralists, while highlighting the interplay between the heavily imported indigo Guinea cloths from India and local indigo dyeing industry operated primarily by women. An exploration of regional clothing styles emphasized the diversity of cotton cloth consumers in terms of class, age, occupation, religion and perhaps even ethnic identification.

After a review of these factors within the context of the expressed goals of Almamy’s embargo that continued to shape the Sengal river trade throughout the period, the chapter concludes that Kan’s state, along with the rest of the region, remained enmeshed in a global textile economy whose links with slavery were still growing.

In looking at another embargo imposed in the Guinea rivers coast by the Fula clerical leader at Timbo, Almamy Sadu, who sought to keep the price of enslaved people from dropping below a certain level, Chapter Four finds that the effort was complicated by the multiplicity of actors on this part of the coast spread across a wide area. As in the case with Almamy Kan, the embargo shows the Fula state confident in its own ability to impose its will but ultimately not able to do so unilaterally. The Fula state’s determination to protect its profits from slaving did not prevent it from simultaneously responding to overtures from the Sierra Leone Company to establish an abolitionist-guided alternative commerce, although Sadu evidently remained doubtful of its claims. His actions reveal an open, yet discerning and deliberative African engagement with Atlantic commercial opportunities.

Chapter Five sketches the emergence in the 1830s of groundnuts as an export cash crop whose demand and profitability seemed to provide a viable alternative to both African growers and European buyers to the now banned slave trade. As groundnuts became a dominant focus of economic activity leading up to the French colonial expansion in the 1840s, cotton textiles continued to play a critical, though still secondary, role in this trade. Indian textile imports
remained important for this commerce, as the French policy attempting to regulate them suggests, although factory produced cotton textiles from Britain and France had gained ground.

The study has demonstrated the centrality of textiles, especially cotton textiles to exchanges between people in western Africa during this period. It has traced the proliferation of particular kinds of textiles as mass produced commodities as it occurred across a large, demographically diverse yet historically coherent region in the 18th and early 19th centuries. This is the same period which saw the proliferation of mass enslavement of Africans in the Americas and with evolving configurations in Africa. The history of cotton textile production, trade and consumption has been the focus of numerous historians of Africa but much more detailed, region-specific research remains to be done. In one brief synthesis of the commerce in textiles between Europeans and Africans between the 15th and 19th centuries, historian John Thornton emphasized of African manufacturing capacity, such as the ability of textile weavers in Kongo to produce 100,000 meters of cloth a year for sale to Portuguese buyers who carried it for resale to Angola. He suggested that output rivaled the production of textile centers in Holland of the same period. This study has shown that Thornton’s emphasis on the scale of manufacturing capacity during this period in Africa makes sense, although the actual output would be variable.

At the same time, this study has sought to build on this awareness of a major local industry to think about the people who animated its components (the growers, spinners, weavers, dyers and consumers) and their relationships to a global economy. By placing analytical emphasis on clothing practices, the study has tried to shift the emphasis onto a terrain different from the aim of measuring African industry in quantitative terms, namely to set in comparative terms with similar industries elsewhere. Analyzing clothing practices has been a strategy for tracking consumption and attempting to discern the meaning or significance of particular items and of particular forms
of dress within specific historical contexts. This study of cotton and consumption departs from a concern to complicate historians’ narratives of western Africans as agents acting within a local context that had ramifications for and synergies with other parts of the world. For the region between Saint Louis, Senegal and Sierra Leone, it has shown the complexity of this interaction and suggested the specificity of local constraints on African cotton production that had long been fed by commercial contacts from outside the region.
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283


