

# MALIAN LANDSCAPES OF FREEDOM

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## Escaping Slavery in Kayes

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24 February to 21 March 2014 - Wolfson Gallery, SOAS Library - London WC1H 0XG

African slavery was officially abolished in Mali by the French colonial authorities in 1905, but effective emancipation of formerly enslaved was a lengthy process, the repercussions of which were still felt long after Mali's independence in 1960.

The exhibition presents photographs of archival documents testifying to the history of slavery and emancipation in Kayes (Mali), as well as photographs by French visual artist

Fanny Challier of the present-day village of Bouyagui, which was created in 1914 by populations escaping slavery.

The exhibition accompanies the documentary film 'The Diambourou: Slavery and Emancipation in Kayes - Mali' (2014) directed by Dr Marie Rodet (SOAS), which tells the story of those communities escaping slavery in the region of Kayes in the first half of the twentieth century.



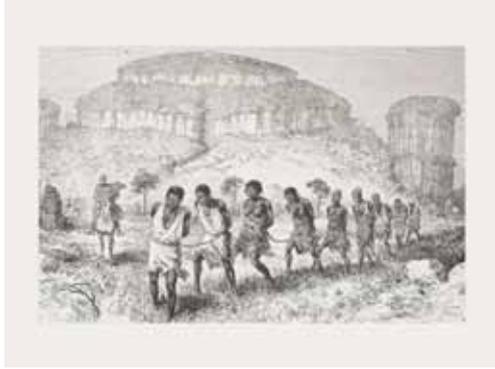
During the twentieth century, the region of Kayes experienced several waves of emancipation. These could sometimes only be achieved through revolts. The Soninke village of Bouyagui was founded following such a revolt in 1914.

Doua Konaté (left), former head of the village of Bouyagui, was 6-7 years old at the time of the revolt.

In early 2009, when this picture was taken, he was the last survivor of this era. He passed away a few months later at the age of more than 100. On the picture, he sits next to his son, Doulaye Konaté (centre), and to one of the village councillors, Samba Kanouté (right).

Photo taken by Marie Rodet (2009).

# Documenting Slavery and Emancipation in Kayes by Marie Rodet



1.

Engraving taken from Joseph Simon Gallieni, *Mission d'Exploration du Haut-Niger : Voyage au Soudan Français* (Paris, 1885).

2. We still know little about processes of slave emancipation in Mali prior to the official abolition of 1905. Yet, we know that some individual and collective emancipation took place long before. These letters were written in 1898 on the behalf of Mansouka (c.1860-1920), an African colonial soldier (tirailleur) of slave descent from the region of Kayes. In both letters, Mansouka threatens the local king Kusi Kurubari and demands that he leaves his family in peace, claiming them to be henceforth free (see translations of the letters enclosed)

3. The liberty villages date back to the first French military campaigns in Mali at the end of the nineteenth century. In the first years of the colonial conquest of Mali, these villages took in the slaves of the defeated enemies of the French army. They also provided a refuge for mistreated slaves, and for those threatened with sale by their masters or whose family had already been sold by the master. The liberty villages were above all an attempt by the French administration to control increasing slave flights in the region and to create permanent settled communities in deserted areas around colonial posts and along the main conquest and trade routes. They were also a cheap labor source for the colonial authorities.



4.

National Archives of Mali. Koulouba. 1 E 211: Liberty certificate. 1899. Nioro.

1. Wars ravaged West Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. The Sahel experienced unprecedented slave trafficking. A portion of these slaves were sold in the region of Kayes, whose inhabitants were heavily involved in the internal slave trade. The first attempts to restrict the slave trade in this region of West Africa began in 1895 with the banning of the slave trade by Albert Grodet, Governor of the Colony at the time. Slave caravans crossing the territory were to be seized by the colonial administration with the help of local chiefs, and slaves sent to the liberty villages. Ultimately, the colonial Decree of 12 December 1905 would abolish the slave trade throughout French West Africa.



2.

National Archives of Mali. Koulouba. 1 E 211: letters from Mansouka to Gossi Coulibaly.



3.

Postcard. A Liberty Village in French Soudan. Collection Courtois.

4. Populations escaping slavery and arriving at the liberty village were issued a liberty certificate after three months. However, up to 1901 if the masters claimed them within three months of their date of entry into the village, they were systematically returned to the masters by the colonial authorities. Following the abolition of 1905, these liberty villages were gradually integrated into the expanding colonial cities. Populations escaping slavery after 1905 continued to go to the colonial authorities and to claim their liberty certificate. They often settled in these neighbourhoods before building or joining other free and independent communities elsewhere.

5. See front page

# Bouyagui, Mali, 2010 by Fanny Challier

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Bouyagui is located in the Soninke region of Guidimakha, North West of Kayes. Like in most villages of the region, houses are built in *banco*, a mix of mud and grain husks, formed into bricks but also applied on surfaces by hand, drying in the sun. Earth soil is one of the most used construction material worldwide and often served to build the first cities. Bouyagui appears as a photographic 'ready-made': By the formal aspect of its houses close to the 'earthworks' of the American Land Art, it looks like an

open-air sculptural space.

It can also be noted that contrary to the idea of an ebullient African village full of life, Bouyagui seems empty of his people, giving an impression of coldness and distance.

In fact, the villagers are away at a funeral of a member of their community. It shows the importance of the social link, but also the stronger presence of death. Indeed, funerals aren't anything exceptional.



## About

Fanny Challier was born in Nevers (France). After having spent her childhood in Senegal and Congo, she studied at ENSA Fine Arts School of Bourges. Her work is concerned with landscapes and *ecumene*: the relations of human beings with their environment. She has taken part in several collective exhibitions: Annual exhibition of the Art Centre

Magasin in Grenoble (2010); 'Territoires' Exhibition at Gallery Michel Journiac in Paris with Barbara Glowczewski, Karen O'Rourke and the Art group LAAB (2011); 'Parking Day' open air exhibition in Paris (2012); the London Analogue Festival (2013).

[www.fannychallier.com](http://www.fannychallier.com)



The region of Kayes is situated in the western part of Mali, at the border with Senegal, Mauritania and Guinea.

It was colonized at the end of the twentieth century by the French Army. Kayes was the first capital of the

colony of French Soudan until the transfer to Bamako in 1908. Mali became independent in 1960.

Bouyagui is located about 50km North West of Kayes, close to the border with Mauretania.



Exhibition organised by the Department of History and the Centre of African Studies at SOAS, and the Royal African Society.

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