



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
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Master's Programme in Economic Growth, Population and Development

“Freedom is the greatest gift your master can give you”

Understanding a protracted emancipation process from slavery to
freedom from the perspective of Mauritanian master's

by

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Abstract. Using Mauritania as a case study this thesis compare the decline of two forms of coercive labour, slavery and servitude, to understand how masters' incentives differ depending on property right and thus affect conditions for decline. By re-analysing sociological research through an economic lens, this thesis offers a new angle on Mauritania's emancipation process. It is suggested that changed market condition in the late 19th and early 20th century affected slave-owners opportunity to use slaves as a mean to access capital whereupon they were less incentivised to resist the emancipation initiated by France. Though people in servitude remained bonded. As these people did not provide the same benefits as property it is instead suggested that specifically the increased cost of controlling them made masters no longer deem it worthwhile to keep people in servitude.

Keywords: Labour coercion, Emancipation, Property right, Economic incentives, Capital markets, Narrative analysis, Mauritania

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Table of content

Acknowledgements	i
List of tables	iv
List of tables	iv
Glossary	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Research gap, motivation and contribution	2
1.1.1. Building upon former research	3
1.2. Purpose and research question.....	4
1.3. Defining concepts.....	5
2. Case Mauritania	8
2.1. Reoccurring abolitions.....	8
2.2. Demographics and hierarchies.....	10
2.2.1. Applying the definition of slavery and servitude to the Mauritanian context	12
2.3. Slavery in the Mauritanian context.....	13
3. Theory	15
3.1. An evolving field of research: origin, persistence and decline	15
3.1.1. A note on slavery and production system.....	17
3.2. Theoretical framework: Economic incentives	20
3.2.1. Expenses	20
3.2.2. Benefits.....	21
4. Data	24
4.1. Previous analyses.....	24
4.2. Data for conceptual understanding	26
4.3. Supporting testimonials	27
5. Methodology	29
6. Empirical analysis	32
6.1. From heyday of slavery to decline	32

6.1.1. The role of collateral in Mauritanian and Islamic credit markets.....	32
6.1.2. Falling market value of slaves	33
6.2. Decline in servitude.....	35
6.2.1. Drought and the growing city of Nouakchott	35
6.2.2. Increased cost of keeping humans unfree	36
7. Conclusion	39
7.1. A comparison of two eras and two types of coercion.....	39
7.2. Discussion of result	41
7.3. Contribution and connection to current research.....	42
7.4. Future research	43
References	45

List of tables

Table 1. Social groups and hierarchies	v
Table 2.1. Estimated population shares, 2013	12
Table 5.1. Focus areas for effective data scanning	30

List of figures

Figure 2.1. Map of Mauritania	8
Figure 3.1. Relationship between slavery and system of economic production	19
Figure 3.2. Direct benefit and expenses of coercive labour from masters' perspective.....	23
Figure 7.1. Incentives of keeping people in slavery	40
Figure 7.2. Incentives of keeping people in servitude.....	41

Glossary

HIEARCHIES AMONG SOCIAL GROUPS					
<i>Master class</i>	White moors / Beydane	Hassani	Warrior tribes. Political control		
		Zwaya	Religious leadership. Economic control		
		Znaga	Tributary vassals		
		Artisans & Entertainers	Occupational groups ranked in a caste-system		
<i>Unfree class</i>	Black moors	Haratine	Slave descendants	Educated by the French	
				Majority of slave descendants	
			Freed slaves	Often remain tied to former masters.	
		Abeed	Slave of the tent	Part of the household. Generally unsellable	<i>Abeed</i> is in this thesis generally used to label people in servitude.
			New slave	Slaves by the definition used in this thesis	
Black Mauritians		Ethnically similar to black Moors, but culturally different.			

Table 1. Social groups and hierarchies

Sources: see section 2.2.

1. Introduction

Mauritania is considered to be slavery's last stronghold, where according to some estimations up to 20% of the population live in slavery. This is despite that the practice has been officially abolished since 1981 and criminalized 2007 (Sutter, 2011). This uphold a relevance of the questions why slavery exists, why specifically in some places and how it decline? Since Evsey Domar (1970) revived this topic in scholarly debate, ever more angles are continuously analysed and the field keeps evolving. After the first questions concerning origin of slavery, scholars now further start mapping why it persist and decline. Does it vanish when the reason for appearing no longer apply or do other mechanisms then become more relevant? Economic historians, historians, sociologists and anthropologists with different perspectives dissect cases from antiquity (Garnsey, 1996; Patterson, 1977), medieval times (Domar, 1970) and the heyday of Atlantic slavery (Candido, 2020; Fatah-Black, 2020; Martins & Green, 2020; Wright, 2020), searching for threads to explain this disgraceful phenomena in human history. At present the frontier of the field is occupied with the role of slaves as capital, a factor which distinguish slavery from other forms of unfree labour because it is tied to the definition of humans as property.

First time slavery was abolished in Mauritania was 1905 with a French decree, which stirred a substantial number of slaves to break free from their chains (Pettigrew, 2019). But this abolition made an exception for the widely used household slaves (McDougall, 2021a). Considering the French administration relied on local elites who thus were more accepting of abolishing one kind of slavery over another (Klein, 1998), this prompt the question "why". There was a second abolition in 1961 but this seems to not have been successful considering there was a perceived need for yet another one in 1981. By investigating Mauritania's protracted process of emancipation the research field has an opportunity to gain better understanding of the complexities of persistence and decline of labour coercion. At what point are masters no longer incentivized to insist in and protect their right to another person's freedom? By mapping the pre-1905 versus pre-1981 periods, this study intends to create understanding of reduced ability to use slaves as property to access capital which I will suggest was the reason the slaveholding elite could accept the abolition of 1905. Thereafter, many of those who remained bonded did not offer the same benefits for masters and by building on previous research regarding emancipations of in the 1970's this thesis suggests this decline unlike the former one was due to increased cost of control in urban environments.

1.1. Research gap, motivation and contribution

Most of the current research in the field focus on main slave societies having reached a certain level of economic development given they used slave labour to produce surplus for markets, as in the plantation economies (Candido, 2020; Engerman, 1973; Martins & Green, 2020; Wright, 2020). Therefore, conclusions shaping overall theories are mainly drawn from relatively similar contexts while mechanisms and incentive of slavery in different structures remain relatively unexplored and yet to be understood. The general vision of this thesis is not to just explain the specific case of Mauritania but to contribute to the understanding of mechanisms behind labour coercion by highlighting another angle than from those societies mainly studied. Thus may upcoming research use this understanding and incorporate it into a broader explanatory model of decline of slavery and servitude.

This thesis will be based on a strict definition of slaves as property which is argued for in section 1.3. With this definition, a question that occurs is whether the Mauritanian household slavery, which persisted after 1905, was even slavery at all considering the people concerned were deemed unsellable (Ruf, 1999:32). This restriction of transaction therefore removed an important benefit of slaveholding; the ability to use slaves to access capital by using them as collateral (Martins & Green, 2020). Therefore this thesis will differentiate between slavery and servitude, a closely linked status of unfreedom. This opens up to analysing how different mechanisms affect decline of coercive labour depending on property right.

While slavery has been practiced among 99% of Mauritanian communities, making it one of the African nations where slavery has been the most widespread (Bezemer, Bolt & Lensink, 2013), the country is often neglected in volumes on African slavery (Miers & Kopytoff, 1977; Nieboer, 1910; Watson, 1980). Though it is not completely overlooked and a few scholars has specifically focused on Mauritania. Giuseppe Maimone (2013) analyse the relationship between the white elite and black Mauritians and how these groups competed for *haratine*¹ support and thus improving the rights of this group. Two other relevant scholars are Urs Peter Ruf (1999) and Ann McDougall (2021a; 2021b). They consider slavery to largely have declined in the 1970's when Mauritania rapidly urbanized which challenged the power dynamics in the slave-master relationship as the new context offered opportunities to

¹ A group of former slaves and slave-descendants who often remained tied to their former masters.

gain resources to demand independence. As McDougall and Ruf have made a contribution to especially explain the decline of labour coercion in Mauritania, this thesis will build upon their work. Therefore their research is further explained in the following section to address missing pieces.

1.1.1. Building upon former research

Ruf (1999) investigate why the structures of unfreedom that goes back at least half a millennia began to dissolve specifically in the late 19th century. He links this to the French colonization which opened up for opportunities to travel within the territory. Therefore slaves who managed to escape could go to places where no one knew them, meaning authorities there would not enforce their master's ownership over them whereupon they became *de facto* free. A main point Ruf (1999:79-80) makes is that this freedom was not conditioned on that they kept staying away from their master because with the monetarised economy that slowly began to evolve, slaves could come back after having accumulated enough capital to challenge the master's dominance and that way achieve legal freedom. These opportunities included going Senegal's peanut plantations, joining the French army, prostitution and menial jobs for the French (Ruf, 1999:189). But opportunities to get away were still scarce until urbanization in the 1960's and 1970's which saw a wave of emancipation for the same reason. McDougall (2021a; 2021b) focus on this period when researching how opportunities and the enlarged community of *haratines* in the city strengthened the identity and consciousness of bonded migrants to claim freedom.

With these conclusions, McDougall (2021a) and Ruf (1999) have provided a general explanation for the decline of slavery/servitude. And without disagreeing with their conclusion that increased bargaining power of those in bondage drove emancipation, this thesis aims to further understand the same contextual changes from the masters' perspective. More precisely, to understand what specific factors made masters unable/not finding it worthwhile to insist on persistence in the new contexts. This connect the research on Mauritanian slavery with overall debates in the field about the impact of cost and benefits of labour coercion as mechanisms of decline (Bales, 2000; Candido, 2020; Engerman, 1973; Fogel, 1989; Kleintop, 2018; Martin, 2010; Martins & Green, 2020; Wright, 2020).

1.2. Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to study how different mechanisms lead to decline in slavery and servitude respectively by understanding how different factors may impact masters' resistance toward emancipation. As the abolition following 1905 coincided with slave emancipation while decline in servitude mainly occurred in the late 1960's and 1970's, the intention is to compare the contexts of these two periods. By re-analysing current research by McDougal (2021a, 2021b) and Ruf (1999), this purpose is intended to be fulfilled by answering the following question:

“How did changed circumstances affect masters' direct economic incentives to no longer maintain their right in people and hence motivate emancipation?”

1880-1905 is specified as the first period of study because within this timeframe the French who initiated abolishment made colonial claims throughout the region. The Sahara offered few resources and Klein (1998) state the aspiration of the French was rather driven by a will to manifest power by neutralizing desert tribes who raided communities in the area for resources such as slaves. Further was the demand for commodities produced by slaves, especially gum which was the major export, slowing down compared to earlier decades (Ruf, 1999:183-184). Such changes make this period relevant when studying incentives of slave emancipation.

The second period to investigate will be 1968-1981 which was an era of another transformative change. Droughts in the Sahel, a semidry border region separating Sahara from the rest of the continent, caused waves of migrants to head toward the capital Nouakchott. This urbanization was a catalyst which caused many to be freed whereupon this period is a reasonable period for analysis and by doing so this thesis will build upon the former research by McDougall (2021) and Ruf (1999). Further, since slavery was officially abolished in 1981 it become complicated to establish further labour coercion beyond this year as slavery given the definition argued for in next section; that coercion has to be accepted by relevant authorities to define as slavery.

Finally, as the formulation “changed circumstances” in the research question risk being overly broad for the scope of this thesis, some limitations should be established. Since master's benefits differ for slavery and servitude due to differences in property right, it is relevant to limit “changes circumstances” differently for the two types of coercion. Given that

Martins and Green (2020) steer the discussion about the decline of specifically slavery toward the benefit to use slaves to access credit, and since this indeed was common in 19th century Mauritania (Lydon, 2005), this thesis will in regard to the context preceding 1905 dealing with slavery therefore more specifically look into whether and how changes in the Mauritanian credit markets affected masters' incentives. Regarding the second period where migration to the capital Nouakchott already has been reasonably highlighted as a motive behind emancipation but mainly from the perspective of the freed (McDougall, 2021a), this thesis will more specifically analyse how changed cost of keeping people unfree in urban compared to rural areas affected masters' incentives.

1.3. Defining concepts

The remaining part of this chapter is devoted to understand slavery as a concept. A discussion covering various views lead this thesis to consider slavery as strictly tied to ownership in person such as argued by Engerman (1973).

Scholars with the aim of conceptual understanding use definitions for other purposes than organizations, activists and political actors with specific agendas. For example, the NGO Walk Free (2022) who combat modern slavery borrowed ILO's (1930) definition of forced labour when defining modern slavery as "situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threat, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power". But by emphasizing on the involuntarily this does according to Walk Free (2022) also cover forced marriages and sexual exploitation. Such a diverse definition is problematic since it become practically useless (Allain and Hickey, 2011) and inflict confusion with the historically dissimilar chattel slavery (Schwartz and Nicholson, 2020). Engerman (1973) instead describe slavery as property, thus legal ownership, meaning controlling a person like chattel in contrast to mere controlling their labour. This is how slavery was defined in many societies, for example by Roman (Bradley, 2011:242), Islamic (Freamon, 2012:41) and Western law (Wright, 2006:10) as well as UN's Slavery Convention (1926).

An opponent of this division between traditional and modern slavery and emphasis on the legal aspect is Bales (2000). He argues slavery took a different form after abolitions but it is still slavery despite no longer being protected by law. With the number of poor and thus potential slaves booming with increasing world population the price of slaves has fallen

whereupon legally protected ownership is no longer necessary. Bales does in fact not offer any specific definition but his non-exhaustive examples complies with ILO's (1930) definition of forced labour. As shown this risk leading into a too broad and thus for analysis meaningless definition. The legal characteristic is a guarantee against this trap and it differentiate slavery from other forms of exploitation in the sense that as property slaves provide other economic gains than their mere labour.

Though for historic and universal consistency it is problematic that emphasis on legal status exclude the possibility of slavery in societies without formalized legal institutions or where such are too weak to be the highest accepted authority. This is often the case in African traditional societies (Miers & Kopytoff, 1977:49). Therefore, if structures advanced enough to formalize slavery does not exist or if being formally abolished but acceptance upheld by relevant authorities in a community there is reason to distinguish between *de jure* and *de facto* slavery (Schwartz and Nicolson, 2020).

Yet another critique against the legal definition of slavery comes from an anthropologist and specifically African perspective by Miers and Kopytoff (1977:5-11) who criticize such definitions as West-centric. They argue that in Africa on the other hand the meanings of freedom and slavery differ as there patriachs/matriachs own all members of the lineage. For example, in many African societies kins have been bought and sold to strengthen the wealth and influence of a lineage. This would be slavery if such purchases include the person losing right to control own life but it could in practice also be comparable to paying for adoption which in Western context might be illegal but not considered slavery since adopted children have equal right as biological children. On the other hand, in some African societies slaves or specific slaves cannot be sold whereupon slavery is mere a label of ranking which in some cases is connected with masters' right to control.

Such individual definitions for each African society is problematic for academic comparison. To instead propagate for a universal definition of slavery, distinguished from other kinds of unfreedom, Nieboer (1910:29) suggest slavery cannot by default be temporary because property right is not temporary This mean that for example subjugated children within a kinship system are not slaves, unless they can only become free by the whim of the master and not by simply growing up. This definition of slavery is not West-centric *per se* as Miers and Kopytoff argued, but a question of translation since no African society is originally euro-lingual.

Based on this discussion, a person is by this thesis considered enslaved when a) the master possess ownership in person and thus enjoy legal right to transfer this ownership through selling, gifting, lending, renting and pawning the slave (Engerman, 1973), b) such ownership is at least informally acknowledged by relevant authorities in a community (Schwartz & Nicholson, 2020) and c) such ownership is not by default temporary (Nieboer, 1910:26). Thought if control over person fall beyond this definition while confirming to ILO's (1930) above explained definition of forced labour, this will throughout this study rather be classified as servitude.

The following chapter, in section 2.2.1, will result in a context specific distinction between slavery and servitude concerning the case of Mauritania. There, it will be seen that the form of labour coercion in Mauritania labelled *New slaves* will by this thesis be treated as slavery while the other kind called *Slaves of the tent* will be defined as servitude.

2. Case Mauritania

This chapter provides the relevant setting for the upcoming analysis. The first understanding is that abolitions have been reoccurring affair in Mauritania's 20th century. Although abolition is not to be confused with emancipation which is the interest of this study, but nevertheless are these events relevant for contextual understanding. Thereafter, social groups are identified and how they relate to each other which is helpful for understanding who potentially may benefit from slavery and how each group's incentives might differ. Finally, the labour performed by slaves is described as this is the economic benefit they provide to their master as well as it being central when analysing the effect of changing markets.

Before discussing these matters, the places and regions discussed or mentioned throughout this thesis are here highlighted for reference.



Figure 2.1. Map of Mauritania

2.1. Reoccurring abolitions

Slavery in Mauritania was abolished no less than three times during the 20th century. First time was in 1905 by the French who except from imposing legal formalities engaged in

emancipation programmes which included protecting and educating runaway slaves as well as freeing those sent for military service on behalf of their masters (Maimone, 2013:159). Although French intentions were not always honourable as they in some instances also returned runaway slaves to their masters (Lovejoy, 2000:268; RAMS, 1980:8). Nevertheless, with the 1905 Abolishment Act slaves were freed (Pettigrew, 2019). But the most deep-rooted form, domestic slavery, remained (McDougall, 2021a). This exception was motivated by the French as they believed Mauritania's elite would not be cooperative without slaves and that slaves themselves were not ready for freedom whereupon emancipation would stir chaos (McDougall, 2005). The same source also mentions a reason for the elite to not give up domestic slavery because it guaranteed reproductive control given most domestic slaves were women. Though if masters did not protect their right to keep people unfree for other reasons, reproduction is in itself difficult to motivate. And as shall be seen in cases throughout this thesis, also men remained unfree.

The second abolition occurred 1961 but this was more a theoretical abolition than an actual one. This was because the constitution of the newly independent country drew inspiration from the universal declaration of human rights whereupon equality and freedom on paper became guaranteed "without distinction of race, religion and social condition" (Constitution de la République islamique de Mauritanie: Article premier) but slavery was in itself not specifically mentioned.

1978 was the abolition movement El-Hor founded and it became a vocal agent against status quo by demanding abolition and equality of *haratines*. Against this background did the last abolition occur with an official announcement by president Haidalla in 1980 and the following year it was legally formalized (Maimone, 2013:160-165). As Haidalla was himself an outsider among the Mauritanian elite, he hoped to gain the support of the *haratines* with this move (Warner, 1990:34). But the abolition was vaguely formulated, it did not include criminalization of slaveholding and four years after abolition a UN (1985) investigation found slavery still *de facto* existing. Though it can be noticed that with time rhetoric's changed given that 1983 people openly talked about "their slaves" but a decade later the subject had become taboo and was fiercely denied. Western attempts to bring the subject up was deemed as prejudiced while home-grown activists were accused of being manipulated by foreign powers and thus disturbing stability (McDougall, 2005). But in time legislation became stricter and emancipation efforts increased. For example, today at least a few slaveholders have been prosecuted (Peyton, 2018) and the government has introduced an agency to combat

vestiges of slavery (Walk Free, 2018). Without being able to claim that Mauritanian slavery and servitude is yet *de facto* abolished, the central government is at least somewhat less indifferent than earlier. That indicate that the 1981 abolition was part of a process of change unlike the 1961 abolition.

2.2. Demographics and hierarchies

The most basic demographic classification in Mauritania is between whites and blacks. The whites are made up of Arab and the native Berbers who in turn are categorized into the succeeding four groups of tribes of distinct interests and historical purposes. The blacks consist of free black tribes and the former slave caste as well as those still living in servitude. Hereafter “black” will refer to the former of the two while the other will be denominated *haratines* or *abeeds*.

Hassani (Warrior tribes): These tribes and their members of mainly Arabic origin represent the small minority that historically have made up the political elite (Berry, 1990:52). This power was maintained by the fact that *hassanis* were typical mobile nomads with fighting skills as described by Nieboer (1910:280), meaning they subjugated farming communities who were tied to the land and thus less able to escape demands of tribute. As a result *hassani* could focus their time on maintaining fighting skill rather than themselves being productive.

Zwaya (Religious scholarly tribes): Together with *hassani* the *zwaya* make up the Mauritanian nobility. Their traditional purpose was as religious scholars and leaders, but alongside this work they also formed the economic elite. Due to their image as God-fearing Muslims of moral superiority, *zwayas* earned invaluable trust in the Saharan trade where the jurisdictional system was not always enough to enforce contracts (Lydon, 2008). Thus, they came to control trading routes but they were also the main users of slaves employed in production for these markets (Klein, 1998; RAMS, 1980:67; Ruf, 1999:187; Webb, 1985).

Znaga (Tributary vassals): These rural pastoral groups of mainly Berber heritage have traditionally worked for *hassani* and *zwaya* and to whom they were forced to pay tribute (Berry, 1990:54, McDougall, 2021a). Although being poor themselves, *znaga* tribes kept slaves according to Murdock’s (1967) Ethnographic Atlas.

Artisans and entertainers: Producers of goods, for example tailors, shoe makers and blacksmiths or culturally valued as storytellers. Each occupational group form a caste who strictly socialize and marry among themselves. The more skilled the occupation, the higher status of the caste, though they were still considered inferior to *hassanis*, *zwayas* and *znagas* (Berry, 1990:54).

Haratines (Freed slaves and slave descendants): Ethnically similar to black Mauritians but share culture and language with above white groups since they have lived together for a long time were some master-slave relationships go back to Arab conquest in the 8th century (Berry, 1990:9). Although *haratines* are no longer formally owned, they often live in dependence to their former masters whereupon “freed” does not necessarily mean “free” (McDougall, 2005). The most free is the *haratine* elite who were freed and educated under the French and thus have little relation with those still in slavery or servitude (Maimone, 2013:157). The following testimony from an escaped girl furthermore illustrate the different status of *haratines* and those still in bondage:

“My elder brother had been freed by Salem some time ago; he came to see me and told me that I would go to hell for leaving my master. My brother is an ally of my master – because he is freed, and freedom is the greatest gift your master can give you.” (Selek’ha, 2006:173)

Abeed (Slaves): There were two types of slaves in the Mauritanian society as described by Lydon (2007); *new slaves* and *slaves of the tent*. Those labelled as *new slaves* had often been acquired in the 19th century raids and these slaves had the lowest status in the Mauritanian society and received the harshest treatment. *Slaves of the tent* on the other hand, which included household slaves, had lived together with their masters for generations and were supposed to be unsellable although sales did occur (Ruf, 1999:32). Therefore, *slave of the tent* is itself not a solid definition of whether a specific person was chattel or rather unfree in some other way. Section 2.2.1 below further discuss this dilemma and how this thesis deal with it.

Black Mauritians: Divided into several ethnic groups, blacks mainly live as farmers in the south of the country. Similar to the moors, their social structures have been arranged with slaves as the lowest ranked (Berry, 1980:56). During the droughts in the 1970’s moors who formerly lived pastoral lives in the Sahel migrated towards the more fertile Senegal River valley to settle, causing tension and disputes over land with the blacks. As the regime who promoted Arabization sided with the settlers, blacks of unknown numbers were massacred,

stripped of their citizenship and deported into Senegal and Mali, causing observers to describe Mauritania as an apartheid state (Diarra, 1993).

Table 2.1 present estimated proportions of the major demographic groups. But as no official statistics exist, these numbers shall be taken only as an indication.

Estimated population shares	
Haratines (black moors)	35-45%
Beydanes (white moors)	25-35%
Black Mauritians	25-35%

Table 2.1. Estimated population shares, 2013

Note that since 1981 *abeeds* officially no longer exist and are therefore here included in the *haratine* group. Also, during the 1989 conflict it has been estimated that between 70 000-150 000 black Mauritians (=4-8% of total population) were stripped of their citizenship and expelled (Diarra, 1993) whereupon this group could be expected to have represented a somewhat higher proportion share in the earlier periods which this thesis concern.

Source: Maimone (2013:153)

2.2.1. Applying the definition of slavery and servitude to the Mauritanian context

Before continuing, it is relevant to establish what the above subsection imply in terms of slavery and servitude and how to distinguish between the two in the Mauritanian context. The *new slaves* would have been slaves in the definition of this paper and 19th century documents testify that they were commonly being sold and used as collateral (Lydon, 2005). Since *slaves of the tent*, or household slaves, on the other hand often were considered unsellable they would not have been chattel and thus was property right in these people restricted. This propose *slaves of the tent* to be classified as having been in servitude thought bear in mind that this thesis is not able to state *slaves of the tent* were deemed unsellable by local authorities who enforced regulations all over Mauritania. And whether people were sold as chattel without this being accepted by local customs in these communities will remain

unknown. Therefore, this thesis will settle with considering *slaves of the tent* to generally have been in servitude.

By further connecting this with the multiple abolition narrative, it can be concluded that those freed 1905 were generally slaves by definition while those remaining thereafter were in servitude. A question then occurs how to label the latter group. *Serf* is a resembling condition, but this concept is tied to the European context. Instead a person in Mauritanian servitude will throughout this thesis be referred to as an *abeed*, although as seen above this term does in reality include people in servitude as well as slavery.

2.3. Slavery in the Mauritanian context

The end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade led to the supply of slaves within Africa to go up and regions like Mauritania became flooded with new slaves (Lovejoy, 2000:140). Against this background Lydon (2007) investigates slavery in the oasis town Tishit where labour intensive date palm cultivation spurred with the falling slave prices. Her narrative offer contextual insight and describe how most work in the town was performed by slaves; domestic work, tending animals, caravan employment, construction, guarding wells, agricultural work, the never-ending work on maintaining irrigation, and so on. Typically in such societies half of the population were enslaved.

Generally, the division of labour between slaves and master's was organized to improve the wellbeing of the latter. Slaves could for example provide opportunities to engage in other than labour such as religious scholarship or not working at all. But they could also guarantee a varied diet by diversifying production between pasture and agriculture or allowing for other income sources such engagement in the caravan business (Ruf, 1999:150). A common arrangement was that the masters themselves lived nomadic lives and followed the pasture while the slaves where settled in villages to produce for either household consumption or markets (Ruf, 1999:38). An example of how slaves and other *abeeds* facilitated for increased production in the late 19th century was how Senegal imported most their meat from Mauritania as the expansion of peanut production required a lot of worker to be fed (Ruf, 1999:184).

Another important sector was the gum industry. With European industrialisation the specific gum Arabic that grew in the Sahel alongside the desert edge was in demand to be

used in textile production. By the 19th century most of the supply came from Mauritania. Webb (1985) report about the conditions in this industry and describe the though harvests were the trees tended to violently scratch the workers. These workers lived in separate villages where supervisors were hired to guard up to fifty workers while the owners lived nomadic lives elsewhere. Though Ruf (1999:38) note a problem with this arrangements which was the impending risk of raiders making settled communities vulnerable.

In conclusion, it can be said that slavery and servitude could benefit masters in two ways; as production or pleasure. The former concern this thesis' question of economics, where slaves where used as capital to produce goods to be either be exchanged on markets or to increase household consumption. The second kind intend to rather improve the wellbeing of the owner by allowing themselves to pursue other goals than labour, for example allowing focus on religious scholarship, sexual pleasure or by sanctioning idle (Ruf, 1999:38).

3. Theory

To shape an understanding of how this thesis fits into current research, this chapter begins with reviewing how the field of labour coercion has developed. This intends to shape an understanding of where this thesis fits into the picture. Rooted in this a theoretic framework is thereafter presented where economic factors are examined specifically based on slaveholder's interest.

3.1. An evolving field of research: origin, persistence and decline

At the turn of the 19th century Herman Nieboer (1910:302), after thorough world-wide empirical examining, published a work aiming to understand mechanisms behind the origin of slavery. He concluded that free land is a general condition for a production system to arise where output depend on slave labour, given the organisation can produce surplus. Under such conditions there would be no landless depending on wage labour for survival. With the assumption peasants rather work for themselves than others unless the latter pay better, large landowners were incentivised to enslave people to keep production costs down. If free land on the other hand was unavailable and thus the landless had to work for wages to survive, landowners would prefer such free workers over slaves. This is because in a Malthusian society wages do barely exceed the cost of subsistence which is the price of keeping slaves alive, but slaves further come with the cost of control. 60 years later Domar (1970) revived the theory by institutionally classifying labour coercion. Domar used Russian serfdom as his example where the state's imperial ambition required service from an aristocracy whereupon peasant's movement were restricted as payment for these services. Thus the aristocracy was guaranteed labour to use for production on their land their own time was freed to work for the expansion of Russian territories. Note that although this specific example concern serfdom in Russia it can be interpreted to explain that coercive labour in general as an institution which require the support from the relevant authorities. Since Domar's elaboration, discussions about mechanisms behind slavery have continuously evolved and the Nieboer-Domar theorem serve as a foundation for many scholars studying labour coercion.

On the contrary in a paper Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2002) offer two examples where coercion rather increased with high population density; in feudal Eastern Europe and

the Caribbean plantation economy. The economics behind this could be explained by that control of unfree labourers who rather like to be free is costly and therefore it is rationale to facilitate scale-economics to lower control cost per labourer (Fenoaltea, 1984). In another paper Acemoglu and Wolitzky (2009) develop a model after which they state the two perspectives, whether high or low population density are a more likely condition for labour coercion, are not necessarily contradictory because in their model labour scarcity is only one of two factors affecting coercion. The other factor is what they call outside option and this could for example be cities providing sanctuary from coercion. With such an option coercion declines as workers are more likely to escape the harsher the coercion. Although this does not in itself explain why landowners in densely populated areas with low outside option prefer coercion over wage labour in the first place.

Some scholars from other fields criticise economists for creating rational models like those above which aim to provide universal explanations of labour coercion. One critic is sociologist Patterson (1977) who opposes economics and factor ratios as general driving forces behind slavery since he argue it is a practice that has often strived despite not always being profitable. By comparing ancient Greece in different development stages he argue slavery in less complex societies are motivated by culture and politics rather than economics. This argument is based on a claim that even peasants refused to perform manual labour since Greeks culturally felt contempt for “men to whom by the nature of their employment denied all possibility of moral and political virtue” (Burford 1972:12). But is this attitude not just describing Greek class contempt by those with opportunity to survive without working rather than a reality where even unprivileged peasants refused to work? Would any person realistically choose starvation over working due to culture? Patterson (1977) does not provide proof that culture triumph survival instinct.

With support from Schelling (1957) who use game theory to explain how culture is based on economic choices, it could be argued persistence of any institution, including slavery or servitude, in less developed societies are more based on culture than its origin and decline. This is based on how individual’s knowledge about others behaviour develop with experience whereupon behaviours are updated to gain the most for each individual and finally common norms are shaped as everyone go through this process. But if circumstances change for other behaviours to be optimal, actors do not by default adapt since norm-change require coordination as individuals worry to be screwed if they are the only one to change behaviour. North, Wallis and Weingast (2006) reason less developed societies have less developed

coordination capacity which mean culture, as Patterson (1977) argued, influence behaviour to greater extent in such societies. Although if this perspective can be used to explain persistence of coercive labour, it does not explain neither origin nor decline since at least the latter would require some coordination.

Whatever the arguments for origin of slavery or servitude are, it was in earlier days assumed that when these no longer apply the coercion would cease to exist (Cairnes, 1863). It was observed how maintenance costs barely balanced productivity whereupon slavery was said to have been bound to decline (Phillips, 1918:391-392). But this was up for debate. Due to coercion slaves worked longer days and also more years whereupon Engerman (1973) state profitability measured as income/capita was high despite less incentives and output/hour. Though he does not take into account whether those high incomes were rather because of high prices due to global demand for the products produced by those in slavery or servitude.

More recently scholars developed interest in more aspects of slaveholding to explain persistence. Wright (2006:122) proposed slaves were valued more as property than for its productivity. Emancipation was resisted by slaveholders because it jeopardized their wealth but did not relieve them from debt responsibility which was analysed by Kleintop (2018) who studied slaveholders' quest for compensation during the American abolition. Emancipation also deprived masters the ability to pledge slaves as collateral which Martins & Green (2020) argued was an important source for accessing credit and could thus be used as a mean to develop businesses. Connecting this with the Nieboer-Domar theorem, they further argue slaves became especially important as a credit source when slaves had a relatively high value due to low land-labour ratio.

With these ideas, the field has developed to now study origin of slavery and servitude as having a different cause than persistence and decline. Notice also how scholars in the final paragraph acknowledged that property right offer distinct benefits for slavery that do not apply to servitude whereupon the reason for decline of these two coercion arrangements might differ.

3.1.1. A note on slavery and production system

Above accounts highlight a misrepresentation in the field, especially concerning slavery. Most scholars who have studied slavery have focused on and build theories based on main slave

economies with specialized, large-scale plantation systems operating on global markets. Especially the American south are widely studied. Also, Nieboer (1910:427) acknowledged that his theory mainly applied to agricultural societies but he urged further research should aim to better understand slavery in contexts such as among hunter-gatherers, fishing or pastoral societies. And as we saw in the previous chapter, Mauritania was partly agricultural but mainly pastoral.

Nieboer (1910:273) generally found slavery to not have been necessary in the pastoral economy because unlike with abundant farmland where people were enslaved to access labour, in pastoral society's production was not only dependent on access to land but also access to animals. Thus, those not owning animals were forced to ask for employment whereupon he reasons labour should generally have been available. But although he reasoned pastoral economies did not have a need for slaves, the cost of their subsistence was neither an unmanageable burden to these societies as it had been for the hunter-gatherers. Therefore Nieboer (1910:289) picture pastoral societies as if they balance on a threshold where other factors serve as a tipping-point toward either existence of slavery or not. Such factors could for example be the opportunity to make profit from slave trade. It is worth noting this explanation is unsatisfactory to explain pastoral slavery because that slaves can be afforded is in itself not a reason for a society to choose to have this expense.

A paper by Lagerlöf (2009) takes on the challenge to illustrate how slavery and labour coercion correlate with production system. He differentiates between systems based on their intensity of land use and therefore indirectly on technology like for example ploughing versus slash-and-burn cultivation. Based on Figure 3.1 his argument takes hunter-gatherers as a starting point after which slavery rises with development. This model is based on Lenski and Lenski's (1974:96) differentiation between productive systems. There pastoralism, which were the main production system among the Mauritanian moors, range in technological development between simple horticultural societies to simple agrarian societies.

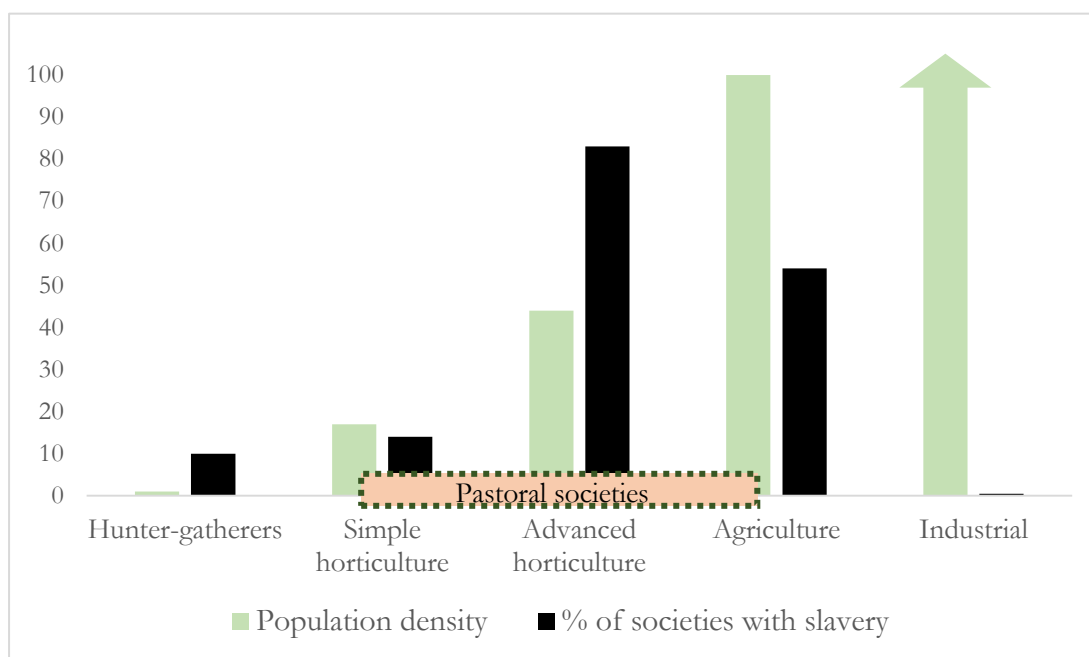


Figure 3.1. Relationship between slavery and system of economic production

Source: Lenski & Lenski (1974:104, 107); industrial staple based on narrative from Lagerlöf (2009)

Though this division between production system and slavery must be carefully interpreted since Murdock’s (1967) *Ethnographic Atlas* which provide the underlying data, measure slavery among tribes rather than specific production systems. For example, if one tribal subgroup were pastoral while another agricultural it does not distinguish which of them used slaves. For the upcoming analysis it is also relevant to note that it is not possible to use this model to generalize the extent of slavery within groups because the *Ethnographic Atlas* only offer data about whether slavery was practiced at any extent, not to what extent (Bezemer, Bolt and Lenzink, 2014).

But what Lagerlöf (2009) takes hold on for his analysis is that labour were originally scarce due to Malthusian mechanisms but productivity was also too low for landowners and households to pay the cost of having slaves. With increased efficiency following agriculture, population rose but remained low enough in relation to land to motivate enslavement the way Nieboer-Domar theorised. According to Lagerlöf both fertility and technological process is lower in slave societies because slaves are not in control over their own reproduction and this hinder population growth which would spur technological innovation in a dynamic

endogenous process. Therefore, he argues that slavery decreases with development as this correlates with population growth and thus technological process. In this view land-labour ratio does not solely explain coercion as Nieboer-Domar suggested but also efficiency is relevant. Though an issue with the model is that it does not explain how a society move from a labour and technology equilibrium into growth and thus decline of slavery. But however this occurred, Figure 3.1 offer a relevant observation that slavery decline when reaching higher development.

3.2. Theoretical framework: Economic incentives

This section will discuss variables for calculating slavery's loss and gain which will be used as the main lens to understand why masters' would persist on coercive labour, whether it concern slavery or servitude. The book *Time on the cross* by Fogel and Engerman spurred a large scholarly debate about the profits of slavery which has then developed over the years. The book is largely based on a paper from the preceding year by Engerman (1973) and this paper will be the starting point of the following discussion.

3.2.1. Expenses

To start with Engerman (1973) list the following three expenses of slavery; acquisition price, variable expenses and difference in productivity compared to employing free labour. This way of calculating expenses are more complete than the above discussed model by Acemoglu and Wolitzky (2009) which somewhat simplified could be summarised as stating that the tipping point toward free labour occur when cost of subsistence plus cost of control exceeds wages on a free labour market.

The first of Engerman's (1973) expense items, acquisition price, only concern slavery since it is associated with the transaction of property. It is determined by supply and demand of the slaves. Supply were affected by factors such as the transatlantic slave trade ban which rather increased slave trade and slavery within Africa (Austen, 1979) or improved export infrastructure enabling transportation from distant locations (Lovejoy, 2000:140). Demand for slaves on the other hand was affected by factors like whether geography supported large scale production (Fogel, 1989) or whether there could be any preference to use slaves as security to access capital (Martins & Green, 2020).

The second cost category of slaves, variable expenses, include costs like maintenance and control. As the former includes more than bare subsistence cost but also feeding slaves enough to keep them productive, this cost would have varied depending on slaves' task. Also control cost varied; Varro (circa 30 BC:227) estimated that as much as one fourth of Roman worktime had to be spent punishing slaves while Frankema, Green and Hilbom (2016) give an example from the Americas where it was more difficult for slaves removed from their own societies in Africa to make resistance and was thus cheaper to control. To further understand to control cost, it is relevant to remind about Acemoglu and Wolitzky's (2009) above discussed idea that control becomes more difficult if slaves and people in servitude have an outside option, an alternative which they can escape to.

Finally, the difference in hourly productivity between wage worker and the unfree is an opportunity cost thought Engerman (1973) who believes this might be outweighed by the ability to squeeze out more labour through coercion.

3.2.2. Benefits

Engerman (1973) further suggests three plausible benefits from slaveholding. First, as conspicuous consumption where slaves were part of a particular lifestyle. This means that owners were consumers of for example household chores or concubines rather than slaves producing output that offered return on capital to owners (Garnsey, 1996:2-3). Second, masters may profit from expropriating the difference between free workers' wages and the cost of slaves/people in servitude. In this equation free worker's wages would be understood with assistance from the Nieboer-Domar theorem while the costs are the factors outlined in the former section. The final benefit by Engerman is the opportunity to coerce workers to do certain tasks as well as when and where to do them, even it was against the will of the worker. This could be beneficial in agriculture, which was a business sensible to especially weather, and were coercion could guarantee harvesting to be done at a specific time and thus reduce risk. Wright (2020) argue this risk reduction gave southern U.S. a lead over the northern states as long as the economy was still agricultural.

Although Engermen (1973) specifically discussed slavery, the above list of benefits could be obtained also from other forms of coercion. Though missing are the benefits tied to ownership and thus of slaves as specifically property, for example using slaves as security to access capital. Martin (2010) theorised that slavery was an "invisible engine" of the economy

in the antebellum U.S. south where ownership of slaves allowed access capital and thus business could grow without first having to save which resulted in capital circulated more. Since abundant land was both immobile and less valuable than scarce labour, Martins and Green (2020) develop such arguments by comparing Brazil, U.S. and the Cape to determine the collateral factor to cause slavery persisting beyond reason of origin.

The factors accounted for in this theoretical framework by Engerman (1973) as well as the benefit of credit as theorised by Martin (2010 and Martins and Green (2020) are summarized in Figure 3.2. Those factors especially used to answer the research question of direct economic factors based on the Mauritanian case are in this figure marked with a star.

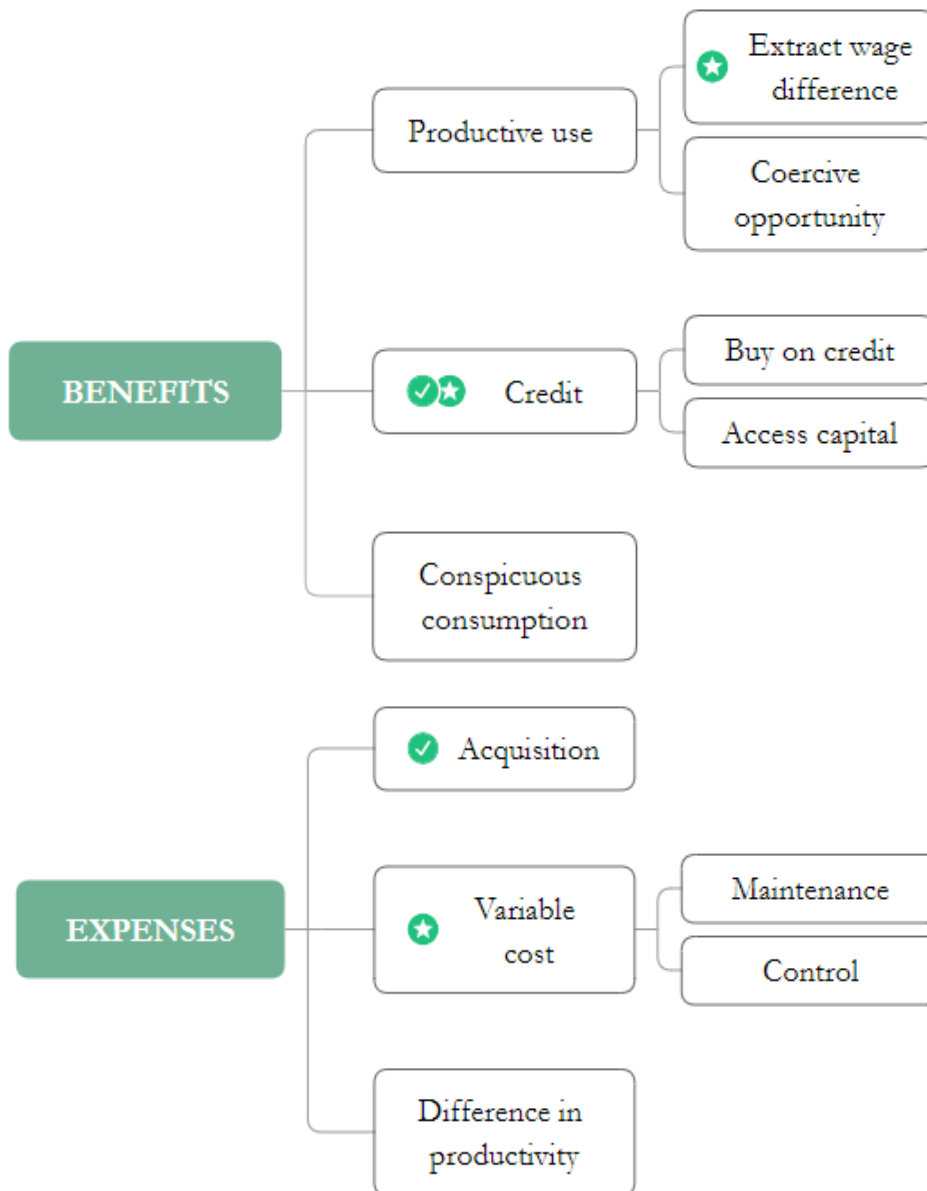


Figure 3.2. Direct benefit and expenses of coercive labour from masters' perspective

Symbols. Star: Factor especially relevant for analysis of direct economic incentives;

Tick: Factor which concern slavery but not servitude

4. Data

The intention is to use existing research to re-analyse against the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. The data, which consist of this current literature as well as supporting material, is categorized into three types; (i) previous analyses which the main body of empirics is built upon, (ii) data for conceptual understanding of aspects suggested to answer the question and (iii) testimonies offering practical examples to support the arguments.

4.1. Previous analyses

The basis of the research is mainly shaped around previous works by scholars whose conclusions are based on unbiased views on slaveholding, patience in relationship building and mainly first-hand sources. For the late 19th century, those experiencing slaveholding are no longer alive to tell their story and to clarify misunderstandings to researchers. Instead the literature from this period is constructed from traces left behind. When instead approaching present time the sensitivity of the topic of slavery increase as the Mauritanian government has declared slavery non-existent and it is hostile toward investigations (Sutter, 2011). For this reason, the data chosen in this category is gathered by three researchers; Peter Urs Ruf, Ann McDougall and Ghislane Lydon, who have specialized in either Mauritanian, Maghreb or West African contexts. Further, they do all have lengthy investment in local networks and cultural understanding to capitalize on when conducting interviews, whereupon their research is deemed to provide high quality data.

Due to the risk of kidnapping of Westerners (Regeringskansliet, 2015 and UK.gov, 2022), I did not go to Mauritania myself but the alternative option to using previous research as data would have been to hire a research assistant from the University of Nouakchott to perform interviews. Though this option was rejected for ethical reasons as it would be difficult to guarantee the safety of this research assistant considering the political sensitivity of the topic.

Many sources were rejected in this first category of data due to unreliability and representability being uncertain, for example a large number of NGO reports which tend to be victim-centric, journalistic portrayals such as Sutter's (2011) well noted report for CNN which was based on just eight days journalistic investigation throughout the country as well as scholars not demonstrating strict impartiality. Instead are mainly papers by three scholars; Ruf (1999),

McDougall (2005, 2021a, 2021b) and Lydon (2005, 2007, 2008) used as data given the representability and validity of those papers were deemed to be of higher level than other rejected sources. This is further elaborated on below.

Ruf (1999) wrote a book on specifically why slavery persisted so stubbornly long in Mauritania. He is the scholar in this category who paint the longest lines back in history and consider the most angles, including market conditions, to draw conclusion about how changing context caused changed slave-master relationship and thus emancipation. His analytical narrative span from 19th century to the 1990's. His focus on analysing the slave-master relationship provide understanding of masters' mindsets and motives in both eras of focus for this thesis. Although the approach of this thesis differ from him considering his focus on relationships versus this thesis' focus on direct economic incentives, the context he is narrating is to a large extent forming a relevant base for the analysis of this thesis. Ruf's aim to understand the relationship form several angels make him a source to be used to demonstrate master's mindsets and motives. Further is Ruf (1999:44-47) transparent with his interviewing technique, how he conduct ocular observations of people in communities, his limited understanding of the hassaniya dialect and his relationship with his assistant who solve his language issues. His own analysis is largely based on interviews with both slaves, *haratines* and slave owners of different rank and the transcripts of these interview are also published for other researchers to use.

McDougall (2005, 2021a, 2021b) has a long commitment to Mauritania and in a 2005 paper she describe how her understanding since the early 1980's has developed to improve the interaction with the respondents. Her research often provide understanding of the period between independence and present day and her main focus area is the status and sense of identity among the *haratines* who although they are not slaves often have experience of slavery (servitude). Especially in her two 2021 papers she strikes a blow for the role of cities and town for emancipation which she means has been a neglected discussion in the field. Further is she a critical voice against prevalent orientalist views of Muslim slavery as fundamentally distinct as if the institution of slavery would have been culturally more ingrained in these regions than elsewhere.

Finally, the research interest of Lydon (2005, 2007, 2008) concern Islamic legal culture and trans-Saharan trade. She excavates historic archives and compare 19th century commercial documents with medieval scholars of the Maliki legal school who formed Mauritania's interpretation of Islamic law. She is herself not concerned with drawing conclusions about

either persistence, decline or slavery itself but her findings and framing narrative about 19th century society offer understanding of the culture, economy, use of slaves and interest of the slaveholding class at the time. Her narratives can thus be re-arranged to in part answer the research question of this thesis. Lydon's effort has been praised for its contribution to understanding Sahara as an economic space rather than dead desert (Pettigrew, 2019).

4.2. Data for conceptual understanding

As the research develops, this second category of data used intends to provide understanding of specific concepts but always based on the theoretical framework

As the question regarding first period of study explicitly concern credit markets and the Mauritanian legal regulations at this time were based on Muslim law (Lydon, 2005) it is relevant to understand how this context impacted credit markets. Two sources provide insight about this. Lawal (2016) is a Nigerian banker who in paper explain the regulations concerning collateral. Though it shall be clarified that this paper is not written to be used in a historical context and not Mauritania specifically, but I argue his paper is still relevant as he refer to the Maliki legal school which is the same interpretation that was followed in Mauritania at the time. The second source used to map Mauritanian credit markets is Bah and Cheikh (2009) who analyse the development of financial instruments based on religious networking.

Based on understanding of the Maliki legal school, it was understood that using slaves as collateral were legally condemned unless there was a demand for them on a market and that the market value was not decreasing (Lawal, 2016). Therefore it became relevant to understand the development of these prices during the late 19th century and early 20th century. As the development of slave prices has not yet been established for this period through mining of local archives, this thesis will instead estimate whether there was an increase or decline in demand for slaves based on market development of the commodities produced by slaves used as a proxy. As this concerned the so called *new slaves* and not *slaves of the tent*, the value of these slaves would be based on their productive value rather than some complexly defined value of conspicuous consumption. Apart from already mentioned scholars in the first category, understanding of prices will be combined from mainly two sources. First, a project financed by the U.S. agency for international development (RAMS, 1980) has compiled how the market economy over time has developed in Mauritania. It does not offer any analysis of its own but

mainly a presentation of data in narrative form and descriptive statistics. Second, a renowned paper by Webb (1985) provide relevant insight into specifically the gum sector which as understood from chapter 2 was especially slave labour intensive and oriented toward the export market. Though from the information provided by these sources, this thesis will not be able to conclude more than if slave prices would have increased or decreased. But not more is needed at this is specifically what is of interest to conclude any changes in how useable slaves were as collateral based on the law.

4.3. Supporting testimonials

For the 1968-1981 period, an advantage is that people who experiencing servitude first hand are still alive to give their witness accounts. Their stories are not used to construct any argument on their own but fill the purpose of supporting other arguments which are based on the two other categories of data. This is because Yin (2009:79) recommend to use multiple sources of evidence to construct validity.

As already argued it could not be expected for me who are not known and trusted in local communities to collect reliable testimonies, especially concerning masters' perspective as they would have little to gain from honestly sharing their views with me. Therefore, existing witness accounts are used. Note how some of them are collected from sources which was considered not qualitative enough in section 4.1. Therefore here follow a critical evaluation.

First, caution was taken considering the publishers of concern use a more loose definition of slavery than this thesis, in fact it was found that the testimonies from 1968-1981 was found to concern servitude rather than slavery. Second, based on the information given in the accounts it was calculated that the testimonies of concern involved coercion prior to 1981.

Although it was above was excluded to use conclusions form NGO reports where the narrative takes a biased victim-centric view, separate interviews included in such reports were used in this category. A report on racism in Mauritania from Human Right Watch/Africa (Fleischman, 1994) include multiple interviews with testimonials and witnesses accounts of servitude such as from escaped *abeeds*, religious leaders and school teachers which on their own are included as sources for this thesis. Though as it cannot be assumed these interviews represent masters' general treatment of *abeeds*, these stories are used to understand how at least some masters where motivated to take measures to keep people unfree.

Boubacar Messaoud, a son of former slaves, was interviewed by the journalist Sutter (2011) as he is invested in the cause of abolition through the organization SOS Esclaves. He is the source of a quote supporting the explanation that the cost of control was lower in Mauritania than it would have been in many other slave societies since *slaves of the tent* were raised to be submissive. It could of course be questioned whether such a statement could be generalised and that is further discussed in the empirical section. Nonetheless, through Boubacar's work he has met and helped many *abeeds* whereupon he can be expected to have a rounded view of the general *abeeds*.

Finally, one testimony comes from the escaped *abeed* Seleka'ha (2006) who is the source of the title of this thesis. It was published in a book by Bales and Trodd (2008) who have collected testimonies of modern slavery from all over the world.

5. Methodology

From the theoretical framework which was summarised in Figure 3.2, focus in the upcoming analysis will specifically be on how the following factors changed within the periods 1890-1905 and 1968-1981 to answer the research question; productive use of slaves and *abeeds*, the role of slaves as collateral on the credit market, the variable costs of maintenance and control, given these factors were the most connected to masters' direct economic incentives. As was understood from the previous chapter, also the development of slave prices will be of interest as it was found to be relevant to make claims about their role on the credit market. With this in mind, this thesis aim to answer the research question through the following process.

First is a broad understanding of the context of Mauritanian slavery shaped and this has already been presented as the background to the case study in chapter 2. This understanding will together with the theoretical framework be used to study the given literature. While doing so relevant information that concern the research question is categorized based on the two periods, the factors in the theoretical framework and background narrative.

During this process of categorisation where data is interpreted in the light of theory, patterns gradually occur which could potentially provide answers to the research question. With this a second round of reading begin where the purpose is to find relevant information which can be specifically used to argue both for and against this potential answer. This require specific focus to identify relevant information and this is presented in more detail in Table 5.1. Yin (2009:137) call this "study questions" but I prefer to label it "focus areas" to not confused it with questions that later must be specifically answered in the empirical section. Instead the purpose is guide the reading. This provide the opportunity to conduct a more effective scanning for arguments throughout the sources which release time to collect data from yet a broader spectrum of sources and whereupon more angles can be understood and thus more solid arguments are to be constructed.

<p><i>First focus area: General understanding</i></p> <hr/> <p>Understand...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...the composition of labour, land and capital and how this changed over the periods studied. ...if demand changed for the goods and services produced by slaves. And if so, understand how it changed. ...the socio-economic groups in Mauritania and how they relate to labour coercion.
<p><i>Second focus area: Access to credit as a unique benefit of slaves</i></p> <hr/> <p>Understand...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...how institutional frameworks regulated the credit market. ...whether security in property right changed. And if it did, understand how. ...if slaves were used to access credit. And if they were, understand in what way and whether this changed in the 1890-1905 period. ...if it was the debtor or creditor who were to bear the burden in case of loss of capital.
<p><i>Third focus area: Productive use of abeeds in urban and rural environments</i></p> <hr/> <p>Understand...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...whether labour activities changed. And if they did, understand in what way and whether such changes affected market wages. ...how variable costs and opportunities of keeping people bonded developed.

Table 5.1. Focus areas for effective data scanning

By comparing this table with Figure 3.2 which highlighted the main factors in the theoretical framework, it can be noticed how that lens specifically has motivated a focus toward shifting variable cost, slaves used as property and credit as well as investigating opportunities to extract wage difference.

If counterarguments after the second round of reading cannot be circumvented, the once potential answer is no longer considered potential whereupon the process return to another

round of broader categorisation, but this time with yet more understanding of the context to be used. The process continues until a final explanation for masters' acceptance of decline in slavery and servitude is accepted in the sense it is supported by all given arguments.

After creating descriptive narratives of the decline of slavery and servitude, the final step is to compare the two different periods. Again, this step is done against the theoretical framework by comparing the arguments which passed above test for both decline of slavery and servitude.

6. Empirical analysis

In chapter 2 it was found that the research question which concern emancipation are to be divided into slavery and servitude. Further it was argued that slavery concerned the emancipation of 1905 while it was largely servitude that was left until 1981. This corresponds to the purpose of the thesis to study the difference between these two forms of coercion and to this by comparing these two periods. Therefore, this chapter will first investigate the period of 1890-1905 followed by 1968-1981. By comparing these two forms of coercion it will be seen that a diminished ability to use slaves as capital is correlated with the emancipation after 1905. This thesis will suggest that the slave owning tribal elite did not insist on persistence of slavery at the time because they had in practice already lost benefit of using slaves to access capital. This was because the Islamic legal code did not allow slaves of declining value to be used as collateral and the markets that used slaves for production went into decline. This mean that when droughts affected Mauritania in 1968 and onwards, masters could not use slaves to access of capital to find way to survive in their local area but instead had to migrate to the city. There the decline of servitude was correlated with increased a control cost of *abeeds* and therefore urbanisation led to many *abeeds* being emancipated.

6.1. From heyday of slavery to decline

6.1.1. The role of collateral in Mauritanian and Islamic credit markets

An example from the Mauritanian livestock market illustrate complexities of the Mauritanian credit system where in that specific case animals were bought and sold on credit, sometimes with the involvement of middlemen, whereupon a number of unrelated partners simultaneously could be invested in the same animal (RAMS, 1980:14). Although the example concerns livestock it is somewhat telling about the pervasive use of credits. And 19th century commercial documents testify that also slaves were commonly used as security for loans and credit (Lydon, 2005). This system connects Mauritania with other slave societies as described in the theoretical framework of this thesis, for example the southern U.S. where the use of credits allowed expansion of businesses without first saving for direct payment which made Martin (2010) label slavery an “invisible engine”.

As interest was prohibited in Islam, the role of collateral was of especially high importance for transactions on credit in a society like Mauritania as this was the main counterweight to creditor's risk. Further, the legal code was specific in regard to how slaves and other property could be used as collateral (Lydon, 2005). The regulation included several clauses regarding which property could be used as collateral whereupon two of them are of relevance for this argument. The first one state that there needed to be a market demand for the property (slave) used as security and the second that this property should not be of decreasing value (Lawal, 2016). Thus the opportunity to use slaves as collateral was ultimately tied to their market value and in an economy where slaves were used for market production such as gum, meat, grain and dates, their demand and market value would have been upheld as long as there was demand for these products as well as slave supply did not exceed this demand. This calls for connecting the two factors *Acquisition* and *Credit* from the theoretical framework as pictured in Figure 3.2. Because utmost was the option to access credit legally tied to the market value of the collateral which in turn derived from the correlation between supply and demand, in this case of slaves.

Researchers have previously connected increasing slave prices in the first half of the 19th century with increased production and growth of the markets that employed them (RAMS, 1980:67; Ruf, 1999:125; Lydon, 2005; Webb, 1985). But the slave prices are not yet estimated for the end of the 19th century and the following section therefore estimate that they then declined for the opposite reason they previously had increased; due to declining markets.

6.1.2. Falling market value of slaves

The increase in incidents reported in 19th century court cases could indicate an attitude of carelessness toward slaves (Lydon, 2007). This is in itself not enough to prove falling market value, but must be paired with an account for declining demand for goods produced by Mauritanian slaves.

In section 2.3 it was understood that slave supply increased with the end of the Atlantic slave trade but with European industrialization the demand also increased for Mauritania's gum arabic. Webb's (1998) report about gum cultivation highlight the sector's work load when describing that a tree could produce up to 800 kilogram of gum per year while a single worker could harvest just one to three kilogram per day. For perspective, total exports to Europe were 2 000 tons per year. But around the turn of the century the boom was over as

industrial demand declined and prices dropped (Ruf, 1999:183-184). But unlike when the Atlantic slave trade ended, there was this time no new labour intensive sector to employ these leftover slaves.

Already 1870 the newly developed peanut production in Senegal exceeded the Mauritanian gum export (Webb, 1985) and I will argue that indirectly caused a decline of the Mauritanian slave demand. Because the meat from Mauritania's pastoral communities came to feed the Senegalese population and outcompeted the more slave intensive grain production as those farmers rather migrated to Senegal themselves for opportunities in the peanut sector (Lovejoy, 2000:216; Ruf, 1999:184-185). The slaves working with animals would on the other hand have rather been slaves *of the tent* which this thesis generally classify as servitude instead of slavery. This was because herding was an activity requiring trust (Ruf, 1999:151-152) which it was unlikely that the category of *new slaves* had earned. Because as already mentioned they did not share an intimate bond with the master family like the *slaves of the tent* did given they had not been with the family for generations. The conclusion of this is that the overall demand for slaves would have decreased with the decline in gum arabic and growth of meat production.

As European powers saw it their mission to end slave trade on more than their own soil and as they were present along the coast, slave markets there slowly decreased. But out of reach for the Europeans, in the hinterland slave markets continued into the 20th century (Lydon, 2005). But if the potential slave market declined, so would the prices as slaves had been traded between regions (Austen, 1979).

To sum up, if the productive use of slaves decreased toward the end of the 19th century, it would have been illegal to use them as security to access credit which we saw had previously been prevalent. Thus, declining market value would have represented a loss of opportunities for slaveholders who were thus less inclined to resist abolition as Martins and Green (2020) theorized. But this abolition and the emancipation that followed mean that also masters in succeeding periods could not enjoy the benefits of slaves as property. Therefore the direct economic benefits of servitude in the following section will only include the variables productive use in relation to the variable costs of keeping people unfree.

6.2. Decline in servitude

6.2.1. Drought and the growing city of Nouakchott

Throughout history large parts of Mauritania consisted of not much more than sand dotted with occasional oasis towns. At the time of independence not even any proper city existed that could function as a capital. Somewhere in the sand this had to be built to house administrative buildings and a location was chosen which would come to be the city of Nouakchott. But up until 1956 there existed nothing but a bland fishing village (McDougall, 2021a).

Eight years after independence, in 1968 began what would turn out to be a decade long national catastrophe which would transform this young city. The Sahel region which stretch across Africa was severally affected by drought and Mauritania was the country suffering the most (McDougall, 2021a). As animals died and livelihoods vanished, the 1970's saw increased decline in servitude as masters could no longer afford to keep servile labour. This is portrayed by the *haratine* Zeyneb who explain why her master freed her from obligations during the drought, although it was first after abolition she was officially freed:

“We left the master in 1969. It was because he had lost his animals. He no longer had the means to sustain us, and we too did not have any means [...] Since 1983 we have been freed, we no longer belong to him.” (Ruf, 1999:66)

During these years, when migrants sought refuge from the drought, the urban population increased from 2,87% to 28,8% of the total population between 1960-1981 (Macrotrends, 2022), and the new capital was at the centre of change. The dramatic decade when the city grew beyond imaginable limits is analysed by McDougall (2021a) who conclude that when slaves and *haratines* came to the city they embraced new opportunities which broke dependence on their masters/former masters. Economically such opportunities included capitalizing on the land they as early migrants had been allocated by the government, vending, guarding tools at construction sites, domestic work and pressuring former masters to care for them out of traditional duties. Although McDougall's argue that this created a sense of independence and created opportunities to demands emancipation are reasonable, the same narrative can also be applied to confirm Nieboer-Domar's theorem by explaining how come slavery could decline despite a substantial demand for manual and unskilled labour to build the city with housing for all new inhabitants. During first drought years McDougal explain this work was done by poor refugees who earned a salary for their work but as more people

arrived the market wages came to fall toward subsistence. Soon the supply for unskilled labour came to exceed the demand and the wage dumping was amplified as some of the migrants were in servitude and yet others were semi-servile *haratines* still tied to their former masters and working for bare subsistence. The shift toward subsistence wages was demonstrated by how the original wage workers in construction no longer could afford to pay rent for their housing but had to relocate to the growing shanty towns surrounding the city. McDougall also give another example, that 21% of the official population took employment as domestic servants for better off families where most of them worked just for just food and clothing, including *znaga*'s. In other words, in this context there was no economic need to enslave workers.

6.2.2. Increased cost of keeping humans unfree

While it was seen that the alternative cost of keeping *abeeds* was low, this section will argue that at the same time the cost to control them increased.

As was discussed in the theoretical framework, the cost of control varied in different slave societies, among other depending on opportunities for slaves to free themselves. The following description from an abolitionist and son of former slave, Boubacar, create an understanding of how the cost of slavery in Mauritania could be kept low:

“Chains are for the slave who has just become a slave [...] But the multigeneration[al] slave, the slave descending from many generations, he is a slave even in his own head. And he is totally submissive. He is ready to sacrifice himself, even, for his master.” (Sutter, 2011)

From an economic perspective, this describe how the cost of control of the typical *slave of the tent* used to be very low in Mauritania due to what could be classified as mental chains. This can be compared to the cost of controlling the *new slaves*, where the salary of the supervisor was half of the harvest (Webb, 1985). So how could then mental chains be created? Concordant testimonies recorded by Fleischman (1994:88, 91) tell that since neither Quranic nor secular schools were open to *abeeds*, masters could make them believe they would go to hell if not being obedient. And despite abolition it was possible to keep rural *abeeds* ignorant about their new rights which was described by escapee Mostapha, who said knowledge about the 1981

abolition could only be learnt from black Mauritians in neighbouring communities whereupon masters routinely punished such contacts.

But a contradictory narrative highlighted in research about emancipation and the transformed roles of *haratines* demonstrate that such mental chains weakened with increased opportunities to free oneself (Maimone, 2013; McDougall, 2021a; Ruf, 1999). Thus was the low control cost mainly associated with the ability keep *abeeds* cut off from opportunities to enlighten themselves which would have been easier and therefore cheaper in distant and isolated communities compared to in populous areas. An example by Klein (1998) support this; in colonial times it was more common for *abeeds* living close to Senegal to free themselves than for those staying deep into the Sahara. Thus it would have taken even more effort to keep someone mentally chained as described above, by cut them off from everyone and in a buzzing city than cutting them off from a neighbouring village in the countryside. A more theoretical support for these observations and the decline in servitude in correlation with the growth of Nouakchott can be made by connecting the Mauritanian case with Acemoglu and Wolitzky's (2009) theory. As discussed in chapter 3 they theorised that with an increase of what they called outside option, meaning something to escape to, coercion decrease because otherwise the lure of this outside option would be stronger whereupon the cost of keeping people bonded increased.

Similarly McDougal (2021b) argues about the importance of cities and towns for emancipation. In a paper about African contexts in general, she points to how town slaves in Zanzibar were the elite among slaves since compared to their rural peers they had more opportunities and freedom, their work was not as physically demanding and they were more commonly freed. For discussion, it is interesting to contrast McDougall's argument with the shift in American slavery from plantations to urban settings as described by Fatah-Black (2020). Rather does he note how restrictions became even harsher because slaves remained crucial to economic activities whereupon owners were cautious about the opportunities slaves might come across in cities. This can be theoretically understood as abilities and incentives of slaveholders to pay the higher price of control matter. By applying this to Nouakchott, it is observed that many of the *beydane* migrants had little financial abilities to uphold coercion as they were themselves poor (McDougall, 2021a) and neither did the city provide vibrant commercial opportunities like those in American cities as described by Fatah-Black. Thus, economic incentives from 1968 and onward would have been insufficient to resist emancipation since masters could not extract enough value from *abeeds* to motivate the

increased control cost. This can be compared to slaveholders in 1905 who without the option to fully benefit from slaves as capital, did not have enough to lose to full heartedly resist emancipation.

7. Conclusion

This final chapter of this thesis begins with summarizing the decline of the two kinds of labour coercion as outlined in the former chapter as an empirical comparison. When thereafter discussing the results, potential counterarguments to this conclusion are addressed. This is followed by a summary on how this thesis contributes to the broader field of labour coercion by connecting the result back to the theoretical chapter of this thesis. This leads into finally addressing suggestions on how to further build upon the understanding from this thesis.

7.1. A comparison of two eras and two types of coercion

By studying Mauritania's long transition from slavery to freedom I have argued this process deals with two kinds of emancipation, slavery and servitude, and while the difference between the two might be small the mechanisms behind respective emancipation differ. This has been a central understanding when answering how changed circumstances affected direct economic incentives to accept emancipation.

As a reminder, this thesis was set to answer the following question, with specific focus on changes in credit markets prior to 1905 and the urbanisation prior to 1981.

“How did changed circumstances affect masters’ direct economic incentives to no longer maintain their right in people and hence motivate emancipation?”

This thesis has suggested that changed market conditions in the late 19th century and early 20th century changed slave-owners' ability to legally use slaves as a means to access capital which had previously been a common benefit of slaveholding. This was due to specific Islamic regulations regarding what property may be used as collateral. Therefore, when the French demanded abolition the Mauritanian slave-owners were less incentivised to insist on persistence than they most likely would have been if it had meant giving up valuable access to capital. To connect this back to the theoretical framework as summarised in Figure 3.2, slave owners' access to credit is connected with the acquisition price of slaves and thus ultimately supply and demand. This is clarified in Figure 7.1 below where demand, unlike supply, is highlighted as this was the changing factor during the 1890-1905 period in Mauritania.

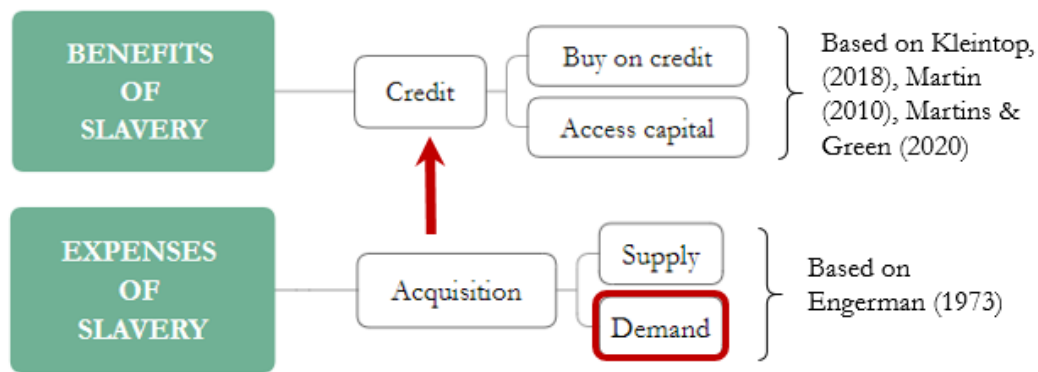


Figure 7.1. Incentives of keeping people in slavery

The second emancipation studied in this thesis was coloured by the first emancipation studied because it changed the factors deemed relevant. As the remaining *slaves of the tent* were not chattel they did not provide the same benefit as the so-called *new slaves* once had. Thus in the 1960's and 1970's it was rather the ability to extract the profit of labour which was the relevant economic incentive to keep *abeeds* unfree. And this period saw this benefit decline as the value of labour diminished while the cost of keeping people unfree increased. Because despite high demand for low-skilled labour in Nouakchott the supply of such labour was even higher which caused the extractable payback from forced labour minimal. This was demonstrated by wages falling toward subsistence. At the same time cost of control increased when *abeeds* found opportunities to reject submission. Not only did the city offer new ways to earn a living as highlighted by McDougall (2021a) which is an example of the so called outside options to servitude as Acemoglu and Wolitzky (2009) theorised, but also ideas about freedom could easily spread in the urban environment. Thus the strategy from rural areas to keep costs low by keeping *abeeds* ignorant was difficult and thus expensive to implement in the city. Engerman (1973:61) categorised this as “cost of enforcing slave conditions” while this thesis simply has labelled it increased cost of control. Consequently, less benefits but increased costs of keeping people unfree made masters less incentivised to struggle for persistence. These factors found relevant are shown in Figure 7.2, which like the preceding figure is based on the theoretical framework as pictured in Figure 3.2, and based on the empirical evidence discussed in section 6.2.2 it is here the increased control factor that is especially highlighted.

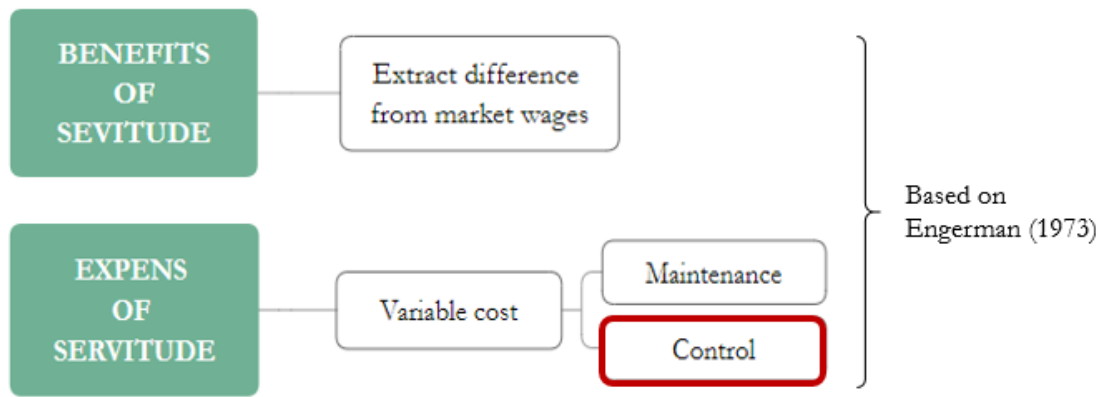


Figure 7.2. Incentives of keeping people in servitude

All in all this thesis have highlighted a fundamental difference between the Mauritanian slavery prior to 1905 and its servitude prior to 1981, where the benefits of the two differed and thus masters’ incentives to accept emancipation were dissimilar

7.2. Discussion of result

To understand Mauritania’s emancipation process this thesis has focused on direct economic incentives of masters. By doing so other potential influences such as political and cultural factors has been largely ignored. As a result it cannot be concluded to what extent specifically economic factors affected masters. Although I reason that even if cultural preferences could affect persistence, in drought affected Mauritania economics were a more likely force for decline because masters first and foremost needed to survive. This is the same counterargument made against Patterson (1977) in section 3.1 who reason that under pressured circumstances economic incentives reasonably triumph culture and politics.

While servitude generally declined during the drought years, this thesis has not concluded that master overall accepted emancipation. McDougall (2021a) who is a major source of this thesis mainly highlight poor herding families which is the description of a typical *znaga* master. The elite *zwaya*’s on the other hand benefitted in this period from financial support from Arab oil states (Bah & Cheikh, 2009). With the argument that servitude declined due to increased control costs, it cannot be generalised from observations of poor migrants with little choice but accepting emancipation that also masters with the ability to pay this higher price would no longer keep people unfree. If this was the case, it would have been a question about persistence rather than decline and thus not the focus of this thesis. It is possible that such

persistence would have been for other reasons than economics, such as cultural preferences, but based on insights gained in this thesis such a statement are solely speculative.

If following the line of thought of Patterson (1977) it could be argued that it was not motivated to reject the cultural factor when formulating the research question. But not only is it more hazardous to reliably establish culture and thus its effects, also does cultural change seems to have been more a factor for *abeeds* as their drive for emancipation was correlated with them breaking free from their mental chains as was proposed by McDougall (2021a) and Ruf (1999). But I would argue that such cultural change was not a relevant motivation for masters to accept emancipation given that sources provide several examples of masters who after several years claimed their right to inheritance as well as right to children of former *abeeds* (Amnesty International, 2002:19, 33-35). This indicate that manumission by masters did not arrive from any cultural epiphany while economic explanations as argued throughout this thesis are more reasonable explanations.

Finally is a thought offered regarding the first period studied. Concerning the Islamic impact on the credit market, the creditor could benefit despite the ban on interest since agreements included a right in profit (Lydon, 2005). Therefore it could be argued that also creditors might be incentivised to ignore regulations if they perceived opportunities to earn profits. Although I argue it remained beneficial for *zwaya* tribes, who largely controlled both trade and production (RAMS, 1980:67; Ruf, 1999:187; Webb, 1985), to obey the rules. Because with the risk linked with trusting partners and caravaners with fortunes large enough to cause bankruptcy, *zwaya*'s could capitalized on their moral high ground to earn this valuable trust. Theoretically this is supported by sociologist Bourdieu (1986) who modelled how social capital could be exchanged for financial capital as well and empirically by Lydon (2008), Bah and Cheikh (2009) who give examples of how *zwaya* tribes actually have benefitted economically from maintaining religious virtue.

7.3. Contribution and connection to current research

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis Mauritania is rarely addressed in the broader field of slave research, despite being the country where slavery officially persisted the longest. Though by strictly differentiating between slavery and servitude thesis has taken a somewhat provocative stance to argue slavery in fact was abolished already in 1905. By doing so the

Mauritanian case has become more academically comparable with slavery and servitude in other societies which is needed for this case to contribute to develop stronger explanatory models of coercive labour.

The two scholars, McDougall and Ruf, which this thesis mainly has built upon, analysed slaves and freed slaves from a sociological perspective of cultural change. Thanks to them we have an understanding about the active agents who were drivers of change. Instead this thesis has broadened the understanding by focusing on the other side, the passive agents, who seem to have preferred maintaining status quo but found themselves not able to withstand the force of the active agents. By doing so, an economic angle was found to be more relevant to explain this perspective and therefore this thesis connect Mauritania with the broader field of economics of labour coercion. In this field the frontier is at the moment concerned with creating better understanding of slave's role as capital. This perspective, and especially concerning slaves as a mean to access credit, has played a large part as the explanatory variable in the period preceding the abolition of 1905. As collateral is specifically regulated in Islamic legal codes, this thesis has not only drawn Mauritania into this scholarly discussion but also opened up for an approach to analyse slavery in decline in other Islamic countries.

In chapter 2 it was observed that many scholars focus on more developed agricultural economies when studying slavery despite Lagerlöf (2009) showed slavery was more prevalent in less developed economies. Among others, Fenoaltea (1984) give the example of how scale economics was a mean to lower the control cost. Though such production system did not exist in Mauritania (possible was the gum arabic cultivation an exception) but testimonies presented in this thesis instead describe "mental chains" as a mean to lower the control cost factor. This is therefore a difference between Mauritania and the more studied slave economies such as the U.S. Antebellum South.

7.4. Future research

Section 7.2 raised a question whether the elite who benefitted economically after independence lived on like before despite increasing costs for keeping people unfree. If this was the case it possibly took until the new millennium before coercive labour decreased also among this group. Mauritania made a theoretically unlikely turn toward democracy in 2005 which Girod and Walters (2012) argue was political move to secure aid. And as they highlight that the structure of Mauritania's banking system made it easier for elites to control incomes

from aid than from the main exports, fishing and iron ore, it could be imagined the elite saw not only political power but also the persistence of slavery and servitude to be a price worth paying to maintain cash flow. And indeed, slavery did become criminalized in 2007. To investigate such potential post-abolition decline other factors might therefore have to be taken into account than this thesis has done.

While this thesis has solely focused on Mauritania it would be relevant to conduct a general investigation on how the use of slaves as collateral influenced persistence and decline of slavery in countries and territories which have followed Islamic regulation. By comparing differences and similarities with other credit systems, the perspective on the institution of slavery would further broaden to form a yet more comprehensive basis for explanatory models in the field.

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