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Children, Agricultural Labor, and *Engagement à Temps* in the 1820s Senegal River Valley

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- ¹ In 1828 a woman named Pinda Amady gave birth to a daughter named Pinda Arouna at La Sénégalaise, a plantation owned by the Compagnie de Galam in the Senegal River Valley.¹ Pinda Amady worked as an *engagée à temps* for the Compagnie, assisting with growing cotton plants and grinding millet to feed the plantation's workers. *Engagement à temps* (indenture) was a labor system in France's African colonies that developed with the illegalization of the slave trade in the French empire.² After Haitian independence, France's imperial fortunes plummeted, and many administrators representing the conservative Bourbon Restoration believed that the construction of new plantation economies in Africa could replace Haiti's profits and revive France's economy (Miller 2005).³ Then, an 1817 royal ordonnance and 1818 law declared the slave trade abolished. French merchants illegally traded in slaves after these measures. France passed two more laws, one on 25 April 1827 and the other on 4 March 1831, with harsher sanctions in order to end the illegal slave trade (Daget 1971). Although the illegal slave trade continued in the 1820s, France's legal commitment to ending the trade in human beings left French colonial officials in Senegal in a quandary: how were they to acquire free workers for the cotton and indigo plantations they hoped to build in the Senegal River Valley to increase imperial profits after the Haitian Revolution? Thus, they created the system of *rachat* (redemption, or ransom) as a way of obtaining non-enslaved labor. Under this system, the colony's administrators and colonists

bought, or “redeemed,” captives on African slave markets, then forced a fourteen-year *engagement à temps* contract on the individual with a promise of “freedom” from servitude at the end of the term (Flory 2019: 58–59).⁴ Officials in Senegal argued that *rachat* and the subsequent *engagement à temps* contract was a beneficial training system for Africans that taught them to be productive workers and provided a solution to the challenge of ending the slave trade in the French empire, while also building a new plantation economy.

- 2 French administrators in Senegal identified children like Pinda Arouna as ideal workers for building an agricultural economy. In 1822, Governor Jacques François Roger described children, whom he defined as people under the age of sixteen, to be an ideal population source for *engagement à temps* because they were “easier to mold, to settle in the country.”⁵ By acquiring children, Roger hoped to create a loyal labor force committed to agricultural work, less likely than adults to run away and to abandon the plantations after the expiry of their contracts. In addition to administrators like Roger, Senegal’s colonists and habitants, a population comprised of wealthy free Black and mixed-race men and women who resided in towns like St Louis and Gorée, also participated in *rachat* and *engagement à temps*, including that of children, because of their inability to legally buy captives on slave markets. The preference for children had important implications for those caught in the slave trade in Senegambia. For example, a four-year-old boy named Yoro, a native of “Bambara country,” was forced into *engagement à temps* for the Compagnie de Galam in 1825.⁶ Out of a sample of 181 *engagement à temps* contracts registered in 1825 at Bakel, a French outpost in close proximity to the slaving networks of the Upper Senegal region, 55.8% per cent of the “redemptions” involved people under the age of sixteen.⁷ Under Roger’s direction, children came to comprise over half of all *rachats*.
- 3 Roger also hoped to gain from the labor of children born to mothers working as *engagées à temps*, including Pinda Amady. The 1823 decree that regulated *engagement à temps* in Senegal stated that “Any child who is born of a female *engagée à temps* will be free at birth, even if the child had been conceived before the emancipation of the mother.” In this sense, the 1823 decree built on slavery’s legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrum*, enshrined in Articles XII and XIII of the Code Noir, which stipulated that the legal status of a child followed that of the mother (Morgan 2018). However, this “free” status came with obligations. The law required the mother’s *engagiste* to provide food and clothing for the child until he or she could work; in exchange, the child had to labor for the mother’s *engagiste* until he or she “reached the age of twenty-one,” the age of majority in French legislation, “in compensation for the care he received during his childhood until the moment when he could make himself useful.”⁸ While the law ensured that the child would be born with free, not slave, status, it also ensured that *engagistes* could take advantage of a child’s labor until he or she reached the age of majority, in addition to the reproductive labor of *engagées à temps*. In this article, I argue that administrators, colonists, and habitants in 1820s Senegal preferred children over adults for *engagement à temps* because they hoped that children, seen as more malleable and coercible than adults, would grow up to be loyal adult workers committed to labor within the French colonial economy. To them, children represented a future labor force for an era in which the slave trade was illegal. More broadly, a focus on the importance of children to *engagement à temps* reveals the ways in which

colonial officials drew on slavery and the slave trade when developing new forms of “free labor” in the age of abolition.

- 4 While *engagement à temps* began in Senegal in the early 1820s, it became an important source of labor for much of the French Empire in the Atlantic and western Indian Ocean in subsequent decades. From the late 1810s to 1861, when France agreed to end African *rachat* in exchange for easier access to South Asian indentured workers from British-controlled India, the French forced approximately 70,000 Africans from across the continent into *engagement à temps* (Lovejoy 2000: 146–147). They comprised an important portion of the over 700,000 enslaved Africans coerced into indenture by European colonial governments claiming to end the slave trade from Africa between 1800 and 1920 (<https://liberatedafricans.org>), and of the estimated two million people who left their homes for indenture contracts abroad from 1831 and 1920 (Northrup 1995: 160). The first *engagés à temps* in Senegal, who numbered 3,077 between 1819 and 1844, when Governor Édouard Bouët-Willaumez prohibited the introduction of new *engagés à temps* into the colony, performed a variety of tasks (Zuccarelli 1962: 436; Flory 2015: 39). They worked on cotton and indigo plantations in the Senegal River Valley until the establishments failed by 1830 because of environmental challenges, including drought. They also worked in domestic service and hospitals, and adult men were forced to serve in France’s colonial troops (Faure 1920; Zuccarelli 1962: 426–427, 432–433; Echenberg 1991: 8). In the Indian Ocean in the 1820s, *engagés à temps* from mainland Madagascar and eastern Africa worked on coffee and clove plantations on the island of Sainte-Marie, located off Madagascar’s eastern coast (Sermet 2000). The system reached its fullest extent in the 1850s, with almost 40,000 *engagés à temps* working in the plantation economies of the French Caribbean, French Guiana, and Réunion after their *rachat* from various locations on the African continent including, but not limited to, West-Central Africa and Mozambique (Renault 1976; Chaillou-Atrous 2010; Flory 2015).
- 5 One of the central historiographical questions about the rise of indenture is the extent to which the practice constituted a new form of slavery. This debate has been particularly lively among historians of South Asian indentured labor in the British Empire who examine the coercion and trickery that agents used to recruit workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Tinker 1974; Northrup 1995). For the French Empire, historians of *rachat* and *engagement à temps* have referred to it as “une sorte d’apprentissage à la liberté,” “la liberté forcée,” or a “nouvelle servitude,” recognizing that, while *engagés à temps* were not slaves, they did not have autonomy over their bodies or lives (Zuccarelli 1962: 421; Renault 1976; Flory 2015: 22–23). For his part, Alessandro Stanziani argues that the characterization of indenture as a continuation of slavery, or as a “legal fiction,” implies that the abolition of slavery had little to no impact on millions of Africans in the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, and beyond (Stanziani 2013: 1219). Such works have sought to understand indenture and *engagement à temps* from the perspective of the workers themselves, probing the extent to which indenture mimicked key characteristics of slavery, including the erosion of laborers’ autonomy.
- 6 Children were not excluded from the various forms of indenture that expanded in the nineteenth century. A focus on children offers an opportunity to trace continuities in labor systems across abolition, especially the ways in which buyers preferred children not only as future adults, but also as productive workers and servants during childhood

itself (Klein 2011: 125). In his study of children and slavery in the Atlantic slave trade, Benjamin Lawrance characterizes the nineteenth century as the “age of child enslavement,” as the shift from legal to illegal slave trading led to slaveholders’ preference for more coercible captives. Children, deemed less likely to lead a rebellion or resist their owners, seemed to fit this demand (Lawrance 2014: 5; Duff 2022: 65–7). With the illegalization of the Atlantic slave trade came new ways to prey on children and to mold them to the economic needs of the colonial state. Érika Melek Delgado has estimated that 36.2 percent of the Africans taken from confiscated slave ships and landed in Sierra Leone from 1808 to September 1819 were children. She reveals the ways in which these children suffered from a lack of freedom on account of their condition as “liberated Africans” and as children perceived to be in need of adult guidance (Delgado 2020: 85). In the case of Senegal and elsewhere in Africa, slavery, including child slavery, continued outside of European colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Audra Diptee and Martin Klein have described the prevalence of child slavery in the late nineteenth century in Senegal’s interior, with Klein stating that slave caravans comprised of only children existed in the early 1880s (Klein 2011: 160; Diptee 2017: 215). Additionally, Bernard Moitt and Kelly Duke Bryant have described the ways in which Senegal’s guardianship system (*tutelle*), instituted in 1849 because of concern that children had turned to vagrancy after the 1848 abolition of slavery, continued to rely on the forced domestic labor of children for their guardians, often their former enslavers, into the twentieth century (Moitt 2011: 174–176; Bryant 2019: 212.) Bryant in particular raises the question of the agency of children under *tutelle*, as she reads the archives for evidence of children’s defiance and disobedience under the exploitative labor regime. In this way, Bryant’s scholarship intersects with that of scholars of gender and reproductive labor under Atlantic slavery who read archives “along the bias grain” to understand the ways in which the archive of slavery, almost entirely produced by white slave owners and administrators, predominantly reflect slaveholders’ perspectives, yet still offer glimpses into the actions and inner lives of people held in bondage (Fuentes 2016: 5; Hartman 2008).

- 7 To identify the preference for children among *engagés à temps* in Senegal’s agricultural sector, I analyze a variety of archival sources produced by French administrators in the 1820s. In the first section of this article, I read correspondence among officials alongside plantation reports to understand administrators’ motivations when they identified children as the ideal population for *engagement à temps*. In the second section, I analyze a series of *engagement à temps* contracts from 1825, primarily completed at Bakel, where most *rachats* occurred, to trace the prevalence of children.⁹ The year 1825 is instructive because it was after the construction of the bulk of the plantations, and before the drought of 1826 significantly damaged harvests (Nigro 2014: 158). In this section, I also analyze birth records from Richard Toll’s *état civil* from 1826 to 1829 to locate children who were born to mothers working on plantations as *engagées à temps*.¹⁰ The bulk of the article concerns itself with labor in the Senegal River Valley on plantations owned by the state, colonists, and habitants because administrators primarily envisioned *rachat* and *engagement à temps* as tools for acquiring people to labor in cotton and indigo fields. Children were an important part of this plan, since in the 1820s agriculture was seen as the colony’s economic future. It is important to note that children were also forced into domestic and trade labor in towns such as St Louis. Although this article’s focus is on agriculture because of the administration’s emphasis on that sector, I also describe children’s labor elsewhere when appropriate. In the final

section, I apply the methodologies pioneered by scholars such as Marisa Fuentes to wrestle with what archival documentation can and cannot tell us about children under *engagement à temps*. These methodologies are an important reminder that the silences that dominate the archive of slavery also characterize the archives of forced labor, including various forms of indenture in the nineteenth century.

The Construction of *Engagement à Temps* for Senegal River Valley Plantations

- 8 After the political and economic instability of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, France's Bourbon Monarchs retook the throne in 1814 and again in 1815 after Napoleon's "Hundred Days," hoping to revive imperial fortunes. The production of cash crops seemed pressing, especially because Haitian independence in 1804 meant that the metropole lost access to colonial Haiti's production of sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo. Various merchants, chambers of commerce, and administrators pushed cash crop production in Senegal, arguing that the colony appeared to be suited for cotton and indigo production.¹¹ After all, the region had long supported this production by indigenous cultivators, and both products had been cultivated in colonial Haiti alongside sugar and coffee (Kriger 1983). Julien Schmaltz, Senegal's governor and administrator from 1816, agreed. When Schmaltz arrived in St Louis, he attempted to broker treaties with indigenous rulers to obtain land and workers for the plantations he hoped to create. In 1819, he negotiated a treaty with the leaders of Waalo, a kingdom located along the Senegal River from the Atlantic coast to Fuuta Toro in the east. Schmaltz hoped that the river's regular floods would boost soil fertility for cotton and indigo production.¹² Waalo's rulers saw much to gain from an alliance with the French, since nearby powers, including the Trarza Emirate, claimed expensive tribute from their kingdom. Hence, Waalo's *brak* (elected hereditary ruler), Amar Faatim Mborso, hoped to rid himself of high tributes and to gain access to St Louis's port for trade. With these factors in mind, Schmaltz and the *brak* brokered the 1819 Treaty of Ndiaw, in which the *brak* agreed to let the French establish plantations and to furnish the French with free workers. Village heads would be paid four iron bars per worker.¹³ In exchange, the French government agreed to pay an annual sum of 10358,64 francs (Barry 1985: 217). However, Waalo's residents resented French incursions into their land and the obligation to work for the French for the benefit of their aristocratic leaders.¹⁴ They systematically destroyed dikes on the Senegal River to protest French claims to their land and labor (Barry 1998: 138–139). Despite such protests against French use of the land, Senegal's administrators continued to support cotton and indigo production within the kingdom's boundaries.
- 9 Given the prohibition on the slave trade and the locals' reluctance to work for the French, Schmaltz and his successors developed *engagement à temps* and *rachat*. While *engagement à temps* in Senegal built on a long history of white indentured laborers who moved from France to the French Americas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its more immediate precedent was the indenture of captives taken from intercepted slaving vessels in the British Empire.¹⁵ Because of anti-slave trade treaties with European nations other than France, the British Royal Navy had the right to intercept foreign slave ships and bring the human cargo to work in British colonies and outposts, especially Sierra Leone. In the case of France, a January 9, 1822, dispatch

stipulated that any slaves taken from confiscated ships would work for the government, preferably in agriculture, for fourteen years. However, the French Navy could only seize French slave trading vessels, and interception was generally understaffed and underfunded, so few workers were obtained through this mechanism in Senegal (Flory 2015: 36).¹⁶ As a consequence Senegal's administrators experimented with other ways to obtain *engagés à temps*, including *rachat*. In 1819, Schmaltz proposed the *rachat* of captives for military service in Senegal because European soldiers had difficulty adapting to the colony's climate (Echenberg 1991: 8–9). Subsequent governors further expanded *rachat*. Schmaltz's successor, Louis Jean Baptiste Le Coupé de Montereau, hoped to replace slavery with "engagements à terme" in order to support agriculture, commerce, and domestic service (quoted in Zuccarelli 1962: 424). Colonists and habitants came to support *rachat* and *engagement à temps* because they could obtain workers and maintain possession of their preexisting slaves, while obeying the legal prohibition of the slave trade.

- 10 Le Coupé collaborated with his eventual successor, Jacques François Roger, on ways to obtain *engagés à temps*. Under Le Coupé's administration, Roger tested new crops to develop in the "naturalization garden" at the Habitation du roi at Koïlel. As early as 1820, Le Coupé addressed a budgetary request to the Directeur général du ministère de la Maison du roi on behalf of Roger. Roger and Le Coupé requested 7500 francs to "redeem" twenty-five "captives" at the price of 300 francs per head. Any children born to these workers would be legally free and raised on the *habitation*, where they would learn to be "good farmers and good foremen (chefs d'ouvriers)."¹⁷ This request reveals that Le Coupé and Roger hoped that children born on the plantation would learn the value of agricultural labor from a young age. To them, *rachat* did not constitute slavery because it occurred on land, not at sea, and the French prohibition of the slave trade forbade the introduction of captives from overseas (Flory 2015: 39). Additionally, unlike slaves who were held in perpetuity, the victims of *rachat* had a legal guarantee to freedom after their *engagement à temps* contracts expired.
- 11 On March 15, 1822, Roger, by then governor, sent instructions to Bakel's commandant on how to implement *rachat* to obtain *engagés à temps* "for cultivating the land." He was to "redeem, and not buy" captives, then force a fourteen-year *engagement à temps* contract on them. When examining potential *engagés à temps*, the commandant was to prioritize two populations. First, he should obtain people from as far away as possible because they would be less likely to abscond, they would be cheaper, and their *rachats* would not promote conflict among neighboring populations. Second, Roger wanted the commandant to prioritize the *rachat* of children, whom he defined as anyone under the age of sixteen. Roger theorized that, with children, "we have a population that is easier to shape, to settle in the country, and to receive the impressions and habits that we want to give them in the interest of civilization."¹⁸ Similar to many slave traders in the nineteenth century, Roger judged children's emotional vulnerabilities, especially their craving for "security and protection," as signs of submissiveness and an ability to adapt to life as workers in French colonies (Lawrance 2014: 29). Roger also wrote that since the trans-Atlantic slave trade had become illegal, African traders could no longer sell their captives, which led to a glut of slaves on the markets.¹⁹ In Senegal, the French could not impose their laws of abolition beyond their colonial holdings at St Louis, Gorée, and trading posts, so many indigenous Africans continued to practice slavery according to their own traditions (Duff 2022: 48–60). Roger hoped to gain from the

continuation of internal slavery in Africa to obtain more workers, especially children, for agriculture.

- 12 A year later, on September 28, 1823, Roger passed a decree that regulated *rachat* and *engagement à temps*, which were already being practiced by the administration, colonists, and habitants. The decree instituted several mechanisms to differentiate the practices from the slave trade and slavery, including the requirement to file each *rachat* in the *état civil*. These files included biographical information on each *engagé à temps*, including their name, place of origin, the price paid for the *rachat*, the seller, the *racheteur*, and the *engagiste*, if different from the *racheteur*.²⁰ Additionally, the death or transfer of the *engagé à temps* to another *engagiste* had to be reported to the colony's administration (Flory 2015: 38). Furthermore, François Zuccarelli points out that it was forbidden to call these workers "captifs" or "esclaves," and good work and behavior could be rewarded with a reduction in their contract time or permission to be absent from work (Zuccarelli 1962: 431). Finally, if the *engagiste* did not treat the *engagé à temps* with "humanity and kindness," the worker could make a formal complaint to "any public official."²¹ While French administrators attempted to differentiate the practice from slavery through state oversight, *engagés à temps* may have experienced *rachat* differently. Roger "invited the chiefs of Bambara, Kaarta, and Kasson to direct their trade to Bakel," and once traders arrived at the post with humans to sell, a buyer paid the merchant in currency, often the value of six bolts of blue Indian *guinée* cloth, to purchase the captive in question.²² On seeing currency exchange hands, these *engagés à temps* may well have experienced the moment as one of purchase, not one of "redemption" (Flory 2019: 59–62).
- 13 Schmaltz, Le Coupé, and Roger envisaged *rachat* and *engagement à temps* as tools to obtain agricultural workers, many of whom worked on cotton and indigo plantations. These plantations increased in number under Roger's governorship. In September 1822, fifteen agricultural concessions boasted more than 800,000 cotton plants (Hardy 1921: 192). By the end of 1824, thirty-eight people had invested in agricultural establishments in Senegal.²³ By 1826, more than sixty existed (Zuccarelli 1962: 437). A variety of stakeholders invested in these plantations. Senegal's government administered a number of them, including Richard Toll, Faff, and the Habitation du roi at Koïlel, to serve as examples of the region's agricultural possibilities to the other land concessionaries (Hardy 1921: 186–187). The Compagnie de Galam operated a cotton plantation called La Sénégalaise, where Pinda Amady worked, located near the village of N'Diaw (Saulnier 1921: 81–95). A number of merchants, especially from Bordeaux and Marseille, and habitants of St Louis were involved in the growing agricultural sector (McLane 1986). At first, many habitants expressed reluctance to invest in cash crop production. Roger blamed this reluctance on a number of factors, including anxiety that agriculture might displace the political and economic status they had gained from the gum trade.²⁴ In order to encourage the population to invest in plantations, in 1822, Roger promised them free land concessions, advances on supplies, and bonuses (*primes*).²⁵ By the end of 1822, three habitants owned concessions on the Senegal River.²⁶ By 1825, more had become landholders, including a concession called the Quatre Soeurs that belonged to the Alins, a prominent habitant family based in St Louis.²⁷ A wide variety of actors invested in Senegal's agricultural concessions and would have experienced the same need to obtain non-enslaved workers.

14 Once purchased at trading posts such as Bakel, many *engagés à temps* went on to work at these agricultural establishments. For example, thirty-five men, nineteen women, and twenty-eight male children worked at La Sénégalaise in 1827.²⁸ In the first half of the 1820s, *engagés à temps* on the plantations spent much of their time planting and tending cotton plants.²⁹ They also worked on Richard Toll's mission to "naturalize" new crops to Senegal, including orange and lemon trees, and to improve the production of plants native to the region, such as peppers, rice, and native strands of cotton and indigo (Hardy 1921: 162–169; Nigro 2014: 148). The work was similar on privately owned plantations; for example, in March 1823, on the Habitation de Donkill, fifteen workers, seven of whom were *engagés à temps*, ploughed new land for cotton plants before the rainy season began.³⁰ After 1825, *engagés à temps* spent more time cultivating indigo, as plantation owners shifted their attention away from cotton because insufficient weeding, flooding, and soil salinity frequently damaged the cotton plants and drove down profits (Hardy 1921: 134).³¹ Finally, workers produced subsistence vegetables, legumes, and grains for consumption.³² Women were particularly important for preparing millet, a staple grain, for meals (Jones 2013: 49). Overall, *rachat* was key for obtaining workers to perform a wide variety of tasks on Senegal's plantations, and from the beginning of *engagement à temps*, Roger identified children as a key population source.

Mechanisms of Obtaining Children for *Engagement à Temps*

15 Many children entered this world of plantation labor through the *rachat* process, in accordance with Roger's vision. A close examination of the 101 children who were "redeemed" at Bakel in 1825 reveals that some became *engagés à temps* alongside their mothers.³³ For example, on June 10, 1825, a representative of the Compagnie de Galam purchased a woman named Fateman Gangari together with her eighteen-month-old child.³⁴ This occurred seven times in the sample group. In other instances, young children with no accompanying parent underwent the *rachat* process. Six children under five years of age were "redeemed," including a two-and-a-half-year-old girl named Nielely. The Compagnie de Galam employed a high number of children. Of the seventy-seven *rachats* by the Compagnie de Galam in 1825, forty-seven were under the age of sixteen.³⁵ It is difficult to determine the children's tasks, given the Compagnie's various trading networks and its ownership of La Sénégalaise, which employed twenty-eight children in 1827.³⁶ Since the Compagnie sometimes obtained *engagés à temps* for the government, it is possible that these children were passed into government employment (Zuccarelli 1962: 432).³⁷ The Compagnie prioritized male children in its purchases; its representatives purchased seventeen girls alongside thirty boys in 1825. Perhaps the Compagnie wanted boys who could work in trade on the Senegal River or agricultural labor on La Sénégalaise, while girls may have been used for domestic tasks, including pounding millet.³⁸ Finally, while children comprised 51.8 per cent of *engagés à temps* at La Sénégalaise, they comprised less than one per cent of *engagés à temps* working on government-owned plantations in 1828.³⁹ This suggests that private colonists agreed with Roger's assertions that children were crucial to agricultural and domestic labor in the colony.⁴⁰

- 16 In addition to the children who underwent *rachat* at posts like Bakel, those born to women who worked as *engagées à temps* were also forced to labor for their mother's *engagiste*. In the 1825 sample group of *rachats* at Bakel, 102 men and boys were "redeemed," alongside seventy-seven women and girls, and some of these women went on to give birth to children while under *engagement à temps*.⁴¹ In accordance with the 1823 decree, their children were born with the requirement to labor for the *engagiste* until the age of twenty-one. It is important to note that the experience of children born to *engagées à temps* differed from children who experienced *rachat*. Under *rachat*, women, children, and men experienced commodification at the moment of their sale, as they were exchanged for bolts of blue Indian *guinée* cloth or francs. In contrast, under the 1823 decree, children born to *engagées à temps* did not experience *rachat*, but instead were born with the expectation that they would compensate for the care they received in childhood through work. Even with this difference in status, it is important to note that French administrators wanted to take advantage of the labor of these children, who were listed as *engagés à temps* (albeit without *rachat*) in the *état civil*, and of the reproductive labor of their mothers, who birthed future workers.
- 17 Richard Toll's *état civil* provides information on eighteen children born on plantations in the Senegal River Valley from 1826 to 1829. In some cases, children were born to parents who were both *engagés à temps*. For example, in 1826, a boy named Charles Latir was born to two *engagés à temps* who worked at Richard Toll; the same was true of a baby boy named Mancoudou, born at Richard Toll in 1828.⁴² Other children were born to mothers who worked on the plantations and fathers who worked elsewhere. In 1829, an *engagée à temps* named Founé who worked at La Sénégalaise gave birth to a child named Abdoul Koumba. The father, a free worker named Alimana from St Louis, appeared before the *état civil* officer to register the birth.⁴³ Perhaps he worked as a *laptot*, or sailor, in the Senegal River trade, which would have enabled him to travel between St Louis and La Sénégalaise.
- 18 Richard Toll's *état civil* offers the only glimpse available into the lives of Pinda Amady and Pinda Arouna, the mother and daughter who lived at La Sénégalaise in 1828. The most striking aspect of this entry is that the pair had the same name. No father is listed on the record.⁴⁴ The shared name "Pinda" may be evidence of Pinda Amady naming her child after another family member or perhaps after herself to mark her daughter as her own. In West African societies, naming practices carry significant meaning for families and lineages (Mann 2002: 310–311). For example, a Wolof tradition called *turando* involves naming children after another family member, a practice that signifies "the special relationship that exists between a child and his or her namesake" (Jones 2013: 88). The document does not list Pinda Amady's place of origin or preexisting kinship ties, but given the pair's proximity to Wolof tradition and culture, and the broader importance of names in the region, it is possible that the mother gave her daughter a name that held special significance for herself or her broader kin networks.
- 19 A mere fifteen days after Pinda Arouna's birth, she died of unspecified causes.⁴⁵ The newborn's birth and death records give no insight into the emotions that Pinda Amady may have felt after she discovered her daughter's passing. In this sense, the archival documents about people like Pinda Amady and, more broadly, the children forced into *engagement à temps*, represent the perspectives of French notaries and officials who were primarily concerned with building a viable labor force for the colony. Notaries produced *état civil* documents that broke down workers' lives into births and deaths.

Governors and commandants wrote letters that reflected their central contention that *rachat* and *engagement à temps* represented a break from the slave trade because the victims were promised eventual freedom from servitude. We know much less about how children felt as they underwent *rachat*, or as they grew up on cotton and indigo plantations, because the few documents that attest to their existence are comprised of birth and death records, work contracts, and descriptions of their labor. These sources and their accompanying biases remind us that archival methodologies pioneered by scholars of reproductive labor under slavery can be applied to people caught in indentured labor schemes in the nineteenth century (Fuentes 2016; Morgan 2018). We cannot know Pinda Amady's emotional reaction to her newborn daughter's death. However, we can read her choice to give her daughter a shared name as evidence of the love that she felt for her child while caught in a labor regime constructed on the legal architecture of slavery and the slave trade.

Conclusion

- 20 By 1830, Senegal's experiment in cotton and indigo plantations had largely failed because of drought, lack of profit, and a realization among administrators that the colony's climate and soil could not support tropical agriculture (Nigro 2014: 157–61). After the collapse of the plantations, the colony's *engagés à temps* continued to work in a variety of other professions, including the hospitals in St Louis and Gorée or in domestic service. Those who worked at Richard-Toll, the Habitation du roi at Koïlel, and Dagana gained their "affranchissement définitif" (Zuccarelli 1962: 432, 437). By the 1840s, Senegal's administration came to believe that frequent abuses of *engagés à temps* had turned the practice into a disguised form of slavery. For example, in 1840, a magistrate stated that 202 *engagés à temps* who had contracts due to expire in 1835 or 1836 in St Louis were still being held under *engagement à temps* (Zuccarelli 1962: 440). In fact, Trevor Getz estimates that only 102 *engagés à temps* received their "affranchissement définitif" at the end of their contracts (Getz 2004: 50). With this in mind, Governor Bouët-Willaumez forbade the introduction of any new *engagés à temps* in January 1844. Four years later, the system was prohibited by the same decree that abolished slavery across the empire. However, *rachat* and *engagement à temps* were revived in the 1850s to obtain plantation workers after planters in the Caribbean, French Guiana, and Réunion complained about the quality of work performed by formerly enslaved people (Renault 1976; Chaillou-Atrous 2010; Flory 2015). They also continued to be used to obtain soldiers for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* into the late nineteenth century (Echenberg 1991).
- 21 In sum, a close study of the importance of children for the beginning of *engagement à temps* in 1820s Senegal reveals the continuities between the slave trade and the forced labor practices that proliferated alongside abolition. Administrators, colonists, and habitants sought to prey on the emotional insecurities of children to mold a new labor force that would not abandon the French colonial economy at the end of their work contracts. The archive of *engagement à temps*, including administrative correspondence and the *état civil*, reveals French perspectives on the practice, especially the idea that colonists "redeemed" Africans who would otherwise remain caught in slave trading networks. These documents, produced by the people who gained from *engagement à temps*, reveal much less about the perspectives of the workers themselves, especially

children, some of whom were younger than five years old and who survived slave trading networks with no parental figure to provide them with care and support. The stories of children like Pinda Arouna remind us that children offer a window into a society's hopes for the future because they were seen as more adaptable and coercible than adults. Because children represent the future, they proved to be key for redesigning labor systems as abolitionism grew in the nineteenth century.

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List of abbreviations

- AN (Archives nationales)
- ANOM (Archives nationales d'outre-mer)
- ANS (Archives nationales du Sénégal)
- EC (État civil)
- FM (Fonds ministériel)
- GEN (Généralités)
- SEN (Sénégal)
- SG (Série géographique)

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– Fonds ministériel, Série géographique, Généralités, carton 152, dossier 1273

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- Fonds ministériel, Série géographique, Sénégal, carton XIII, dossier 17A
- Fonds ministériel, Série géographique, Sénégal, carton XIV, dossier 18
- Fonds ministériel, Série géographique, Sénégal, carton XIII, dossier 18A
- Fonds ministériel, Série géographique, Sénégal, carton XIV, dossier 19
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NOTES

1. Acte de naissance (n° 2) de Pinda Arouna, 5 avril 1828. Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), État civil (EC), Sénégal (SEN), Richard Toll, 1828. All links to Richard Toll's *état civil* are listed in the Bibliography by year. In archival documentation in the 1820s, the Compagnie de Galam appears under various names, including "Compagnie commerciale et agricole de Galam et de Oualo" and the "Compagnie commerciale de Galam" (Saulnier 1921: 54).
2. *Rachat* and *engagement à temps* were not practiced in the Antilles or Île de Bourbon (contemporary Réunion) in the 1820s. In this period, French territory in West Africa was minimal, including Île de Gorée, Saint-Louis, and various *comptoirs* on the coast. In Waalo, located on the Senegal River, local political authorities rented land to French colonists and administrators. Finally, France claimed the island of Sainte-Marie off Madagascar's eastern coast.
3. Développements sur le projet de colonisation dans les établissements français d'Afrique, 8 juillet 1817. ANOM Fonds ministériel (FM) Série géographique (SG) XIII 18A.
4. I use quotations around "redeem" to signify that the workers may have felt *rachat* to be closer to a purchase, not a "redemption."

5. Roger au commandant, n° 2, 15 mars 1822, Archives nationales du Sénégal (ANS) 3B22. The definition of “child” varies across time and space. In the era of the Atlantic slave trade, slavers defined children by height, whereas many African societies focused on “generations,” not height or age. See Klein 2011: 125; Diptee 2017: 210; Delgado 2020: 83.
6. Acte de libération d’une esclave rachetée, 3 novembre 1825, n° 180/3. ANS 4Z2(15). The contract was filed in November, although the *rachat* took place on June 10, 1825.
7. Data collected from ANS 4Z2(15) and 4Z2(16). The 4Z2(15) carton from St Louis’s *état civil* includes *rachats* completed at Bakel, almost entirely in 1825, then sent to the notarial service at St Louis. Carton 4Z2(16) primarily contains *rachats* completed in 1826, but forty were completed in 1825, then sent to St Louis in the first months of 1826. Most *rachats* occurred at French posts in Senegambia with proximity to slave markets, especially Bakel, and also the *comptoir* of Albréda, Sédhiou in Casamance, and near African-Portuguese villages of Cachéo, Bissau, and the Bissagos archipelago. Few occurred in St Louis and Gorée because slaveholders there did not want to lose access to their human property through *rachat* (Flory 2019: 61).
8. Arrêté sur le régime des engagés à temps, 28 septembre 1823, n° 6, *Ministère de la Marine et des colonies, Sénégal, Bulletin administratif des actes du gouvernement depuis le 28 mai 1819 jusqu’au 31 décembre 1842*, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1844, pp. 67–69.
9. The decree of September 22, 1823 that regulated *engagement à temps* required that *rachats* be completed before a *greffier* or an officer of the *état civil*. See Arrêté sur le régime des engagés à temps, 28 septembre 1823, n° 6, *Ministère de la Marine et des colonies, Sénégal, Bulletin administratif...*, p. 67. A subsequent decree of December 31, 1825 stipulated that the *état civil* of *engagés à temps* had to be recorded in supplementary registers in the interior’s establishments, in addition to St. Louis and Gorée (Zuccarelli 1962: 429).
10. Births in government- and privately-owned establishments such as La Sénégalaise were registered with Richard Toll’s *état civil* beginning in 1826.
11. Mémoire sur l’établissement d’une colonie au Sénégal, pour la culture des denrées coloniales, par des nègres indigènes, 14 décembre 1816, par les membres composant La Chambre de Commerce de Nantes. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 17A.
12. Développements sur le projet de colonisation dans les établissements français d’Afrique, 8 juillet 1817. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 18A.
13. Traité avec Brak et les principaux chefs du royaume du Waalo pour la formation d’établissements de culture libre dans leur pays, 8 mai 1819. ANS 3B91.
14. Boubacar Barry states, “land ownership was tied to production and reproduction relationships. It could not be acquired as a simple commodity.” This meant that land could not be divorced from the social context and use values that undergirded it (Barry 1998: 30).
15. Rapport au Conseil des ministres, octobre 1821. ANOM FM SG Généralités (GEN) 152/1273.
16. The French also landed intercepted slaves at Libreville in Gabon (Jean-Baptiste 2014: 16).

17. Le Coupé au directeur général du ministère de la Maison du Roi, 27 septembre 1820. Archives nationales (AN) O/3/872 (Maison du roi). I extend my thanks to Mary Dewhurst Lewis for sharing this document with me.
18. Roger au commandant, n° 2, 15 mars 1822. ANS 3B22. Roger made this request in several subsequent letters to Bakel's commandants, including n° 3, 26 mai 1826; n° 9, 8 août 1826. ANS 3B22.
19. Roger au commandant, n° 2, 15 mars 1822. ANS 3B22.
20. Arrêté sur le régime des engagés à temps, 28 septembre 1823, n° 6, *Ministère de la Marine et des colonies, Sénégal, Bulletin administratif...*, p. 67. Some *engagistes* employed representatives to buy *engagés à temps* on their behalf. For example, on September 25, 1825, Lecontier "redeemed" twelve children "on behalf of" the Compagnie de Galam. Acte de libération d'une esclave rachetée, 25 septembre 1825, n° 95-106. ANS 4Z2(15).
21. Arrêté sur le régime des engagés à temps, 28 septembre 1823, n° 6, *Ministère de la Marine et des colonies, Sénégal, Bulletin administratif...*, p. 68.
22. Roger au commandant, n° 4, 8 avril 1823. ANS 3B22. For a *rachat* involving *guinée* cloth, see Acte de libération d'une esclave rachetée, 3 août 1825, n° 44. ANS 4Z2(15).
23. Tableau des établissements de culture existant au Sénégal, 1^{er} mai 1825. ANS Q16.
24. Letter from Roger, undated, in a folder marked 19 Mars 1820. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 19A. I extend my thanks to Mary Dewhurst Lewis for sharing this document with me.
25. Proclamation du 1^{er} mars 1822. Reprinted in *Gazette de France*, 6 May 1822, p. 2. I extend my thanks to Mary Dewhurst Lewis for sharing this document with me.
26. Rapport au commandant et administrateur sur le recensement des cultures, n° 13, par Brunet, 22 avril 1823. ANS Q16. The report is dated as 1823, but the information was collected in 1822.
27. Tableau des établissements de culture, existant au Sénégal 1^{er} mai 1825. ANS Q16. The Allains (also spelled as Alin) were a family of free Blacks from Martinique who moved to St Louis in 1799. Jean-Jacques Alin was involved in in the gum trade, owned an *établissement* in 1823, and served as mayor from 1829 to 1848. He also "redeemed" an eight-year-old child named Salouba in 1826. See Acte de libération d'un esclave racheté, Salouba, 5 janvier 1826, n° 4. ANS 4Z2(16). (Jones 2013: 189, 20).
28. Rapport fait le 14 mars 1827 par la commission déléguée par le consul d'administration de la Compagnie de Galam et Walo sur la situation de La Sénégalaise, March 1827. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 7B.
29. Rapport au commandant et administrateur sur le recensement des cultures, n° 13, par Brunet, 22 avril 1823, Richard-Toll. ANS Q16.
30. Rapport au commandant et administrateur sur le recensement des cultures, n°13, par Brunet, 22 avril 1823, Donkill. ANS Q16. *Engagés à temps* worked alongside people with different legal statuses, including those who had been enslaved prior to the abolition of the slave trade and "rented" workers from nearby regions, including Cayor and Fouta (Hardy 1921: 148; Zuccarelli 1962: 432). Although agricultural workers had a variety of legal statuses, plantation reports hint that some employers viewed *engagés à temps* and slaves as interchangeable. One report stated that an indigo plantation of sixty hectares "possessed twenty slaves or *engagés* for fourteen years." Additions aux développements concernant la statistique du Sénégal, 1826 et 1827. ANS Q16.

31. For example, see Rapport au commandant et administrateur sur le recensement des cultures, n° 13, par Brunet, 22 avril 1823, Boucaline et Besuchet. ANS Q16.
32. Rapport au commandant et administrateur sur le recensement des cultures, n° 13, par Brunet, Boucaline et Besuchet, 22 avril 1823. ANS Q16.
33. Statistics compiled from ANS 4Z2(15) and 4Z2(16).
34. Acte de libération d'une esclave rachetée, Fateman Gangari, 3 novembre 1825, n° 180/3. ANS 4Z2(15). Although the document is dated 3 November 1825, the *rachat* occurred on 10 June 1825. Fateman Gangari's age is not included.
35. Statistics compiled from ANS 4Z2(15) and 4Z2(16). For Nieley's *rachat*, see Acte de libération d'une esclave rachetée, Nieley, 3 novembre 1825, n° 180/37. ANS 4Z2(15).
36. Rapport fait le 14 mars 1827 par la commission déléguée par le consul d'administration de la Compagnie de Galam et Walo sur la situation de La Sénégalaise, mars 1827. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 7B.
37. La Sénégalaise had 42 hectares of cotton and indigo production in 1826. See État indiquant l'étendue et la nature des cultures formées au Sénégal, 1826. ANOM SG SEN XIII/39A.
38. Statistics compiled from ANS 4Z2(15) and 4Z2(16).
39. For La Sénégalaise, see Rapport fait le 14 mars 1827 par la commission déléguée par le consul d'administration de la Compagnie de Galam et Walo sur la situation de La Sénégalaise, mars 1827. ANOM FM SG SEN XIII 7B. For the government establishments, see État numérique des noirs du Roi engagés à temps indiquant les Accroissements et les Diminutions survenus parmi eux pendant l'année 1827 et leur effectif au 1^{er} janvier 1828. ANOM FM SG SEN XIV 19.
40. For example, a St Louis woman named Henrietta "redeemed" a woman named Emma and her child, perhaps to work in her household. See Acte de libération d'une esclave rachetée, Emma, 3 novembre 1825, n° 180/39, ANS 4Z2(15).
41. Statistics compiled from ANS 4Z2(15) and 4Z2(16).
42. Acte de naissance, n° 1, Charles Latir, 11 février 1826. ANOM EC SEN Richard Toll 1826. Acte de naissance, n° 1, Mancodou, 15 janvier 1828. ANOM EC SEN Richard Toll 1828.
43. Acte de naissance, sans numéro, Abdoul Koumba, 15 mai 1829. ANOM EC SEN Richard Toll 1829.
44. Acte de naissance, n° 2, Pinda Arouna, 5 avril 1828. ANOM EC SEN Richard Toll 1828.
45. Acte de décès, n° 3, Pinda Arouna, 20 avril 1828. ANOM EC SEN Richard Toll 1828. The documents do not specify Pinda Amady's faith, so it is difficult to determine religion's role in the naming.

ABSTRACTS

I examine the preference for children under *engagement à temps* (indenture) in Senegal, especially the Senegal River Valley, in the 1820s. In the late 1810s and early 1820s, Senegal's administrators wished to build cotton and indigo plantations in the Senegal River Valley to replace profits lost after the turbulence of the Age of Revolutions, especially the loss of colonial Haiti, which had been France's most profitable colony. However, France's 1817 prohibition of the slave trade signaled to administrators that they would have to obtain non-enslaved workers for the plantations they wished to build. Thus, they created *rachat* (redemption) and *engagement à temps*. Under this system, Senegal's administrators, colonists, and habitants bought captives on African slave markets, "redeemed" the captive from slavery, then forced a fourteen-year *engagement à temps* contract on the individual with the promise of eventual "freedom" from servitude. Senegal's administrators, especially Governor Jacques François Roger, prioritized obtaining children, whom they defined as anyone under the age of sixteen, for this practice because they saw children as a docile labor force which would more easily take root in the colony, especially in its nascent plantation sector. By acquiring children, Roger hoped to create highly coercible workers committed to agriculture who would not abandon the plantations after the expiration of their contracts. Using correspondence among Senegal's administrators, I trace the reasoning behind the preference for people under the age of sixteen, in addition to the two primary mechanisms used to acquire children. The first mechanism was *rachat*. An examination of *rachats* registered at Bakel in 1825, located in the notarial archives of St Louis at the Archives nationales du Sénégal, reveals that 59.5 per cent of *rachats* involved people under the age of sixteen. Second, the September 28, 1822 decree that regulated *engagement à temps* in the colony stated that any child born to a mother working as an *engagée à temps* had to work for the mother's *engagiste* until the age of twenty-one, the age of majority in French legislation, in exchange for the care they had received in childhood. While this group of children did not experience *rachat*, the law enabled administrators to take advantage of their physical labor in addition to the reproductive labor of their mothers. I argue that the abolition of the slave trade forced French administrators, colonists, and habitants in 1820s Senegal to envision new ways to build a stable laboring population for the plantation economy they hoped to build along the Senegal River; because of free labor shortages in the region, *rachat* and *engagement à temps* appeared to be a solution. Children, seen as malleable and more coercible than adults, came to be seen as a key component of this workforce because administrators and colonists hoped they would grow up to be adults loyal to the French colonial economy. I also argue that historiographical methodologies pioneered by scholars of gender and reproduction under Atlantic slavery provide a useful way of grappling with the perspectives of people forced into *engagement à temps*. Overall, a focus on the importance of children to *engagement à temps* allows us to probe the continuities that tie together slavery and the slave trade, on the one hand, and on the other, the forced labor practices proliferated alongside abolition.

J'analyse le désir d'avoir des enfants chez les personnes engagées à temps (sous indenture) au Sénégal, en particulier dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal durant les années 1820. À la fin des années 1810 et au début de la décennie suivante, les administrateurs du Sénégal étaient partagés entre deux impératifs. D'un côté, ils souhaitaient établir des plantations de coton et d'indigo dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal pour compenser les baisses de profits liées aux secousses de l'âge des révolutions, en particulier la perte de l'Haïti colonial, qui avait été la colonie française la plus

rentable. D'un autre côté, l'interdiction par la France de la traite des esclaves en 1817 leur fit comprendre qu'ils devraient se procurer des travailleurs non asservis pour travailler dans les plantations qu'ils désiraient établir. Dès lors, ils optèrent pour le rachat et l'engagement à temps. Dans ce système, les administrateurs du Sénégal, les colons et les habitants se procuraient des captifs sur les marchés d'esclaves africains, c'est-à-dire « rachetaient » les captifs-esclaves, moyennant un engagement à temps contractuel obligatoire de quatorze ans pour chaque individu avec la promesse à terme d'un « affranchissement » de la servitude. Les administrateurs du Sénégal, en particulier le gouverneur Jacques-François Roger, avaient comme priorité de se procurer des enfants, qu'ils définissaient comme toute personne de moins de seize ans, pour cette entreprise parce qu'ils les voyaient comme une force de travail docile qui serait plus facile à enraciner dans la colonie, notamment dans le secteur naissant des plantations. En faisant l'acquisition d'enfants, Roger espérait former des travailleurs hautement disciplinables, dévoués à l'agriculture, et qui n'abandonneraient pas les plantations après l'expiration de leur contrat. En m'appuyant sur la correspondance entre les administrateurs du Sénégal, je reconstitue leur raisonnement concernant la préférence pour les personnes âgées de moins de seize ans, en plus des deux mécanismes principaux mis en place pour acheter des enfants : le rachat et l'engagement à temps. Une analyse des rachats enregistrés à Bakel en 1825, puis classés dans les archives notariales de Saint-Louis au sein des Archives nationales du Sénégal, révèle en premier lieu que 59,5 % des rachats concernaient des personnes âgées de moins de seize ans. En second lieu, le décret du 28 septembre 1822 qui réglementait l'engagement à temps dans la colonie statuait que tout enfant né d'une mère travaillant comme engagée à temps devait travailler pour l'engagiste de la mère jusqu'à l'âge de vingt et un ans, l'âge de la majorité dans la loi française, en échange du soin qu'il recevait dans l'enfance. Ces enfants n'avaient pas connu le rachat, mais la loi permettait aux administrateurs de tirer profit de leur travail physique en plus du travail de reproduction de leurs mères. Une étude de l'état civil qui contient les actes de naissance de ces enfants dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal révèle qu'ils étaient considérés comme engagés à temps dès la naissance. Plus largement, je soutiens l'idée que l'abolition de la traite des esclaves obligea les administrateurs français, les colons et les habitants du Sénégal des années 1820 à concevoir de nouvelles façons de constituer une force de travail stable pour l'économie de la plantation qu'ils espéraient établir le long du fleuve Sénégal et, en raison des pénuries de main-d'œuvre libre dans la région, le rachat et l'engagement à temps semblaient être pour eux une solution. Les enfants, perçus comme malléables et plus disciplinables que les adultes, en vinrent à être considérés comme l'élément clé de cette force de travail, parce que les administrateurs et les colons espéraient qu'ils deviendraient des adultes loyaux à l'économie coloniale française. Plus généralement, le fait de porter l'attention sur l'importance des enfants dans le système de l'engagement à temps nous permet d'examiner les continuités qui relient esclavage et traite des esclaves d'un côté, et de l'autre, les pratiques de travail forcé qui proliféraient en parallèle de l'abolition.

Analizo el deseo de tener hijos de las personas contratadas (bajo *indenture*) en Senegal, en particular, en el valle del río Senegal en 1820. A finales de 1810 y a principios de la siguiente década, los administradores de Senegal se encontraban divididos entre dos imperativos. Por un lado, querían hacer plantaciones de algodón y añil en el valle del río Senegal para compensar la disminución de los beneficios por los vaivenes de la era de las revoluciones, principalmente por la pérdida de Haití, que había sido la colonia francesa más rentable. Por otro lado, la prohibición de la trata de esclavos de 1817 en Francia les hizo comprender que deberían procurarse trabajadores libres para las plantaciones que planeaban establecer. Desde entonces crearon la compra y el contrato. En ese sistema, los administradores de Senegal, los colonos y los habitantes conseguían cautivos en los mercados de esclavos africanos, es decir “compraban” cautivos esclavos mediante un compromiso por contrato obligatorio de catorce años para cada individuo

con la promesa de una liberación de la servidumbre al terminarse el contrato. Los administradores de Senegal, sobre todo el gobernador Jacques-François Roger, tenían una prioridad: conseguir niños, o sea menores de dieciséis años, porque los veían como una fuerza de trabajo dócil más fácil de arraigar en la colonia, en particular, en el incipiente sector de las plantaciones. Adquiriendo niños, Roger esperaba formar trabajadores dedicados a la agricultura, muy disciplinables, que no se marcharían de las plantaciones luego de que expirase su contrato. Basándome en la correspondencia de los administradores de Senegal, procuro reconstituir las razones que sustentaban dicha preferencia así como los dos principales mecanismos para adquirir niños. El primero es el de la compra. Un análisis de las compras registradas en Bakel en 1825 y, más tarde, clasificadas en los archivos notariales de Saint-Louis que se encuentran en los archivos nacionales de Senegal, revela, ante todo, que 59,5% de las compras conciernen menores de dieciséis años. El segundo es el decreto del 28 de septiembre de 1822 que regía la contratación en la colonia y establecía que todo niño nacido de una madre contratada tenía que trabajar para el contratista de la madre hasta sus veintiún años, edad correspondiente a la mayoría según la legislación francesa, a cambio de los cuidados recibidos durante la infancia. Esos niños no habían conocido la compra pero la ley autorizaba a que sus administradores sacasen provecho de su trabajo físico amén del trabajo de reproducción de sus madres. Un estudio del registro civil, que contiene las partidas de nacimiento de esos niños en el valle del río Senegal, revela que desde su nacimiento se los consideraba como contratados. De manera más general, sostengo la idea que la abolición de la trata de esclavos obligó a los administradores franceses, colonos y habitantes de Senegal a considerar desde 1820 nuevas formas de constituir una fuerza de trabajo estable para la economía de la plantación que querían establecer a la vera del río Senegal y, debido a la penuria de mano de obra libre en la región, la compra y la contratación parecían ser una solución para ellos. Los niños, percibidos como maleables y más disciplinables que los adultos, fueron considerados como un elemento clave de esta fuerza de trabajo porque los administradores y los colonos esperaban que se convirtieran en adultos leales a la economía colonial francesa. Prestar atención a la importancia de los niños en el sistema de contratación nos permite examinar las continuidades que vinculan esclavitud y trata de esclavos por un lado, y, por el otro, prácticas de trabajo forzado que proliferaron en paralelo a la abolición.

Examino o desejo por ter filhos das pessoas *engagées à temps* (por contrato limitado) no Senegal, em particular no Vale do Rio Senegal, durante os anos 1820. No final dos anos 1810 e início da década seguinte, os administradores do Senegal foram presos entre duas necessidades. Por um lado, eles queriam implantar *plantations* de algodão e de indigo no Vale do Rio Senegal para recuperar as perdas resultando das turbulências do período das Revoluções, nomeadamente da perda do Haiti colonial, que tinha sido a colônia francesa mais proveitosa. Por outro lado, a lei francesa de 1817, proibindo o comércio de escravos, obrigava os administradores a procurar trabalhadores livres para as *plantations* que pretendiam fundar. Eles criaram assim o *rachat* (resgate) e o *engagement à temps*. Conforme esse sistema, os administradores do Senegal, os colonos e os habitantes compravam cativos nos mercados africanos de escravos, « resgatavam » os cativos da escravidão, obrigando-os a quatorze anos de contrato individual, chamado *engagement à temps*, com a promessa de uma « libertação » possível.

Os administradores do Senegal, e em particular o governador Jacques François Roger, privilegiaram a obtenção de crianças, definidas como qualquer pessoa debaixo dos dezasseis anos, considerando essas crianças como uma força de trabalho dócil que seria mais fácil de enraizar na colônia, nomeadamente no incipiente setor agrícola. Ao adquirir crianças, Roger esperava formar trabalhadores disciplinados para a agricultura, que não deixariam as *plantations* depois de os seus contratos terminarem. Examinando a correspondência entre os administradores do Senegal, procuro entender essa preferência por pessoas com menos de dezasseis anos, bem como os dois principais mecanismos utilizados para comprar crianças.

O primeiro era o *rachat*. Analisando os registos dos *rachats* em Bakel em 1825, que se encontram nos arquivos notariais de St. Louis conservados nos Arquivos Nacionais do Senegal, verifica-se que 59.5% dos *rachats* diziam respeito a pessoas com menos de dezasseis anos. Por outro lado, o decreto de 28 de Setembro de 1822, que regulamentava o *engagement à temps* na colónia, estabelecia que qualquer criança nascida de uma mulher trabalhando como *engagée à temps* teria de trabalhar juntamente com a sua mãe até a idade de vinte e um ano, ou seja a idade da maioridade na legislação francesa, em troca dos cuidados recebidos quando crianças. Se bem que este grupo de crianças não tivesse vivenciado o *rachat*, a lei permitia aos administradores aproveitar a sua força física para além da força reprodutiva de suas mães. O estudo do *état civil*, que contém os registos de nascimento dessas crianças no Vale do Rio Senegal, mostra que elas eram consideradas como *engagés à temps* logo depois de nascer.

Assim, consideramos que a abolição do comércio de escravos levou os administradores, colonos e moradores franceses, no Senegal dos anos 1820, a conceituar novos modos para formar uma força de trabalho estável para a economia de *plantation* que esperavam estabelecer ao longo do rio Senegal e, por causa da escassez de mão-de-obra na região, o *rachat* e o *engagement à temps* apareceram como a solução apropriada. As crianças, consideradas como mais maleáveis e disciplináveis do que os adultos, foram vistas como a pedra angular dessa força de trabalho, porque os administradores e os colonos esperavam que eles se tornassem uns adultos leais para a economia colonial francesa. De maneira geral, o foco na importância das crianças para o sistema de *engagement à temps* permite-nos examinar as continuidades que relacionavam, por um lado, a escravidão e o comércio de escravos, e por outro, as práticas de trabalho forçado que floresceram com a abolição.

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