

OLD MEN AND NEW STATE STRUCTURES IN GUINEA-BISSAU

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Introduction

During the past hundred years, Guinea-Bissau, like most other African countries, has experienced a dramatic process of governmental changes at the central, regional and local levels. Characteristic of this process was the formation of a complex governmental structure which was a mixture of the administrative systems introduced by the Portuguese and those of the African native population. Despite what often was said in the colonial offices, little remained of the original forms of administration. Those political and administrative state structures of Guinea-Bissau generally assumed to be traditional and authentic, were in most cases formed during a process of cultural assimilation. In fact, these structures proved to be alienated from, not expressions of the local cultural and political history. However, the colonial administration and its legislative machinery in Guinea-Bissau was never strong enough effectively to penetrate the rural

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areas. Therefore, changes could take place within the existing power structures in the villages without regard to the colonial apparatus.

In the beginning, the process of the formation of the post-colonial state took place primarily within a rural context. The independence movement PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde), which the colonial government had driven out of the political heart of the country, the city of Bissau, was forced to turn to the rural population to gain support for its independence struggle. Right from the beginning, the party considered itself to be a state in embryonic form which would, in due course, turn into a fully developed state (Cabral, 1975: vol.I). This vision resulted in a specific relation between the PAIGC and the local authorities and led to the formation of a completely new leadership structure at the village level.

In this article an overview will be provided of the changing relationships between the colonial and post-colonial political and administrative structures on the one hand, and the regional and local government patterns with their own characteristics and phases of development, on the other. Before this overview, however, some basic information on Guinea-Bissau and its various ethnic groups will be presented. In the paragraphs following this introduction, a general outline of the pre-colonial structures and the establishment and further expansion of the colonial state will be provided. The various phases of this process and the changing relationships between the state and local authorities will be illustrated within the framework of the experiences of two ethnic groups: the Mandingas and the Balantas. The information about these two population groups is, for the greater part, the outcome of the author's own fieldwork and will be supplemented by data from other sources. In the last part of the article, the establishment of the independent state and the new local government structures will be discussed.¹

1. It is not my intention in this article to present theoretical statements about modern state penetration in Guinea-Bissau. However, anticipating my forthcoming study: *State and Rural Development in Guinea-Bissau*, I can say that I am interested in the paradigm of the articulation of modes of production and processes of incorporation. Incorporation should be understood as referring to institutional structures reaching all the way from the local to the international level; not only state institutions, but also other agencies, development projects authorities and international donor organizations, play an important role in integration processes.

Guinea-Bissau is a small West African country which is situated south of Senegal and borders Guinea-Conakry in the east and south.² The present borders of the Republic were first established in 1886 in a treaty between Portugal and France, and more specifically defined in 1906. The total area of the country is 36,125 square kilometres. The geographical and climatological conditions in Guinea-Bissau have brought about the development of two agricultural systems. The line which marks the end of the tidal portion of the rivers (in some places up to 100 km inland) separates the coast and the delta of the rivers from the savannah-forest area. In the coastal plain; peoples whose language belongs to the West Atlantic language group, engage in irrigated rice production. In the savannah and forest areas, Mande-speaking peoples cultivate mostly millet, sorghum and upland rice. Fulas, whose language also belongs to the West Atlantic language group, were originally nomadic cattle owners. During the 19th century, they shifted to arable agriculture and like the Mandingas developed an increasing interest in the cultivation of peanuts.³

Although Guinea-Bissau is a small country with a population of about 770,000 (1979 census), it enjoys a great ethnic diversity. Most of the ethnic groups had established themselves in this area before the arrival of the Europeans in this part of Africa.

I. Pre-colonial Political Structures

The Kaabu empire played an important role in the political and economic history of pre-colonial Guinea-Bissau. Although the region had already known various forms of centralized political structures, the establishment of a number of Mandinga kingdoms at the upper reaches of the Gambia, Casamance and Geba rivers signified a new phase in the history of these areas. In the first place, the existing regional trade became more clearly integrated into the trans-Saharan trading networks and the Atlantic trade. Secondly, at the socio-cultural level, Mande emerged as the most important language group.

2. The information presented in this section is derived from the following sources: *Comissariado de Estado da Coordenação Económica e Plano*, 1980; *República da Guiné-Bissau*, 1981.

3. The ethnic names appearing in this article are those currently used in Guinea-Bissau. In the literature, the Mandingas are also referred to as Malinké, Madinka or Manding. Likewise, the Fulas are called Fulani, Fulbe and Peul.

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The emergence of a number of kingdoms in this area to form the Kaabu Confederation, can primarily be attributed to their favorable location at the crossroads of already-existing trade networks connecting a number of West African ecological zones each with a diversity of products. The Beadafas, living south of the Geba River, got pepper and kola nuts from the forest zone even further to the south. The Papel, Felupe and Banhun peoples who lived to the north of this river, obtained supplies of kola nuts, iron and iron utensils from the savannah-forest zone. The coast and river areas provided salt and dried fish. Finally, the Mandingas living in the savannah zone produced cotton cloth. Moreover, they had access to the trans-Saharan trade and brought textile fabrics, gold and other luxury goods to the west (Brooks, 1983:1-4).⁴ The arrival of the Europeans on the coast of Guinea not only meant a new stimulus for the existing trade activities, but more importantly signified a shift in the trade from its traditional inland direction towards the Atlantic Ocean.

The establishment of various Mandinga kingdoms along the Gambia, Casamance and Geba rivers began in the 14th century. The Kaabu Confederation encompassing these kingdoms came into being during the course of the 16th century with Kansalá - situated in present-day Guinea-Bissau - as its capital. The formation of this political entity signified the end of autonomy for the Banhuns, the original inhabitants of the central area of the Kaabu empire. (Mané, 1978:99).

How was the Kaabu empire politically and administratively organized? Hawkins describes the empire as a sort of "family of states". The number of these states, however, varied somewhat between the 16th and 19th centuries. Normally, a member of the Sané or Mané family would be at the head of these states. Because these rulers were blood relatives, there existed a kind of natural unity among them, and a problem in one state was seen as an issue common to all (Hawkins, 1980:54).

4. As is often the case in Africa, many of the names given to various ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau, are the result of the European misunderstandings of, and confusions about the local languages. This applies to such names as Papéis (single: Papel), Brames, and Manjacos. Until the end of the 18th century, the inhabitants of the coastal area between the Cacheu and Geba rivers were all called Papel, or Buramo (from which the word Brame was derived). At the end of the 18th century, the name Manjaco came into being. See, for example: Teixeira da Mota, 1954:146; Carreira, 1964:259-261.

Roughly speaking, three administrative levels can be distinguished in the Kaabu empire. The central government had its seat in Kansalá. At its head was the ruler of the empire, the *kaabu mansa ba*, while a governor (*farim mansa*) ruled each state. These governors owed allegiance and paid tribute to the ruler in Kansalá, and had to provide contingents of soldiers in times of war. The various states where, in turn, subdivided into a number of territories which functioned as military and administrative units (Mané, 1978:106; Cissoko, 1969:335; 1981:83, 203). The exercise of political power at the various levels was reserved for the aristocracy, among which various sub-groups could be distinguished (Mané, 1978:113-115; Hawkins, 1980:56-60).

The expansion of the Kaabu empire was directly connected with the changes in the existing trade networks and the transformation of the traditional position of slaves into trade goods for the European traders (Curtin, 1975:12-13). According to various sources, more than 700 slaves were exported annually from the Guinea-Bissau region during the 17th and 18th centuries (Carreira, 1981:14; Mané, 1978:128). The riches which were, thus, accumulated by the ruling families, undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation of their power and the longevity of the Kaabu empire.

The reasons for the disintegration of the Kaabu empire during the course of the 19th century are numerous. While there were problems at the center of the power concerning the selection of the highest ruler, the *kaabu mansa ba*, a number of the states began claiming more independence from Kansalá (Cissoko, 1981:205-206). The process of abolition of the slave trade during the first half of the 19th century contributed to the weakening of the economic power of the ruling families. Economic reforms introduced from Europe, such as the shift from the slave trade to the production of export crops led to an increase in the presence of Europeans in the area, and as a result, their direct interference in the numerous conflicts developing at the time. One of the important sources of conflict was the rapid spread of Islam in West Africa, particularly among the Fulas. Their conversion to Islam went hand in hand with the struggle to free themselves from centuries of servitude under the domination of the Mandinga rulers of Kaabu. As early as the 15th century there existed small Fula settlements in the Guinea-Bissau region. Although their communities were characterized by a strong social stratification, the Fulas did not establish a separate state of their own in this area. As pastoralists, their major concern was to obtain suitable pastures for their herds for which they had to pay taxes to the Mandinga

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rulers. As the Kaabu empire expanded and later consolidated itself, its rulers increased their pressure on the Fula (Hawkins, 1980:37-38, 66, 91). The confederative and Islamic Fula kingdom which emerged at the end of the 18th century in the Futa Djalón, was therefore inevitably hostile to the neighboring Kaabu empire.

The collapse of Kansalá in 1865 dealt the final blow to the Kaabu kingdom as a central political entity. A Fula army of 32,000 men was raised to face the last Kaabu ruler. One of the army leaders was Alfa Molo who played an important role on the political scene during the years following this war (Caraço, 1948:121-124).

As a result of the disintegration of the Kaabu empire, its states either continued to exist as independent political entities or, as was more often the case, were further sub-divided into smaller territories. Moreover, a few new Fula kingdoms were created. Forria situated to the south of the Geba River and its tributary the Corubal, became the most important kingdom in the Guinea-Bissau region. This area which originally belonged to the Beafadas was incorporated in the Kaabu empire and was ruled primarily by Mandinga kings. The invasion of Forria by various Fula groups took place almost at the same time as the great attacks of the united Fula armies on Kansalá. The Fula attacks on Forria marked the beginning of a long period of wars in southern Guinea-Bissau. The hostilities lasted about twenty years (1868-1888) and caused great damage to the production of peanuts for export which was developing in this region (Hawkins, 1980:107, 117).

At the same time, a political change was also in process in the northeastern part of what is today known as Guinea-Bissau. The disintegration of the Kaabu empire meant the incorporation of this area into the Fuladu kingdom which also contained portions of southeastern Senegambia. The Fuladu kingdom was founded by Alfa Molo, one of the Fula military leaders who took part in the decisive battle against Kansalá. The Fuladu kingdom was created in the period 1865-1868 and like Gabú and Forria was subordinate to the Futa Djalón kingdom to which it had to pay annual taxes and tributes.⁵ In order to understand the governmental structures which were set up

5. The word 'Kaabu' is pronounced 'Ngaabu' by the Fulas (Mweng, 1981:9). From this point on, the term Gabú, the current spelling used in Guinea-Bissau, will be used to indicate the Fula kingdom which comprised a portion of the central area of the former Kaabu empire of the Mandingas.

by the Fulas in this area, one has to realize that the Fula had no tradition of forming states. They simply copied the administrative model of the Kaabu empire. This meant, among other things, that the founder of the Fuladu kingdom had to reward those who assisted him by appointing them rulers of various states (Hawkins, 1980:193, 205, 207). A similar situation could have occurred in Forria and Gabú.

The Portuguese were active participants in the complex process of economic, social and political change taking place during the second half of the 19th century. During this turbulent period, Portugal tried to give a new and modern dimension to its century-long presence in this part of Africa. This was to be done through establishing a colonial state and controlling the socio-economic development process.

II. The Establishment of the Colonial State and the Disintegration of the Existing Political Structures

The formal establishment of the colonial state in Portuguese Guinea in 1879 was a sign of Lisbon's increasing economic interest in the area, and reflected the international political relations during the last quarter of the 19th century. Until then, Guinea was a district administratively subordinate to the governor-general of Cabo Verde (Cape Verde Islands). This administrative dependency dated back to the 15th century when this group of islands became West Africa's commercial center of the Atlantic slave trade. The abolition of this trade in the first half of the 19th century and the rise of the production of export crops required the establishment of new administrative structures. Moreover, in view of the intrusions of France and England, it was necessary for Portugal to have a stronger presence in the area to secure its historical claims.

Considering the socio-economic changes in the Guinea-Bissau region, it is important to note that a small group of traders who had become rich through the slave trade, gradually shifted their activities and investments towards peanut production and the exploitation of palm trees (*elaeis guineensis*). This group consisted of traders who were born in Africa. They were Cape Verdians and so-called Luso-Africans, the descendants of Portuguese who had settled in Guinea, and who became more 'Africanized' with each generation. Their African wives played often prominent and independent roles in the trade transactions with various ethnic groups (Carreira, 1981:31-32; Brooks, 1980:3). In changing the course of their economic activities, these merchants had to face a severe competition from the French and English traders.

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Vegetable oil and oilseeds rapidly became the most important merchandise in West Africa. This was, in response to the considerable demand in Western Europe where, because of the industrial revolution, there existed a great need for lubricating oil for the expanding industries and their machinery, and cheap soap and cooking oil for the laborers and their families. The production and trade of peanuts, in particular, enjoyed a spectacular growth. During the first half of the 19th century, the production expanded rapidly from Gambia into Senegambia and Guinea-Bissau (Brooks, 1975:46; Mota, 1954 vol.2:31).

The production of peanuts in Guinea started around 1840 on the island of Bolama, the largest island of the Bijagós archipelago situated at the mouth of the Rio Grande de Buba. From here, the production spread towards the mainland along both sides of the Rio Grande. Cultivation of peanuts in the Casamance area began about the same time (Brooks, 1975:43, 46; Mota, 1954 vol.2:31). In order to make the production possible, it was necessary to have access to labor and land. From 1840, trader-entrepreneurs began acquiring large tracts of land, particularly along the Cacheu and Farim rivers where Cape Verdian colonists began cultivating sugarcane to produce alcohol. A similar situation existed along the Corubal River and the Rio Grande de Buba where peanuts were cultivated. There is still much historical research needed to find out how these tracts of land were acquired. According to Portuguese sources, the land was in most cases either bought or obtained from the local African authorities through concessions (Valdez, 1864:383; Barcellos, 1913:42-45). We have to assume that the interpretation of the rights of ownership and land use among the trader-entrepreneurs differed from that of the local chiefs. It should be noted that the peasants initially showed little interest in the production of peanuts, and laborers had to be contracted from elsewhere (Carreira, 1966:425).

Although the production and commercialization of peanuts in Guinea-Bissau was initiated by a small group of Luso-African families, the business was soon dominated by foreign capital. Travassos Valdez, a Portuguese explorer and writer, reports that nearly all the Portuguese traders in Bissau were the agents of foreign firms and that American, French and British companies had monopolized the trade (Valdez, 1864:340).

In the scramble among the European powers for West Africa, the interests of relatively weak Portugal were coming under serious threat. In Lisbon, it was assumed that by forming an independent colonial state in Guinea, the situation could be better kept under

control. The establishment of a colonial government separated from Cabo Verde implied an independent customs and tax apparatus, the introduction of laws and decrees, and the creation of regional administrative posts. But above all, it necessitated the effective expansion of Portugal's military presence in the area. During the Conference of Berlin (1884-1885), Portugal's historical presence in West Africa was acknowledged. After this conference, a protracted period of military campaigns began in Guinea in order to secure these historical claims. The Portuguese became more actively involved in the military clashes between the various ethnic groups in the area. Moreover, they intervened regularly in local social and political affairs. Taking into account some relatively peaceful intervals, the military campaigns aimed at forcing the peoples of Guinea to submit to colonial power lasted until 1936. In that year, the Bijagos people were the last ethnic group to be 'pacified' (Almeida, 1979 III:97-130).

The process of instituting a colonial state and the gradual pacification of the peoples of Guinea by the colonial army fostered the ongoing disintegration of existing African political structures. In the north of Guinea, the falling apart of the Kaabu empire initially led to the independence of a great number of territories and the autonomy of their regional rulers. This happened primarily in the transitional zones between the coastal plain and the savannah area where the empire's border states were situated. A number of villages in the area were even able to detach themselves from the regional political ties and to resist incorporation into the Fuladu kingdom founded in 1865.⁶ This kingdom, containing a large number of territories of the former Kaabu empire, existed until 1903. In that year, Fuladu was conquered by the encroaching French colonial power in the south of Senegal. At the turn of the century, Gabú in southeast Guinea fell under the control of the Portuguese army (Hawkins 1980:251, 268). The methods used by the Portuguese to subjugate the Fulas in Gabú and Forria contributed a great deal to the almost complete disintegration of the native political structures. The Portuguese undermined these central governmental structures permanently by changing their alliances with the leaders of various groups hostile to each other. Over time, different ethnic groups were supported with weapons and troops. The Portuguese concluded vassal treaties with their rulers. Since the Portuguese had little notion of some of the region's complex social problems, and because the power of the colonial army was often inadequate to hold the situation under control, the Africans often

6. Interpretation of 19th century maps of this region by Carreira, 1963:198-205. See also footnote 12.

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broke the treaties. Consequently, the whole operation would have to be repeated. The support that the Portuguese offered to certain Fula groups often guaranteed them assistance in the wars against other ethnic groups. This pattern of co-operation came into being around 1880. The final defeat of the Manjacos, Papel, Mandingas and Balantas by the Portuguese in the first decade of the 20th century would not have been possible without the collaboration of large contingents of Fula troops (Casimiro, 1941:361-365; Hawkins, 1980:170, 176, 184).

III. Colonial Administration and African Authorities

It is not surprising that the administration of the young colony was strongly militarily oriented during the first decade of its existence. Not only was the governor in Bolama, the capital, an officer of the colonial army, the administrative posts created gradually throughout the colony were also occupied by soldiers who, besides their military duties, also took charge of administrative affairs. From 1912, certain administrative laws were proclaimed which facilitated the smooth transition of a strictly military administration into a civilian government. Guinea was partitioned into two municipalities, Bolama and Bissau, and seven districts (*circunscricões*). The districts, in turn, were subdivided into 'posts' (*postos*). The governor in Bolama was the highest colonial authority and was assisted by an advisory council. Each district was ruled by an *administrador* who had extensive authority to administer his area. The lowest ranking colonial official was the *chefe de posto*. The district head was assisted by a number of African subordinates who served as policemen (Pereira, 1914:35). This administrative infrastructure lasted until the end of the colonial period (1974) without undergoing any fundamental change. During this time, only the number of districts and posts was increased. Moreover, after 1926-1928, the administrative authority was radically centralized and its power vested in the governor and especially the Minister of Overseas Territories in Lisbon.

Besides the administrative subdivision into *postos*, the districts also contained a varying number of *regulados*. According to the Portuguese, a *regulado* was a traditional native chieftainship. It is important to mention that in the early Portuguese literature about Guinea the word *reino*, meaning small kingdom, was used by the Portuguese to refer to African territorial and political entities. In the course of the 17th century, the concept was used to indicate the place where a *regulo* (ruler) lived, i.e. a village (Mota, 1974:70). Before long, the terms *regulado* and *regulo* were often used to allude

to various forms of African political and administrative authority. With the introduction of the colonial state, the term *regulo* was adopted in the official administrative jargon. The concept behind this term, however, is as vague as that of the English word *chief* or the French *chef-coutumier* (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1985:14).

In Portuguese Guinea, the *regulados* were incorporated into the district administrative structure. In a number of cases, they were the smaller regional administrative entities which together formed the previously existing Fula kingdoms, or which were the Mandinga kingdoms belonging to the Kaabu Confederation. The original borders of these territories, however, were often drastically changed, either because no attention was paid to the already existing political entities in the international process of colonial state formation, or because there was a lack of familiarity with the political history of the region. For example, a number of *regulados* which were incorporated in the *circunscrição* Farim, originally belonged to the Mandinga kingdom of Berassu which formed part of the Kaabu Confederation. After the 1886 treaty between France and Portugal which settled the colonial border between Senegal and Portuguese Guinea, the greatest part of Berassu was attached to Senegal. The *circunscrição* Farim was partitioned in two administrative *postos*. One of them was Mansabá containing only one *regulado*, Oio, originally a Mandinga kingdom which used to be much greater in size.

This example shows, in a nutshell, how the Portuguese colonial administration dealt with the native political structures they had virtually dismantled through their military pacification expeditions. The colonial government considered in particular the Fula rulers to be suitable for the position of *regulo*. It was noted that members of the Fula ruling class held similar positions within the already described Fula administration. However, the Portuguese also appointed a considerable number of other men as *regulo*. Even more striking was the fact that Fula rulers were assigned to the *regulados* of other ethnic groups. Governor Carlos Pereira reports, for example, that every Mandinga *regulado* in the Farim district had a Fula *regulo* (Pereira, 1914:23). This situation, which was maintained until the last phase of colonial rule, created a great deal of animosity among the various ethnic groups. The *regulos* among the Manjacos, Papéis and Beafadas were, in most cases, selected from among their own people. The Balantas who had never adopted any hierarchical political structure, however, were forced to accept this 'native' political system with Mandinga or Fula *regulos* as their chiefs.

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The functions of the *regulo* as a native chief were already legally established in 1912 and did not change, in principle, until the end of the colonial period. The tasks and duties of the chiefs were defined by the same law which laid down the administrative division of Guinea. Chapter III, article 46 provides as follows: *regulos* are the direct representatives of the *administrador* of the district to which they belong, and are his subordinates. Together, they execute their tasks in the service of the provincial government".⁷ The administrative hierarchy and the manner in which the African authorities were integrated into colonial rule are clearly outlined in this short provision. It should also be mentioned that a similar situation applied to village heads. That is to say, a village selected its leader according to the local customs and practices, his appointment had to be confirmed by the *administrador* representing the colonial government. In practice, village heads were also nominated by the Portuguese. This particularly applied to those ethnic groups such as the Balantas who did not have a hierarchical administrative structure and as a result no formal village heads.

The tasks of the *regulo* are defined in Article 48 of the administrative law of 1912. The most important of these are maintaining law and order in their area; summoning and providing contingents of men on the order of the district administration to defend the territory and to quell rebellions, or to work as laborers; providing assistance in time of epidemic disease; drafting marriage contracts; and facilitating the collection of taxes. In Article 51, it is explicitly stated that the *regulos* are required to summon their subjects and charge them with the tasks of building roads maintaining them at least twice a year, digging wells, and other services for the general benefit.

One of the ideological points of departure of Portuguese colonialism in Africa has always been the self-appointed task of 'civilizing' the peoples of those areas to which Portugal had historical claims. One of the methods to fulfill this 'mission' was to incorporate these areas into the Portuguese political structure. In colonial administrative jargon, therefore, the colonies were frequently called Portuguese Overseas Territories or Overseas Provinces. The incorporation of regional and local authorities into the Portuguese colonial administrative network was part of the same policy. Especially once Salazar

7. Regulamento das Circunscrições da Provincia da Guiné. In: Coleção Oficial de Legislação Portuguesa. Ano 1912, pp.794-803). Imprensa Nacional, Lisboa, 1913.

came to power in 1928, the Portuguese continuously attempted to create a coherent and all-encompassing system of laws and decrees which would provide a legal base for the 'civilizing mission'. In 1930, Salazar presented the *Acto Colonial*, which became an integral part of the new Portuguese constitution of 1933. This was to imply that the colonial administrative apparatus was an inseparable part of the New State (*Estado Novo*). Portugal's 'civilizing mission' was emphasized and the principles of the political unity of the Portuguese empire were strongly stressed in the preamble of the *Acto Colonial* (Wilensky 1971:119). As far as administration was concerned, the most important aspect of the new legislation was a drastic centralization of the decision-making apparatus in Lisbon. In fact, even the details of all administrative matters were controlled from the Ministry of the Colonies (Barbosa, 1946:666).

One year before the *Acto Colonial* was passed, a statute concerning the political and civil rights of, and the penal laws applicable to Africans was published which clearly outlined the 'civilizing' process. Moreover, it explained how Africans could socially, culturally, politically and economically become full citizens of the empire. Paradoxically enough, this was accomplished through the legal definition of 'inequality'. The statute stipulated that the population of the colonies consisted of two different groups: natives and non-natives. Only the latter were in possession of a full citizenship. According to the statute: "Natives are those individuals of the black race, or of black descent who, because of their origin and habits, do not rise above the great majority of that race".⁸

This distinction formed the basis for the process of assimilation. In order to obtain the status of *assimilado*, i.e. full Portuguese citizenship, one had among other things to be at least 18 years old and able to speak and write flawless Portuguese. An African had to prove that he earned enough money to support himself and his family, that his conduct was blameless, and that he paid his taxes. These legal regulations were adopted in the *Acto Colonial* and subsequently in the Portuguese constitution of 1933 (Barbosa, 1947:344).

It is important to mention that these legal provisions remained valid until 1961. The 1951 revision of the constitution introduced no fundamental changes. As far as the political and administrative rights of the Africans were concerned, they remained integrated into the

8. Estatuto Politico Civil e Criminal das Indigenas da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique. Decréto no 16.473 de 6 de Fevereiro 1929.

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Portuguese administrative hierarchy through their 'traditional native' political institutions. At the same time, their leaders received orders and instructions from the colonial administration (Caetano 1951:48). In fact, the status and function of the native rulers had remained unaltered since 1912. The local administrative territories were, since 1951, called *regedorias*, and regulations were drawn up concerning the procedures for any eventual border changes of these territories (Durieux, 1955:16-17).⁹ Such border changes were connected with general administrative reorganizations such as the increase in the number of municipalities and districts. Thus, it was once more emphasized that the native political administrative structures were an integral part of the colonial administrative pattern. In other words, there was no question of any political autonomy.

Meanwhile, Africans in all of the Portuguese colonies, as in other parts of Africa, were organizing and demanding direct participation in the political decision-making process. Lisbon, however, was not willing to comply with these wishes and banned all organizations which strived for effective participation in political life, among them the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) which was founded in Bissau in 1956. The PAIGC sought total political independence for Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands.

In 1961, a period began in the history of Portuguese colonialism during which Portugal was confronted with violent resistance against what the independent movements called 'illegal' Portuguese political and administrative domination. Lisbon's response to this challenge was twofold: an increase in military violence and a reorganization of the colonial political structures. In the case of Guinea this led, among other things, to the establishment of a *Conselho Legislativo* in 1963. This council consisted of eleven members. Some were appointed by the colonial government and the officially recognized organisations of administrative officials. Some were chosen by those Portuguese citizens paying a certain minimum amount of tax. Finally the governor appointed three representatives of the *regedorias* to the council (Edição, 1972:39).

9. During the last phase of Portuguese colonial rule in Africa, the concept of *regedoria* was added to the legislative jargon, and was used to refer to territories ruled by a native chief. The concepts *regulo* and *regulado*, however, were still used in the day to day language of Guineans.

These measures, however, were introduced too late to produce the desired result, i.e. to maintain Portuguese rule. When António de Spínola was appointed governor of Guinea in 1968, the Portuguese had already lost most of their political and economic control over the colony. The arrival of De Spínola signified a modification of the strategy used in the battle against the PAIGC. His policy for 'A Better Guinea' included an intensification of the colonial development programs which had already started in the beginning of the 1950s. At the political level he tried to create new relations between the colonial state and the various ethnic groups and their respective rulers. In order to realize this goal, the first step was to establish the so-called *Congresso dos Povos da Guiné*. The government initiated a first meeting in 1970 between Mandinga and Fula leaders. This was a very sensitive issue to the Portuguese administration since, until then, Fula *regulos* had always ruled the Mandinga *regulados*. The independence struggle led by the PAIGC caused a further deterioration on the already strained relationship between these two ethnic groups. A large number of Mandingas had already fled to Senegal at the beginning of the military confrontations, and many had also joined the independence movement. The meeting of 1971 between the colonial government and a number of Mandinga and Fula leaders resulted in the appointment of Mandinga *regulos* in their own areas. The same year, the first meeting of the *Congresso dos Povos da Guiné* convened. During this congress, representatives of all ethnic groups discussed, in separate meetings with the colonial government, their political and socio-economic problems. A rapid improvement of the situation of the Balantas was considered by the Portuguese administration as the next step towards regaining the trust of the peoples of Guinea. From the early days of colonial rule, the Balantas (the largest ethnic group of Guinea-Bissau) had spread over the country and had come into severe conflict with other groups (Belchior, 1973:51, 53, 106). The appointment of chiefs as colonial administrative officials was another part of the Portuguese policy to re-appraise the native administrative structures. Finally, the chiefs were paid a salary for their services to the state (Spínola, 1970:46).

Up to his point, this article has concentrated on the central political and administrative structures of a number of ethnic groups and the relationship between African authorities and the colonial administration in Guinea. Now it is time to pay attention to the local power relations underlying these central structures. Also, it will be explained how the rural-based independence movement created a new and independent government and administrative structure to replace the colonial state in 1974.

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IV. Old Men and New State Structures: the Mandingas

The village of Maqué is located at the heart of the administrative region of Oio.¹⁰ This region covers the transitional zone between the coastal plain and the plateau of the interior. Oio region is intersected by a system of numerous streams and rivers, such as the Cacheu and Mansoa, and borders the Geba River to the south. The tidal streams in the river system reach far inland. As a result of diminishing precipitation during the past two decades, the salty water has penetrated into most of the large and small tributaries. Brackish water has become a serious threat to irrigated agriculture, especially the rice polders on the river banks. Deforestation is yet another important ecological problem. Until now, Oio has been an important forest area. However, a growing demand for firewood and the prevalent slash-and-burn type of agriculture have led to increasing soil erosion.

In terms of the ethnic composition, Oio region can be considered a transitional area between the predominantly animistic coastal peoples and the moslems of the interior. Besides the three major ethnic groups of Guinea-Bissau, the Balantas, Mandingas and Fulas, who are all well represented in the area, Oio region is also inhabited by Manjacos, Brame and Papel.

The village of Maqué with a population of 700 inhabitants, all Mandingas, is situated in a forested area along the old colonial sand road from Bissora to Farim. Like other Mandinga villages, Maqué is characterized by compounds which are built close to one another. Each compound is enclosed by a fence and contains several huts which are situated in an irregular circle around a courtyard. The cultivated area immediately borders the village. Millet, maize, rice and peanuts are the major crops. The village counts two blacksmiths, one tailor, and an *almame*, the priest of the mosque. Besides these four 'specialists', Maqué has two teachers who are attached to the government school built immediately after independence. The Koran school of the village is run by a villager. With the exception of the elderly *almame*, all the 'specialists' engage in farming for their subsistence. The village of Maqué has neither shops nor a health center. There is no electricity.

10. The independent republic of Guinea-Bissau is divided into eight administrative regions and one autonomous sector (Bissau). The regions are, in turn, subdivided into sectors.

The village's social organization is based on kinship relations. The *kabilo*, a patrilineal lineage which can trace descent from a common ancestor, is considered the most important family unit. Besides the *kabilo*, more encompassing and vaguer clanship relations exist, commonly based on remote ancestors. Such patrilineal clan ties, with their lasting historical and mythical dimensions, had political connotations in the recent past. Such ties connected large groups of people living in the region with the lineage which was considered to be the core of the clan. The oldest man of such a lineage automatically belonged to the group of leaders of the Mandinga state system.

The household (*dimbayaa*) is the smallest kinship group in the village. The word *sinkiro*, meaning fire or the simple stove used to prepare the household's daily meals, is also used to refer to a household. A household may consist of a man, his wives, their children and possibly grandchildren. Some households also include single brothers of the male head. Each household comprises at least one, and occasionally two or more huts. As mentioned above, the huts are placed around a courtyard and together form an enclosed family unit, *kordá*.¹¹ In other words, the *kordá* is also a territorial unity. The various households within a particular *kordá* acknowledge the oldest man as their leader, the *kordá-tio*. In the event that the households within a certain *kordá* do not all belong to the same patrilineage (*kabilo*), the oldest man of the family who founded the *kordá* becomes the *kordá-tio*. A *kabilo* can be scattered over several *kordá*. For instance, the founder family of Maqué lives in three different *kordá*. The oldest male of the founder family is regarded the most respected person in the village.

The household is also the smallest economic unit in Maqué. The male head manages all resources and exerts great authority over the socio-economic activities and cultural life of the individual household members. He is the one who allocates labor, controls agricultural output, and represents the household and its individual members. Each household cultivates its own land, as well as a part of the village rice fields. The latter are situated in a low-lying area measuring about four square kilometers. This area is a part of the riverbeds of several tributaries of the Rio Olossato and is flooded during the rainy season. Among the Mandingas, women are responsible for growing rice for the family consumption. They take care of all cultivation

11. In the creol language of Guinea-Bissau, such units are mostly called *morança*.

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activities including land preparation. Women are also allowed to have their own rice plots (*kamagnan*) and may dispose of the harvest as they wish. Once young single men have demonstrated sufficient agricultural know-how, they can also obtain fields from the head of the household. Crops like millet, maize and peanuts are cultivated and harvested by men only. In general, men takes care of all the preparatory tilling activities prior to sowing and planting. Peanuts are the most important commercial crop of Maqué.

The male head of the household take charge of the cattle. Upon his death, sons *and* daughters, as well as his wife(s) inherit the cattle. Women also have the right to purchase livestock and usually possess some small stock like goats and sheep. At a certain stage during the independence struggle, all the inhabitants of Maqué fled into the forest without being able to take their herds with them. When they returned after the hostilities were over, they had to start restocking.

The heads of all the households united in a *kordá* submit to the authority of the *kordá-tio* who controls the daily life of these households. The *kordá-tio* mediates between households which have disputes over livestock or land. He also allocates additional plots of land to households in need of more crop land. In case the *kordá* does not possess sufficient land, the *kordá-tio* will discuss the issue at the *kabilo* level or at the village assembly. Other tasks of the *kordá-tio* are solving various intra- and inter-household conflicts, and the collection of gifts to be presented to the *almame* and the village council. He also conducts ceremonies on the occasion of birth, illness and death of the inhabitants of the *kordá*. Households lacking sufficient labor for their farming activities may call upon the *kordá-tio* for assistance from other households. However, his mediation in this respect is usually not necessary due to the existing reciprocal labor arrangements. When large-scale and complicated activities have to be undertaken, labor may be recruited through the *kordá-tio*. Finally, since the islamization of the village, the *kordá-tio* acts as the spiritual leader of his *kordá*. He is involved in the daily koran instruction of the children of the *kordá* which usually takes place in the evening around a campfire.

The leadership of the *kabilo* is the next level of authority in the village. Only a lineal descendant of the first man who cleared the *kabilo*'s farm land can become a *kabilo* leader. The oldest man of the *kabilo* considered as the founding family of the village is acknowledged to be the village's highest authority. In other words, leadership at the *kabilo* and village level is directly related to historical

claims to land. All land is communally owned by the village and the different households have usufructary rights to the land they normally cultivate. Initially, land was distributed by the head of the particular *kabilo* who founded the village. At a later stage, he shared this privilege with the heads of other long-standing *kabilos* of the village. Usufructary land rights remain valid as long as at least one of the villagers remembers such rights. In other words, someone who wants to cultivate (temporarily) fallow lands, will have to ask the permission of the last user of that particular plot of land or his descendants.

The villagers' conversion to Islam resulted in the introduction of a new level of authority in Maqué, i.e. the *almame*, or priest of the mosque. His authority in the village is restricted to religious matters. The mosque neither owns nor controls any land in Maqué. For the upkeep of the mosque, as well as various religious activities, the *almame* uses gifts put at his disposal by the head of each *kordá*.

Besides the distinction between the two kinship groups *dimbayaa* and *kabilo*, the village population can be subdivided according to age groups (*fulan-kafō*). Boys and girls, as well as men and women belong to groups of more or less the same age. The circumcision rituals which the boys of each age group experience together, create an extra bond between the members. Circumcision rituals with their related secret instructions are ususally held once every four years. As the members of a certain age group grow older, their opinion, usually voiced by the group's leader, plays an increasingly important role in the village affairs. In socio-economic terms, the most important function of the age groups of both men and women is their potential to act as labor groups. Those agricultural activities which need more labor input than an average household can provide, can be executed by age groups provided certain preconditions are fulfilled.

Until recently, the leadership of Maqué as in all other Mandinga villages, was vested in the head of the family considered to be the founder of the village. This right was based on the fact that such a family was the first to bring the land under cultivation. In the pre-colonial period, the village head acted as the chairman of the village assembly and was the representative of the community. This latter duty meant that he functioned as a link in the administrative structure of Oio, one of the kingdoms belonging to the Kaabu empire. The village head also collected the taxes which were levied by the ruler in Kansalá. The situation was, however, different in Maqué. Here, the taxes were, almost certainly, either not collected, or collected only for a short period. This illustrates that the bonds

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between the various sections of the empire must have been rather loose. This particularly applied to Oio which, because of its location, was only marginally involved in the process of political and cultural 'Mandinganization'. Such areas were also the first to secede when the empire began to disintegrate. Two European historical sources concerning this area, more or less confirm the oral history of the village of Maqué and its immediate surroundings, and assert that the bonds with the Kaabu empire were not firm. At the time of the downfall of the Kaabu empire, Maqué had only marginal ties with one or more chiefdoms in the Oio region.¹²

The village assembly taking place at the *bantang*, normally consisted of all the adult men living in the village. Women and children could also be present at the meetings, but did not take part in the discussions. The right of speech belonged to the members and leaders of particular age groups or to those holding the position of household head, *kordá-tio* or head of the *kabilo*. In fact, the leadership of the village was in the hands of the village head who received advice from a council of old men. The village assembly was a platform for opinion forming.

The incorporation of Maqué in the colonial state structure implied the strengthening of the position of the village head. While, until then, he was the *primus inter pares* among the old men, henceforth he was forced to execute the politics of the colonial administration. The village head of Maqué always received the approval of the Portuguese: they never appointed a new head because of the apparent unsatisfactory performance of the traditionally selected chief. The tasks of the village head included, among other things, the collection of the annual taxes and summoning the villagers for forced labor for the general benefit or for the private affairs of the Portuguese colonial administrators and the *regulo*. These two duties were new to the villagers. Since the tax levied by the Kaabu empire had, in practice, not been collected for a long time, or may have never been collected at all, the introduction of taxes by the colonial rulers had a sweeping effect on the inhabitants of Maqué. This event is still recalled by the small group of very old men. Aside from the eternal

12. In 1894 and 1897, the Portuguese captain Graça Falcão drew a number of topographical maps of northern Guinea on which the independent villages were marked. In his book about this region, the French explorer Bertrand-Bocandé refers to an area around Mansabá which did not belong to any of the political entities existing at that time. See Carreira, 1963:189-212; Bertrand-Bocandé, 1849:63-64.

discussions between the *regulo* and the villagers concerning the amount of taxes to be paid, their introduction forced the inhabitants of Maqué to seek ways of acquiring the necessary cash. For them this implied the beginning of a process of incorporation in the colonial economy. Initially, only young men actively participated in the market economy through the production of peanuts and temporary labor migration.¹³ The integration process was further stimulated by the opening up of the colony through the building of new roads, for which the Portuguese used forced labor. Maqué came to be situated along the road joining Bissau and Farim, both important and old-established trade centres. After the arduous construction work was finished, the villagers were obliged to do maintenance work on the road at least twice a year. Even today, people talk about this forced labor with aversion.

The integration of Maqué in the colonial administrative structure led to the village's annexation by the *regulado* Bissorã. In 1910, the Portuguese had established a military post in Bissorã. Since then, the little village has developed into a regional administrative and commercial center. The *regulo* of Bissorã who was appointed by the Portuguese, acted as the contact person between the village of Maqué and the colonial administration. The Portuguese organized and administered the collection of taxes and the allocation of forced labor at the *regulado* level. In Bissora the function of *regulo* remained in the hands of one family until the final period of colonial rule. When the independence struggle was well underway, the Portuguese came no longer to trust the existing *regulo* and removed him from office. The 'native' chiefdom Bissorã was, in fact, arbitrarily formed and had almost no historical ties with the smaller territorial entities which made up the former Mandinga kingdom of Oio. Under the control of the Portuguese, the *regulo* of Bissorã gained a prosperous socio-economic position. He collected many gifts during his inspection trips to the villages. At the same time, he also reminded the chiefs of their duty to pay taxes and supply labor. Moreover, right from the beginning he also used forced labor for his personal benefit. Although the central colonial administration pointed out several times that forced labor was to be used solely for the general benefit, the Portuguese administrators and the African chiefs often recruited laborers to work for them. Most of the *regulos* in the region of Oio, as elsewhere in Guinea-Bissau, became important

13. It goes without saying that these changes had a considerable impact on the socio-economic development of the village. See Schoenmakers, forthcoming.

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producers and traders of export crops such as peanuts, palm kernels and rubber.

To summarize, it can be said that the village is both a territorial and social unit. The territory comprises forests and agricultural land, and the inhabited area is divided into compounds, the *kordá*. The village's social units are composed of the *dimbayaa*, the *kabilo* and the age groups. The authority is, in hierarchical order, in the hands of the head of the household, the oldest men of the *kordá* and *kabilo*, and finally the village chief. With the introduction of the colonial administration, the function of the village chief acquired more importance. The chief became a link in the colonial state structure and was subordinate to the *regulo*. In Maqué, the contacts between the village chief and the *regulo* were limited to what the law and colonial practices prescribed. Contrary to what happened elsewhere in Guinea, the village chief of Maqué made no effort to use the *regulo*'s assistance to improve his own socio-economic status by, for instance, monopolizing the production and trade of commercial crops. The chief of Maqué, moreover, continued to share his power with the council of elders. It should be emphasized, however, that the changes in the function of the village head described above, were viewed by the villagers, and especially the old men, to be strengthening his position to some extent. However, the manner in which he represented the village in the colonial administration was not regarded as a form of co-operation with the Portuguese rulers, let alone collaboration. The situation which had arisen, was simply accepted as an accomplished fact thrust upon the village. The fact that at the time of the independence war a new village committee was appointed whose members were proposed by the PAIGC, should not lead to the conclusion that the former chief was suspected of collaboration. Nevertheless, the establishment of the new council with a young man not from the village's founding family as its chairman, was considered by the entire village as a drastic step.

V. Old Men and New State Structures: the Balantas

The founding of the Balanta village of Infandre took place during the first half of the 19th century, a period of ongoing migration of Balanta groups moving to the west in order to evade the expansionary political ambitions of the Mandingas. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, the Balantas, the largest ethnic group of Guinea, lived in an area which roughly stretched from the Casamance to the Geba River. The Balantas preferred to live in inaccessible areas with numerous rivers and creeks, and their villages were surrounded by

rice polders and millet fields which alternated with mangrove marshes and forests. The disintegration of the Kaabu empire and the increasing pressure of the Fulas towards the end of the 19th century, caused a new wave of migration of Balantas to the west. Infandre was established by a Balanta who came from the Mansabá area.

The village is situated at about 10 kilometres from Mansoa, the regional administrative and trade centre, and has a population of 340 people. The seven family compounds lie in the shadow of large mango trees and are situated at a considerable distance from one another. Each compound is surrounded by millet, sorghum and cassava fields which alternate with patches of bush. The village is located at the edge of the rice polders which are established within a network of small creeks forming the catchment area of the Rio Uenquem, a tributary of the Mansoa River. Since independence, a school has been built in Infandre, but the village has neither a shop nor a health centre. There is no electricity.

Despite what the government officials and development experts in Guinea often think about Balantas, the Balantas of Infandre do not limit their agricultural activities to the growing of rice: they also invest much effort and time in the cultivation of millet.¹⁴ Besides these two important staple crops, the villagers produce two other types of native cereals, cassava and some vegetables. Peanuts are primarily grown for sale. Cattle rearing is an important activity and the ownership of cattle is an important aspect of one's position in the socio-economic structure of the village.

Kinship and age are the most important factors determining the social organization of the village. Balanta families are organized as exogamous patrilineages. A patrilineage can systematically trace its descent from a well-known ancestor, and marriages are contracted outside this group. The smallest social unit is the household (*ia*) which, normally, consists of a man, his wife(s) and children, and his younger unmarried brothers. A group of households whose heads are descendants the same ancestor, is called *pfut*. The *ia* and *pfut* are the most important units for the organization of agricultural labor. The next larger kinship group is the *pam* which consists of a number of *pfut*. The *pam* is, at the same time, a territorial entity, i.e. a compound with small gardens, fruit trees and a kraal for the cattle, all surrounded by a strong fence. The oldest man of the *pam* who is

14. The Balantas who migrated to the Quinará and Tombali regions south of the Geba river concentrated mainly on rice cultivation.

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a direct descendant of the founder of the family group is the most important authority in Balanta society. He exercises great power over the religious life and the socio-economic activities of the household members belonging to the compound.

One of the most striking features of the Balanta villages is the scattered location of the various *pam* and the considerable distance between these units. The heads of the compounds are the highest authorities and supervise all daily affairs of the households. The *pam* heads do not form a central village council. The inhabitants of a Balanta village regard the oldest man of the village's founder family with great esteem. This man has the privilege of conducting a number of religious ceremonies but does not function as a village chief. The founder of the village and his relatives were the first to bring the land under cultivation, and their offspring inherited the right to distribute land to newcomers.

In addition to kinship, division into age groups also determines the social organization of the village. An age group is composed of people of about the same age. Age, however, is not the only criterion to define one's age group. Knowledge, capability and strength are also important. In Infandre, the men are divided into nine and the women into three age groups. Membership of such a group gives a man or a woman a certain well-defined status. For men, circumcision with its related prolonged period of initiation in the forest form a crucial phase in the process of becoming a full and mature member of society. Circumcision takes place at a rather late age, usually when one is above 30 years. An interesting age group which precedes the preparation for, and the introduction to full adulthood is called *n'haye*. Those belonging to this age group are allowed to behave as freebooters, also with respect to their involvement in sexual relations. However, the relatively great freedom of the men during this phase in life in particular, and in other age groups in general, is subject to well-understood limits; in sexual matters, for example, it applies only with respect to women of other villages. Each separate age group is a crucial step in the development process towards adulthood. Even after initiation, a person passes through various levels of authority and respect until the status of *lantang-dang* is achieved. Only the very old and wise men who have the most direct relationship with the ancestors reach this status. It is they who ultimately judge the inter- and intra-family affairs.

Each household has, in principle, rice fields and other agricultural land at its disposal. The present usufructary rights of the different households are largely determined by an historical process of land

distribution begun by the founder of the village. Therefore, a direct descendant now has the duty to intervene in land disputes. He is also the designated person to perform the religious rituals which mark the beginning of the agricultural season. This man's advice is also of great importance when it comes to clearing new land, especially for rice cultivation. Since this work is extremely labor intensive, the whole village has to be involved. The preparation for, and the execution of such an undertaking takes place under supervision of the heads of the various *pam*. At times, even the inhabitants of other villages are called upon for assistance. The preparation of the river marshlands for rice cultivation is a complicated task. It involves the clearing of mangrove forests and the building of dikes and sluices to control the flow of fresh water. The latter is especially important in this part of Guinea because of the influence of the salty tidal streams. In Infandre, new rice polders have not been established during the past thirty years. This is due to the fact that suitable land for the development of rice polders has become scarce, a process which started already in the 1930s. This problem exists in the entire Mansoa area. The decrease in the amount of precipitation during the past two decades has compounded the existing problems in rice cultivation. In Infandre, like elsewhere in the region, many fields have become unusable because of the increasing saltiness of the soil. This, in turn, has made the provision of sufficient food a critical issue. It should be noted that the execution of such tasks as bringing new rice fields under cultivation, indicates that the Balanta village society - not characterized by any formal leadership - is quite capable of mobilizing its members.

Agricultural labor is, in the first place, organized at the household level where men, women and children have their own particular tasks. As a rule, land preparation, building and maintenance of the dikes, and harvesting are carried out by men. While men sow rice in the seedbeds, women take care of transplanting. Women also sow millet and sorghum, weed the fields and care for the vegetable gardens. In addition, they cultivate peanuts and have control over the output of this most important cash crop of Infandre. The principal duty of the children is tending the cattle. This division of labor, however, is not rigid: during peak periods men help women and vice versa.

The division of labor between the sexes is also present in the execution of non-agricultural activities. The maintenance of the huts and the means of production, as well as basket-weaving are considered men's work. Women, on the other hand, make pottery and, depending on their age group, have specific tasks in bringing up the children.

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It must be emphasized that the household (*ia*) should not be viewed as an autonomous production unit. The labor needed for certain recurrent tasks such as major repairs on the huts and annual preparation of the rice fields, exceeds the household's available labor. In such cases, the other members of the *pfut* provide assistance. If necessary, the head of the household organizes additional labor through the leader of the *pam*. Finally, laborers can also be recruited from the working parties formed by the various age groups.

As mentioned earlier, cattle plays an important role in the socio-economic, religious and cultural world of the Balantas. The possession of a large herd of cattle gives the owner a high social status. Only men own cattle and the more cows one has, the more he is respected. In principle, each household head owns a herd. However, the control over the cattle of the various households belonging to a certain *pfut*, is exercised by the oldest man of that particular *pfut*. The ultimate control over the cattle belonging to the members of each *pam* is vested in the leader of the *pam*. Although the possession of many heads of cattle provides an old man with considerable prestige, it does not lead to economic differentiation. Upon the death of an old man, almost his entire herd is slaughtered during extensive funeral ceremonies and festivities. Only a few beasts are saved to enable the oldest son to build up a new herd. The son is thus provided with limited means to create his own economic prosperity and social prestige. Besides extending his herd through rearing additional cows, he will try to rustle cattle, an act which the Balantas consider to be herioc, clever and a sign of strength. If successful, he is praised in stories and songs which are recited when his cattle are slaughtered during his funeral ceremonies. When other respectable men and women die, cows are ritually slaughtered by the leader of the *pam*. In such cases, however, the number of slaughtered cattle is limited.

In short, one can conclude that this type of rural economy is rather egalitarian. During an interview with one of the villagers about the possible ways through which one could improve his economic situation, the respondent replied: "if you are no longer equal to others, you die".

The Balantas never developed any formal centralized political structure at the local and regional levels. Moreover, they have always strongly resisted any attempt of expansionary states to incorporate them. This resistance was as much directed against the Kaabu empire as the colonial administration. Although a number of Balanta groups were culturally and politically integrated into the

Kaabu empire, the great majority of the Balantas knew how to remain independent in the inaccessible marsh and forest areas of the coastal region. Whenever the Mandinga empire began a new series of expansionary moves, the Balantas migrated westward. Some of the very old men of Infandre still remember armed struggles resulting from tensions between Balantas, Mandingas and Fulas. The Portuguese were also involved in these conflicts. Some men who had experienced these times of war in their early youth, have transformed the bitter feelings of their parents about these events into lively and imaginative stories.

According to colonial sources, on the 7th of June 1914, Infandre and a number of neighboring villages were burned to the ground by a colonial army of more than 700 soldiers under the command of the Portuguese captain Teixeira Pinto.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that although the Balantas did not have any regional political structure, they could easily raise a relatively large number of warriors to confront the Portuguese. The Portuguese colonial army was assisted by Fulas and Mandingas, and made use of horses, gun boats and guns. Despite their military superiority, however, they had to bear a number of heavy blows from the Balantas. In the end, the struggle proved to be uneven and the Balantas of the Mansoa region had to submit to the colonial power.

After their defeat in 1914, the Balantas were for the first time in their history incorporated in a state structure. The Portuguese introduced the function of *regulo* among the Balantas. The inhabitants of Infandre were ruled by the *regulo* of Mansoa, who until the 1960s was of Fula origin. Evidence shows that the Balantas never accepted the *regulo*. Only the backing of the colonial administration induced them to pay the hut tax he levied to construct and maintain the road between Mansoa and Bissorã and to work on the fields of the *regulo* and the whites. The Balantas were also forced to act regularly as carriers when goods had to be transported through the region.

The colonial authorities also appointed a village head. This figure was accepted reluctantly by the Balantas. During the colonial period, the function never acquired any substance in Infandre, particularly since the appointed leader did not belong to the founder patrilineage. Their defeat by the Portuguese, the introduction of taxes and compulsory labor, and the fact they were ruled by foreigners, gave rise to great dissatisfaction among the Balantas.

15. *Boletim Oficial da Guiné Portuguesa*, no 34, 22 de agosto de 1914.

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The partial integration of Infandre in the colonial economy compelled the villagers to devote part of their agricultural land and activities to the production of commercial crops in order to obtain enough money to pay taxes and purchase new consumer goods, such as textile, tobacco, wine and *cana* (rum). Soon the new alcoholic drinks which became available in large quantities were as much favored as the traditional palm wine. Infandre's integration in the market economy led to a relative scarcity of land. The oldest man of the founder family said in an interview: "there came a time when we were so many that the equal subdivision of the fields and rice polders was not possible anymore". In the beginning of the 1920s, large numbers of Balantas began to migrate from the area where they had lived for centuries. The majority crossed the Geba river and settled in the southernmost part of the country where vast and sparsely populated forests and marshlands could be brought under cultivation. Soon, the Balantas became a prosperous and large community among the Nalus, Beafadas and Fulas already living in this part of Guinea. A number of households left Infandre and founded the village of Unal in the catchment area of the Cumbija river.

The people in Infandre came into contact with the independence movement at an early stage. By the time the armed struggle began in 1963, a number of young men belonging to the *n'haye* age group had already left the village to join the PAIGC. Political awareness was, however, not the only motive for joining the party. It was, in fact, another expression of the 'free and easy' status of these young men and a way to get to know the outside world. As mentioned before, another possibility was to work as a laborer in the peanut-growing areas of Senegal. Whatever the reason, the contacts were made and were of great importance when in the course of the 1960's the PAIGC needed the support of the village population in its struggle against the colonial army.

In 1968, a military post was established in Infandre. The inhabitants of six neighboring villages were forced to live in Infandre, which was permanently controlled by the Portuguese soldiers. The situation soon became critical. To begin with, it was uncomfortable for so many people to live together in one village, and to have to cover long distances to reach their fields every day. Moreover, the villagers continued supplying the freedom fighters with food and information despite the fact that maintaining contacts with the PAIGC was, under the circumstances, very dangerous.

The military occupation of the village, as well as the fact that people from different villages had to live together were the most important aspects in a series of changes dating back to the beginning of the 1950s and heralded an era of integration into new administrative structures.

VI. The Formation of the Independent State and New Local Administrative Structures

In 1965, six Africans founded the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) in Bissau, the capital of Portuguese Guinea since 1945. The party was led by Amílcar Cabral, an agronomist. It recruited its members primarily among the urban population. In 1959, the PAIGC organized its first strike among the Bissau port workers. The Portuguese army turned the strike into a bloodbath and 50 people were killed.

This dramatic incident had far-reaching effects on the future course of the decolonization process in Portuguese Guinea. The violence of the colonial administration clearly indicated that no form of political participation would be tolerated. The government maintained this policy almost to the end of the colonial period. It was only after the arrival of governor De Spínola when, as mentioned before, some steps were taken to involve the various ethnic groups in the administration of the colony. However, Portugal's absolute control over the colony would remain intact. The bloodbath of 1959 resulted in a radical change in the PAIGC's strategy. Until then, it had assumed that political control first had to be achieved at the center of colonial power, i.e. Bissau. This was to be realized as far as possible via the infiltration of the various government institutions. The party endeavored to win the support of the employees of the administrative institutions and commercial firms. Likewise, it attempted to establish a footing among the small group of wage laborers. The events of 1959 convinced the party that, for the time being, they would be unable to achieve the country's political independence through the support of the rather limited urban population. It was, therefore, decided to leave Bissau and to concentrate on mobilizing the rural population.

The departure of the PAIGC from Bissau and its new policy of seeking the trust and support of the rural population, implied that the new nation-building process had to occur entirely outside the existing colonial administrative structures. Of the group who founded the PAIGC, the agronomist Cabral was particularly aware that the

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majority of peasants would not be interested in political independence unless it improved their socio-economic position. This awareness became the starting point for the difficult task of mobilizing the peasants.

Because of the economic and cultural diversity of the country, every region and each ethnic group had to be approached differently. In Infandre, the first contacts between the party and the people were already established before the outbreak of the armed struggle. By this time, the aims of the PAIGC had, in general terms, become clear to the villagers. As mentioned earlier, the tight control of the Portuguese on Mansoa region made it impossible to carry out effective guerilla activities here. This applied in particular to Infandre with its military post. For the PAIGC, however, it was essential to remain in touch with, and to receive food from the local population. Women became increasingly involved in providing food to the freedom fighters. Not only were the Portuguese less suspicious of women, but it was also normal for women to 'sell' small quantities of rice.¹⁶

The independence struggle was experienced differently by the villagers of Maqué. Before the outbreak of the war, the contacts between the party and the village were rather superficial. The eruption of hostilities in this region of Guinea in 1963, however, acted as a catalyst and improved the relationship between Maqué and the PAIGC. Its location on the main road about halfway between Bissora and Farim made the village a strategically important spot which the Portuguese kept under permanent surveillance. The soldiers from the military camp which was established just outside the village, frequently confiscated cattle. These events, naturally, created an atmosphere in which the PAIGC gained support for its ultimate aims.

16. Another aspect of the Portuguese control in the area involved the banning of initiation rites. This had a drastic effect on the social life of the people. As explained above, all Balanta males must stay in the forest for a long period to be initiated by the old men. The Portuguese rightly feared that this initiation period would be an outstanding opportunity for the young men to maintain contacts with the nationalists. As a result of the ban, the secret rites could not be performed for more than ten years. During that period, the old men lived in permanent fear of dying before they could pass on the most important secrets of the society. Interestingly enough, immediately after the end of the war, initiation ceremonies were organized. Moreover, since then, the minimum age for participation has been lowered and the periods between the rites shortened.

In 1964, the council of old men took the drastic decision to evacuate the village and move deep into the forest to establish a new provisional settlement. The people of Maqué, together with the inhabitants of three other villages lived in that new village for about ten years. The PAIGC established barracks in the temporary settlement in order to accommodate the soldiers of the people's army. An intensive contact thus developed between the party and the people right from the onset of the war.

Several sources reveal interesting information about the ways in which the peasants were mobilized (Chaliand 1967; Davidson 1969; Rudebeck 1974). It seems that the party militants constantly played upon the villagers' feelings of dissatisfaction with the actions undertaken by the Portuguese rulers and the *regulos*. Forced labor, taxes and confiscation of cattle were some of the recurring themes in the discussions between the militants and the villagers. The nationalists were very careful to contact the villagers through the existing traditional hierarchy of authority. In other words, the old men were the first people whom the PAIGC tried to convince of its cause.

The confrontation between old and young was one of the many interesting aspects of the encounters between the rural people and the party activists. The great majority of activists were very young men. From 1959 onwards, when the party's headquarters were moved from Bissau to Conakry, the number of young members increased. These were mostly young men and a few young women who had recently left the rural areas for the city of Bissau to get a job or to be educated. Many of them were illiterate. They belonged to what Cabral later would call the urban "declassés" (Cabral, 1975 I:139-142).¹⁷ But young people who remained in the villages were also active in the struggle. This was only natural because all Guinean young men regardless of their ethnic background were always ready to defend the interests of their village or region during times of war. What was new in this case was that young men were mobilized by men of their own age group, some of whom also belonged to other ethnic groups. As the struggle went on, an increasing number of

17. Among these were future leaders such as Carmen Pereira, Tatina Sília, Carlos Correia, Francisco Mendes, João Bernardo Vieira (currently president), Constantino Teixeira, Osvaldo Vieira, Domingo Ramos, Manuel Saturnino and Paulo Correia (Nô Pintcha no.1061, 1984:3; no.1062, 1984:4-5; Ignátiev, 1984:107, 126; Chailand, 1967:72-77).

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young people left their villages to receive a military and political training. Initially they went to Conakry, but soon also to the liberated areas of Guinea itself. After their period of training, they returned to their home villages to take command of the militia. While some stayed in this army, others were sent abroad to receive further training.

The quick military successes necessitated profound changes in the party's strategy. Hence the first congress of the PAIGC was convened in the south of Guinea in February 1964. The most important issues were the reorganization of the guerilla and the creation of political institutions. The armed struggle was begun by small groups which had been sent from Guinea-Conakry to operate within Guinea-Bissau. They created autonomous zones from where they kept in touch with the party leaders. Because of the resulting communication problems and the obvious strategic advantage of "blending into the environment" (McCulloch, 1983:21-22; Chabal, 1983:78). However, these groups were at a later stage allowed to integrate themselves into the local population. The great danger of such autonomous groups, however, was that they might break away from the central leadership and without abiding by the party goals begin to operate on their own. Such events occurred, albeit on a limited scale. The 1964 congress tried to limit these incidents by means of radical changes at the military and administrative levels. It was decided to set up a regular army, the *Forças Armadas da Revolucao Popular (FARP)*. At the administrative level, an exceptionally important initiative concerning the eventual forming of a new state, was the establishment of the so-called "party-state" (Cabral, 1975 II:190, 206). At the central level, a Political Bureau with twenty members was formed which selected, in turn, the Executive Committee with seven members. In addition, a Central Committee was created comprising 65 members and seven sub-committees. In 1976, the number of sub-committees was limited to five, each including five members of the Political Bureau (Davidson, 1969:79-80).

The first state structures took shape within this framework. After some time, the various sub-committees, for example, gradually assumed the functions of ministries. In the following years, a number of centralization reforms were carried through. The most important and innovative resolution was made in 1971 with the decision to elect a National Parliament in the liberated areas. This election took place in 1973. After the elections, the "party-state" handed the following responsibilities over to the first independent people's assembly of Guinea: 1) legislative power; 2) control over policy implementation; 3)

the symbolic function of representing the sovereignty of the people (Rudebeck, 1974:152; Cabral, 1975 II:289).

Village committees (*comités de tabanca*) formed the basis of this new state structure.¹⁸ There is no doubt that the PAIGC considered the establishment of *comités de tabanca* to be of great importance. In 1966, Francisco Mendes, the 27-year old political commissioner of the north described the establishment of these committees to Gérard Chaliand. After the party cadres had explained the meaning, function and tasks of such a committee, the members would be chosen by those villagers above the age of 18 years. The committee had five members: three men and two women. "It is often the young people who are chosen. The old men are not always pleased to see that the young people have taken their place in the administration of the village" (Chaliand, 1967:63).

A similar process occurred in the village of Maqué. After the villagers had settled in the thick forest to the north of their original settlement, the contacts with the PAIGC fighters intensified. Various young villagers became active in the war. With the help of the soldiers of the people's army, they organized the defence of the new village against the regular bombardments of the Portuguese warplanes. Moreover, they took part in dangerous missions to supply the freedom fighters with arms, for which they had to travel across the country for several days and nights. Therefore, it is not surprising that during the discussions concerning the formation and tasks of the village committee, the PAIGC recommended such young people as the most eligible candidates. In Maqué, this resulted in the election of a young man who did not belong to the village's founding family, to the position of chairman of the village committee. Also, for the first time two women were elected to the committee.

The introduction of elected village leaders in the community of Maqué was an attempt radically to alter the hierarchical power structure within which the family elders and the council of old men took the most important decisions. The creation of the *comité de tabanca* was a big step toward giving the younger people a more independent position vis-à-vis the old men. This transformation process, in fact, dated back to the beginning of the century when young men began cultivating peanuts or temporarily leaving the village to earn money elsewhere. The election of young people to the village committees, however, did not imply an immediate end to the

18. *Tabanca* is the creol word for village.

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power of the old men. This was, at least, not the case in the beginning. The elders retained their authority over such village affairs as labor recruitment, religious ceremonies, weddings, etc. Any initiative in such matters taken by the village committee would have been unthinkable without the co-operation of the traditional council of the old men. The presence of women in the village committee was accepted with great difficulty.

In fact, it was agreed that the committee as a whole, and not its individual members would be responsible for such tasks as defending the village, supplying food to the guerillas, and representing the community to the Party. Only when the war was finished and the villagers had returned to their original settlement, did the population of Maqué gradually accept the committee as the rightful body representing the village in the administrative structure of the new state. This acceptance was partly due to the fact that by this time the committee members had grown older. Moreover, several government officials from Bissau visited the village and proposed ideas and plans for stimulating socio-economic and cultural development. These officials introduced themselves as party members and alluded constantly to the advantageous co-operation between the PAIGC and the people during the war. These meetings between the new, young administrators from Bissau and the villagers represented by their relatively young leaders, resulted in a number of interesting and promising initiatives. Consequently, the prestige of the village committee grew considerably. However, even today, important decisions are taken only after the council of the old men has been consulted.

In contrast, the new village committee of Infandre has hardly been integrated into the existing social structure. Immediately after the war, the PAIGC convened a large meeting in the neighbouring village of Nimane, to which the villages in the vicinity were also invited. At this assembly the party cadres gave a detailed explanation of the proposed village committees. Interestingly, most of the old men did not attend this meeting. During detailed discussions, many expressed serious doubts about the utility of a village committee. Nevertheless, an election was organized in Infandre which resulted in the election of a village committee consisting of five members. To date, this committee has not been able to function as an effective institution responsible for safeguarding the interests of the village with regard to development initiatives. Power still remains vested in the elders and the heads of the various *pam*. As mentioned earlier, their authority is based on historical and religious ties with the land. The fact that the state has made little effort to involve the Balantas in

the Mansoa region in development projects has further diminished the status of the village committee. Both the committee's chairman and the elders are of the opinion that the only function of the new institution is to enforce the rules and regulations issued from Mansoa.

Despite the absence of formal political authority above the village level, the authority of the old men and their considerable knowledge of the natural environment enable them to propose measures and to implement them in co-operation with their counterparts in other villages. For example, some years ago it was decided to reorganize the water supply system in the rice polders in order to cope with the increasing problems caused by lack of sufficient rainfall. Once again it appeared that a society which for a long time had resisted the development of hierarchical political structures, was able to solve serious problems by taking co-operative action. Interestingly, the water supply system was improved without the assistance of the state's development specialists.

As yet no detailed studies have been conducted to examine how the new village committees function. However, the examples presented here, and the information provided by researchers such as Rudebeck, Chaliand and Urdang lead to the tentative conclusion that both the ways in which the committees were introduced and the social and cultural history of the various ethnic groups determine whether or not the committees are accepted by the rural population. The intensity of the contacts between the village and the party is also of great importance. Once the war ended and independence was achieved, the introduction of development projects and the provision of such amenities as a new water pump in the village could increase the prestige of the new village committee. Nevertheless, even in villages like Infandre whose village committee has not been able to play its own constructive role, the committee's prestige is quite different from that of the former village chiefs appointed by the Portuguese. The abolition of the *regulo* system and its related system of forced labor immediately after independence were other important factors responsible for the relatively positive way in which the people received the new village committees. There is no evidence that the introduction of the committees has been actively and widely opposed. One may conclude that an important first step has been taken to integrate the village communities of Guinea-Bissau into the new and independent administrative structure.

Conclusion

Once Guinea had become a colonial state, the Portuguese government tried to accomplish an incorporation policy through which the country and its inhabitants would become economically, socially and culturally part of Portugal. The Guineans, however, were not permitted to be politically represented in this integration process. Especially once Salazar came to power, the process of economic integration was emphasized. However, both the central government in Lisbon and the government in Bolama (and later in Bissau) lacked a clear development strategy and, particularly, the means to achieve such integration. Only after the second World War did the Portuguese government really start to invest in Guinea. From 1953 onwards, a series of development plans were made, designed to stimulate the growth of the colony's economy and to facilitate its total integration into the economy of the metropolis. It was clear to colonial planners that agriculture would remain one of the most important economic sectors of Guinea. However, since the agricultural sector was mainly geared towards subsistence production, its integration in the Portuguese economic structure proved to be difficult. Therefore, one of the most important aims of the various colonial development plans was to "incorporate the native population in the market economy" through improving the colony's infrastructure (Plano de Fomento 1968-1973:110, 113).

Likewise, the government of the independent Republic of Guinea-Bissau considers agriculture to be the basis for the future economic, social and cultural development of the country. While the colonial state expressly pursued the integration of Guinea into the Portuguese economy, the present government wishes to do away with all colonial structures and seeks to achieve a type of economic independence aimed at economic progress and the improvement of the people's welfare (Vieira 1983). It is well understood that in order to increase production and provide the population with sufficient food, a thorough agricultural modernization is needed. To reach this goal, it will be necessary to dismantle the traditional economic structures and to incorporate the village communities fully in the monetary economy (Programa de Estabilização 1983/84:2).

The post-colonial government of Guinea is confronted with the same problems as its colonial predecessor in this respect. This article has sought to describe one of the methods employed by the colonial and post-colonial state to integrate completely different economies. Creating an atmosphere conducive to the penetration of capital (from the metropolis) in the agricultural sector, and breaking the closed

cycle of production and reproduction in the village economy, were among the most important tasks of the colonial state. The incorporation of non-capitalist modes of production in a dominant capitalist system is not only a matter of economic policy, but also requires the adaption of existing power structures in the rural areas. The colonial state, however, had limited opportunities to realize the capitalist interests of Portugal. From the time when the Salazar regime came to power in Portugal, the colonial state had to provide its own finances through levying taxes. Because of the lack of European personnel, native rulers (village heads and *regulos*) had to be appointed. They were permitted to improve their own economic position through trading and the production of cash crops, using forced labor. This policy proved to be the only way in which their loyalty could be expected, and led to the development of a relatively small elite of chiefs.

A government which wishes to promote the socio-economic and cultural development of its entire population, can not leave the old colonial political structures unaltered. The new government of Guinea-Bissau, therefore, created new central and local administrative structures and institutions. At the local level, it will take time before such institutions will have evolved in such a way as to be able to effectively contribute to the central government's development strategy.

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