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LIVING AT THE MARGINS. YOUTH AND MODERNITY IN THE BIJAGÓ ISLANDS (GUINEA-BISSAU)

by

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Resumo

Este é um trabalho sobre um grupo de jovens e sobre o seu 'desejo de modernidade'. Por um lado, exploram-se as estratégias criativas utilizadas para superar a sua condição de subalternidade, apropriando e utilizando as narrativas do 'desenvolvimento' e as instituições da 'modernidade' para encontrar o seu caminho entre as dificuldades da Guiné Bissau contemporânea. Por outro lado no entanto, serão sublinhadas as suas incertezas e frustrações frente ao facto do que o próprio projecto de modernidade por eles adoptado os confina numa posição de marginalidade e subalternidade na geografia global do 'desenvolvimento', com poucas oportunidades para escapar.

Palavras Chave: Juventude, Modernidade, Marginalidade, Guiné Bissau

Abstract

This is a study about a group of young men and about their 'will to be modern'. On the one hand, I am concerned with their creative strategies for overcoming a subaltern condition, appropriating and using the narratives of 'development' and the institutions of 'modernity' to find their way among the predicaments of post-independence Guinea-Bissau. On the other hand, however, I will highlight their uncertainties and frustration as they realise that the very project of modernity they strive to embrace confines them to a position of marginality and subalternity in the global geography of 'development', with few opportunities to escape.

Keywords: Youth, Modernity, Marginality, Guinea-Bissau

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Introduction

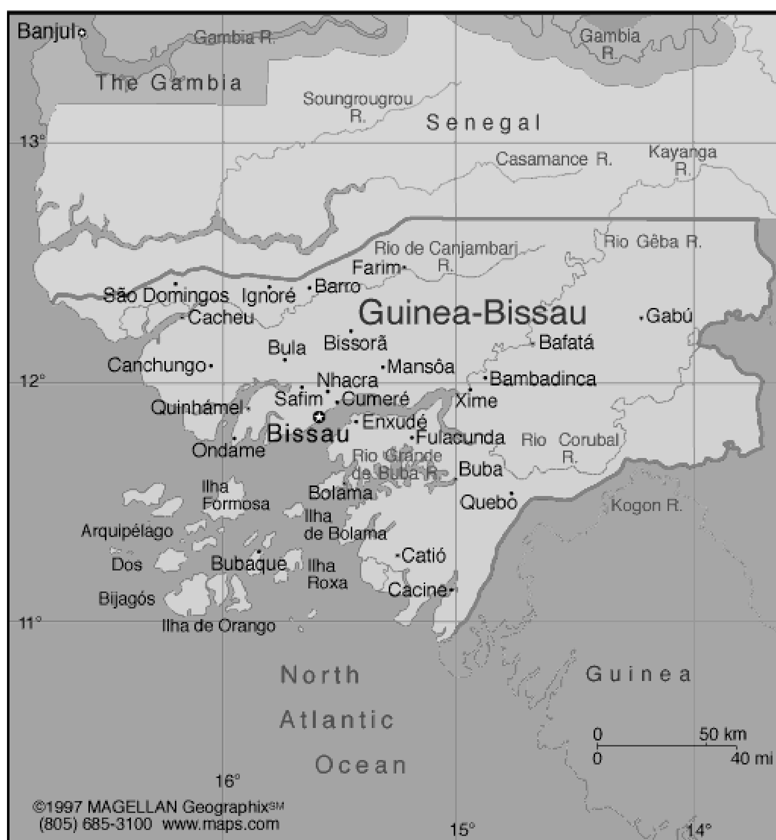
This is a study about a group of young men and about their 'will to be modern'. On the one hand, I am concerned with their creative strategies for overcoming a subaltern condition, appropriating and using the narratives of 'development' and the institutions of 'modernity' to find their way among the predicaments of post-independence Guinea-Bissau. On the other hand, however, I will highlight their uncertainties and frustration as they realise that the very project of modernity they strive to embrace confines them to a position of marginality and subalternity in the global geography of 'development', with few opportunities to escape. Marginality will be here acknowledged in this sense, not only as the arena for the elaboration and display of agency and for local cultural production, but as a 'conceptual site, an analytic placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group's existence' (Tsing 1994: 279).

The island of Bubaque and the Praça[1]

Situated at the estuary of the river Geba, about twenty kilometres from Bissau, the capital city of Guinea-Bissau, the Bijagó Archipelago includes about fifty islands, although only eighteen are permanently inhabited[2].

[1] For the recent history of the Archipelago, see *infra* chapters 3 and 4.

[2] Administratively, the Archipelago constitutes the Bolama-Bijagós region, which is subdivided into four sectors (Bolama, Bubaque, Caravela and Uno).



Guinea-Bissau and the Archipelago of the Bijagó

The island of Bubaque, where I carried out my research, was the seat of the colonial administration, and preserved its regional centrality after independence. On the northern coast of the island is the only 'urban centre' of the Archipelago, simply called the Praça[3], built at the beginning of the XX century by the Portuguese. Except for Bolama, which has, however, an eccentric position in the region, Bubaque is the only island regularly connected to Bissau by small and often unsafe boats and canoes.

[3] In Guinea-Bissau, the term *praça* means nowadays 'urban centre'. In Portuguese, this word has several meanings: square, marketplace, but also garrison, fortress and stronghold. It is probably with this latter meaning that the Portuguese called their first garrisons along the coasts of Africa *praças*, and since it is mainly around these outposts that the urban centres grew along the centuries, the term has in Guinea Bissau the meaning of 'town'. In the Archipelago, the term is locally used to identify the urban centre of Bubaque as opposed to the villages (*tabanka*). The complete denomination should be therefore *Praça de Bubaque*, but this name is only used when one is outside the Archipelago.

With an estimated population of 2000[4], the Praça is the seat of the regional administration and the main harbour of the Archipelago. The hospital, the Catholic, Anglican and Adventist missions, the court, a few hotels, and a market, all these elements give to the Praça the aspect of a small town, attracting traders, students and fortune seekers from other islands of the Archipelago and from the rest of Guinea-Bissau. An 18 kilometres long road, constructed by the Portuguese colonial administration, connects the Praça with the other end of the island and is the main link between the urban centre and the villages. Every morning, hundreds of persons walk some kilometres from their villages to the Praça, to attend school, or to sell and buy food, wine or fish at the market.

Until the independence of Guinea-Bissau (1974), the Praça was just a few colonial buildings and a palm oil factory: in the following years it grew rapidly towards north, along the coast. The urban structure of the Praça developed around the two harbours of the island: the one built in colonial times and nowadays in ruins, and the other, presently in use, where the boats to and from Bissau and the other islands dock and leave. Every day, near the new harbour, a small market is set up where people sell vegetables, palm nuts, fruits, and fish. Behind the market are still the ruins of the old palm oil factory: bent plates, huge boilers, monstrous gears still witness what was once the main industrial activity of the Archipelago. The factory, built by German entrepreneurs in 1913, passed under Portuguese control during WWII and was gradually abandoned after independence. From the harbour, a wide road climbs to the inner urban zone. Along this street several Senegalese, Peul and Mauritanian traders built their boutiques: many tiny huts offer almost every kind of food (from canned tuna fish to candies), knives, machetes, dresses, bags, hats, gym shoes and music cassettes. A small cinema, two discos and several bars make of this zone the heart of the nightlife during the weekends.

A long street on the right leads to the administrative centre of the Praça, built around a circular square: this is the centre of the old colonial post. All around the square, colonial buildings are easily identified by their style, their tiled roofs, the white falling plaster: here is the seat of the regional administration, one state school, the catholic mission, and the police station. The seat of the regional administration – the former

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[4] This figure was provided in 2002 by the local administration at my request. According to a study commissioned by the INEP on the Archipelago in 1990 (INEP 1990), Bubaque had in 1990 a population

residence of the colonial *administrador* - is linked with a cement ramp to the old colonial harbour. Further north, following the coastline, is the regional hospital Marcelino Banca, Luis Cabral's holiday residence (in ruins) and several hotels, among them the *Hotel Bijagó*, built in 1975 during the presidency of Luís Cabral, who planned to transform the islands into a tourist resort.

Like all towns, the Praça is divided into quarters. The commercial zone and the new harbour is the *Porto*, and immediately behind we find *Bas*. South there is the wide quarter of *Luanda*, and in the interior *Buba* and *Baixada*, towards the village of Bijante. North, along the coast, we find *Rotunda* (named after the round square), then *Estancia*, *Morcunda* and *Aeroporto*: at the northern edge of the island, we find in fact a long field that is used as an airport.

The Praça is what Mary Louise Pratt would define a 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992), where Europeans, Bijagó, and people coming from other regions of Guinea-Bissau or from neighbouring African countries to carry out their commercial activities, cohabit side by side. Even though, according to the statistics, the Bijagó were still the majority in 2002, mainly after the civil war of 1998/1999 many Fulas, Balantas, Pepels and Mandingoes moved to the Praça. In 2002 about a hundred Senegalese, mostly Wolof and Nhominca fishermen, lived on the island of Rubane, just in face of Bubaque. Only some thirty Wolof resided permanently in the Praça however, trading in fuel: they bought it in Casamance, where it was much cheaper, and sold it on the island to hotel and boat owners. They were a quite closed community, proud of their identity and looking down on the Bijagó that they despised as lazy and inefficient people. Peul, coming from the Gabu region of Guinea-Bissau and from Guiné Conakry, managed most shops. A small group of Mauritanians owned four shops and a pharmacy. The European presence was evident as well: in recent years, French and Portuguese investors had built small hotels (in 2001 there were 6 hotels managed by Europeans) for the few tourists that come to the islands, looking for natural beauty and sport fishing. Other Europeans worked in NGOs, in the administration of the national park of Orango, and in the Catholic mission.

For the young Bijagó who decided to move to the Praça from the villages of the island of Bubaque or from other islands, this multicultural environment of the Praça was

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of 2936, 1662 living in the villages, and 1274 in the Praça.

obviously an opportunity to get in touch with different cultural elements, transforming and widening their habitat of meaning and their imagination. The Praça was to their eyes a 'modern place' contrasting with the rural milieu, a site of contact with alterity and with 'development', and often the first step in the complex and difficult migratory paths in the recent years that brought some young people towards Bissau, to seek their fortune, and a few towards Lisbon and others European destinations (Bordonaro 2003a; Bordonaro and Pussetti 2006).

Even if historically the Archipelago is far from being a 'cold' context, the coup d'état of Nino Vieira (1980) and the gradual shift towards liberalism, (together with other important political and economic changes I will consider later), bolstered a situation in which young people grew up in a world in certain aspects radically different from that of their parents. Imagined and possible lives (Appadurai 1996) have become fundamental elements in the construction of youth identities and expectations, while local socialising institutions no longer enjoy an unquestioned hegemonic authority.

Despite (and because of) the widening of horizons and the increase in cultural contacts, however, from many points of view the Praça is still a marginal and peripheral place within the context of Guinea-Bissau. It is important to anticipate here that my most recent fieldwork (in 2000/2001 and 2002), took place after the 1998/1999 civil war (see chapter 4), in a critical phase in the history of Guinea-Bissau: prolonged economic and political instability had caused a total collapse of the state and of its infrastructures, while most NGOs and international institutions had abandoned the country. During my last stays in Bubaque, sporadic and unsafe means of transportation towards Bissau and rarely working telephone lines frequently left the Praça totally isolated from the continent, especially during the rainy season (from November to May) when sea conditions are bad. Despite its urban aspect and buzzing activity, the Praça – and the Archipelago - was largely disconnected from the rest of the country and from the capital city Bissau. It was a place where you could feel *really* cut off from the rest of the world, a perception I shared with most of the young men I worked with.

Fieldwork in the Praça

It is a commonplace in anthropology that the experience of fieldwork may (or even should) transform the anthropologist's initial project and his theoretical approach. I have been working in the Bijagó Islands since 1994. Between 1994 and 1997, I carried out fieldwork mainly in the village of Bijante (island of Bubaque), studying male initiation ceremonies and expressive culture (Bordonaro 1998, Pussetti and Bordonaro 1999). When I set out for the islands in 2000, I had a structured research project devoted to expressive culture and performance; I had planned to spend several months living in the villages, sharing 'their' lives as deeply as possible, learning to dance, to play and to light fires.

Against my expectations, the people I met totally upset my plans, bringing the complexities and predicaments of life in Guinea-Bissau to my attention, and taking me far from romantic and idealised visions of the African village. The young people I talked to rejected my motivations and the prefabricated anthropological concepts I carried with me, openly contesting my approach. They showed me the ravages of the civil war of 1998, told me about their painful and tragic personal experiences, about their frustration and about their dreams, and showed my theoretical stance to be frankly inappropriate to the complexities, contradictions and difficulties they were living in.

Facing in such a way violence, marginality, suffering and desperation, took me far from my initial project. If, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot puts it, 'the primitive has become terrorist, refugee, freedom fighter, opium and coca grower, or parasite […] the specialist in savagery is in dire straits. He does not know what to aim at. His favorite model has disappeared or, when found, refuses to pose as expected' (1991: 35). Those young men wearing Nike shoes and baseball hats accused me of ignoring the 'present' and their situation, of pursuing 'old' and 'useless' things. These dreaming young men who strolled along the dusty streets of the Praça with a stylish walk had angry comments to make about the elders, and sparkling eyes when they told me about their hopes for a different life. How could I still ask questions about initiation, symbolism and music when people kept talking to me about war, suffering, migration, money and poverty? What James Ferguson wrote about his experience in the Zambian Copperbelt in an effective passage, appropriately describes my own feelings and reflections:

> My field work left me with a terrible sense of sadness, and a recognition of the profound inability of scholarship to address the sorts of demands that people brought to me every day in my research, as they asked me to help them with their pressing and sometimes overwhelming personal problems and material needs. I could proceed with this book only after arriving at the realization that decline, confusion, fear, and suffering were central subjects of the book, and not mere background to it (1999: 18).

The ideology of 'modernity' and 'development' of the young men of Bubaque, their life-styles, their pains and dreams have thus become the main topics of the study I present in the following pages.

I agree with Ahmed and Shore (1995) that the so-called postmodern current in anthropology and the transformation of the cultural landscapes of the contemporary world 'provoked a chronic sense of insecurity and self-doubt about the legitimacy of the anthropological enterprise' (Ahmed and Shore 1995: 14-15). According to these authors though, this is not a crisis of *representation*, but rather a problem of *relevance*, that compels anthropology to '[re-evaluate] its conventional objects of study and [to develop] new domains and methods of inquiry that are commensurate with the new subjects and social forces that are emerging in the contemporary world' (Ahmed and Shore 1995: 15-16). As the explanation paradigm is put in cause by several theoretical standpoints, our discipline faces a problem both of contested authority and of epistemological validity, which makes the plausibility of the anthropological enterprise no longer self-evident, if ever was. Moreover, increasing this sense of uneasiness, several scholars working on the history of colonialism (Pels 1997, Pels and Salemink 1999, Apter 1999, Asad 1973, Said 1994, Mudimbe 1988, Fabian 1983) have pointed to the relationships between ethnography and colonial discourse, underlining what Talal Asad has called the colonial connections of anthropology (1973: 13). Anthropology, according to these authors, is rooted in an unequal power encounter between the West and the Third World (Asad 1973: 16), and the basic concepts of the discipline (ethnography, fieldwork, participant observation, the concepts of culture and of ethnic identity) must be understood in the historical context of the colonial encounter and of complex dynamics of power. Africanist anthropology, in particular, is historically associated with the colonization of Africa in ways that undermine the subdiscipline's claims to neutrality and objectivity (Apter 1999: 577).

The discomfort that arose during my ethnographic encounters in Guinea Bissau points to power divides, economic differences and to the persistence of neocolonial strategies in the continent. If we accept an ethical confrontation with those we meet in the field, we are compelled to take a position facing contemporary national policies, transnational economic processes and strategies of global capitalism, acknowledging at the same time that we are always inevitably implied in them, because any ethnographic encounter happens in a historically and politically saturated arena.

Dealing with these kinds of phenomena – observing their consequences for the life of women and men in a context like Africa - implies for the anthropologist not only a shift towards new objects of analysis, but also a certain political engagement. Here I define 'engaged scholars' as intellectuals who challenge existing social hierarchies and oppressive institutions as well as the truth regimes and structures of power that produced and supports them. (Isaacman 2003: 3). One of the purpose of an engaged anthropology is to 'render audible the voices and concerns of the powerless and simultaneously to recover the experiences of the disadvantaged and underrepresented which are routinely ignored, forgotten, or cast into shadows of history' (Isaacman 2003: 4).

Subaltern studies scholars have rightly questioned the possibility for Western scholars to 'speak in the name of the subalterns'. According to this perspective (see for e.g. Spivak 1988, Kokotovic 2000), 'university-based intellectuals, particularly in North America and Europe, cannot and should not seek to speak for those who have suffered the worst indignities of the colonial era or of the new global order. In the most profound sense, their positionality and biographies make the role of the interlocutor impossible – even were it desirable' (Isaacman 2003: 4). Even attempts to refigure informants as consultants and to "let the other speak" in dialogic or polyvocal texts – decolonization at the level of text – leave intact the basic configuration of global power on which anthropology, as linked to other institutions of the world, is based (Abu-Lughod 1991: 143)[5].

The problem is not merely ethical (am I a legitimate interlocutor?), but epistemological, too. If the setting is that described in the previous paragraphs, what kind of personal relationship it is possible to establish – especially for an anthropologist

coming from the ‘Euro-American center’ - in a field where unbalanced power relations, colonial legacies and neo-imperialism are still setting the scene? If anthropology is –as I think it is – largely based upon an ethnographic practice that rests on inter-personal relationships, the question is a basic one. This is not simply an issue of individual sensibility, which is not enough to bypass history, global policies and economy only by virtue of a – often fictional - ‘openness to alterity’. Rather, we should acknowledge that these elements are the very frame within which the ethnographic encounter actually takes place, accepting the challenge of working in a political field where power relations, unbalanced economic situations and traditions of domination do affect our representations and must be re-integrated in our methodological concerns and in our texts.

During my ethnography of the young men in Bubaque, I always had the perception that all our dialogues and interactions were taking place within an unbalanced power relation, which was almost impossible to overcome, for it was exactly to the power my interlocutors thought I had as an European that they were aspiring. And it was, according to them, my ‘power’ and ‘wealth’ that could *save* them, bringing them to the other side, out of *there* towards the *center* whence I came. My presence there was already in itself a powerful sign of a difference (which is not only cultural) that could not be overcome with anthropological comprehension, but had to be acknowledged and confronted.

It is impossible, at least according to my experience, to avoid one’s own positionality. Positionality is a basic element of any kind of ethnographic text production, and cannot be ignored or erased; on the contrary, it must be acknowledged as a fundamental element of the anthropological object, which is in most cases the account of an encounter narrated unilaterally. The historical and contemporary power unbalances are part of our ethnographic enterprise, the basis of the relationship we build with the individuals whose lives we want to narrate (in most cases not to them).

The anthropologist is never a neutral presence, and a fortiori not when he/she is a European living in a small African village. Anthropologists cannot avoid being to some extent alien and in various ways politically charged characters, who by their very presence necessarily alter the reality in which they are trying to participate. The

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[5] For the difficulties of such an engaged position in anthropology see also Pina Cabral 2004.

encounter between a foreign fieldworker and rural Africans is never neutral or disinterested; each side has its own interests, brings its own assumptions and beliefs as members of a particular society, and has its own preconceptions as to what is involved in the encounter, what the encounter 'means'.

However, the fact that the anthropologist can never be a purely disinterested spectator does not mean that he/she cannot, within certain limits, be involved in a certain kind of dialogue. Despite all the different agendas and the inevitable misunderstandings, *some* form of dialogue is possible. The limits to this dialogue, however, are not something that can be fixed in any kind of rigorous theoretical way, since they depend so much on the idiosyncratic and particular circumstances of each field study — circumstances that include the nature of the personal relationships that develop between the anthropologist and local people (Crehan 1997).

So, coming back to the subaltern studies scholars and their critique, do I have the right to talk? My answer is yes (otherwise I would not write this lines), as long as my position (in history and in the relationship with the people I meet) is made clear and evident. In addition, as long as the tradition of domination to which I belong (as a European, as a 'white', as an ethnographer) is described as the stage upon which the whole encounter takes place. Even if I decide to write against the grain, against my own position, I cannot deny the fact that I am sitting and writing about somebody else who, on the contrary, is not writing about our encounter. We are doomed to acknowledge the power inbalance that makes us writers and 'others' narrated beyond their intentions or will. But this does not mean that we cannot write *against* those forms of domination which empowered and empower us. As Lila Abu-Lughod puts it, 'from our position as anthropologists, we work as Westerners, and what we contribute to is a Western discourse. […] The West still has tremendous discursive, military, and economic power. Our writing can either sustain it or work against its grain' (1991: 158-159).

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Even if the initial research project has changed, my previous knowledge of the field has been crucial for understanding the relationship between elders and juniors, and the social organisation of the village. The network of people I had built up during my

earlier stays in Bubaque proved extremely supporting. My proficiency in Kriol[6] has been essential as well, as most young men, despite their education, could not manage a conversation in Portuguese.

Though I will not be concerned specifically with gender construction in itself, this is definitely a gender-specific ethnography, as it focuses young Bijagó males living in the Praça. Doing a gender specific ethnography does not in any case mean doing a gender-blind analysis. The reason for my choice is that Bijagó masculinities have become a key site for the experience and negotiation of modernity (see, for a similar conclusion among the Masaai, Hodgson 1999): in other terms, we are facing in Bubaque a gender mediation of modernity (1999: 123; see also Wardlow 2002). This is not to say that Bijagó women are deaf to the appeal of 'the modern', or that girls are less likely to compete for new forms of wealth and status besides the ones offered by the social organisation of the village. I am just stating that gender in Bubaque is an important element in the individual perception of the ideas of modernity, progress and development. The strategies and interpretation men and women are both putting in place in the context of the Praça are different, and respond not only to a local gender differentiation, but are also a consequence of 'development', 'modernity' and 'progress' being profoundly gendered concepts – whether conveyed by media images of consumption, agendas of nation-building, or legacies of colonial discourse (Hodgson 2001) - which redraw local gender relationships and ideologies. On the one hand then, as we shall see in the first and in the second chapter, men suffer deeply from the consequences of the local hierarchies based on age, and are therefore more compelled to seek alternative strategies to attain status which might set them free. The generational conflict, in other worlds, is a powerful incentive for young men since, for them, being

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[6]Portuguese is the official language of Guinea-Bissau and the only language allowed at school. At least in theory. Kriol is the vehicular language of Guinea-Bissau. Some authors proposed to call it *guineense*, in order to underline its autonomy as a language (Scantamburlo 1999: 15). Its origins date back to the arrival of the Portuguese ships on the shores of Senegambia in the 15th century. In the trading posts (the *praças*) of the coast of Guinea, the Portuguese and the African elements mixed up producing a language with grammatical and lexical autonomy, which was an original product of the new Creole culture. Despite Portuguese being the official language of Guinea-Bissau, the Kriol is the only real *lingua franca* of the country, mainly associated with the urbanities, where it allows communication between different linguistic groups, but largely spoken even in the rural zones (Scantamburlo 1999). In Bubaque, it is the language of the Praça, but it is widely spoken also in the villages, especially by the young. See however, *infra*, chapter 2 for the politics of language comprehension. Transcription of Kriol terms follows the simplified system proposed by Scantamburlo (1999: 125-132).

‘traditional’ means accepting a position of subalternity. On the other hand, the very ideas of progress and modernity (both in their colonial and national versions) convey in themselves a patriarchal ideology that pictures men as the very agents of change and development (Boserup 1970, Leacock 1979, Brettel and Sargent 1993, Van Allen 1976, Lockwood 1993, Escobar 1995). Already in 1984, Raul Mendes Fernandes, writing about the changes brought about in gender relationships by the market economy, maintained that:

> Le partage des pouvoirs est constamment mis en cause et renégocié selon des rapports de force complexes entre [...] l'économie marchande et l'économie d'auto-subsistance. La 'modernisation' représentée par l’école et la pêche commerciale, agit de façon à privilégier les hommes au détriment des femmes. Ces activités encouragent la mobilité des hommes vers les centres urbains pour des activités salariales, tandis que les femmes restent à bras avec une économie appauvrie par la carence de main d’œuvre. Cette modernisation crée une catégorie de gens liés à l'Etat par des rapports salariaux et une mentalité d'entrepreneurs qui s'organise autour des notions de propriété privée et de profit. (1984 : 79-80)

Mendes Fernandes attributes the increasing importance of males among the Bijagó also to the patriarchal biases of colonial society:

> Les pouvoirs coloniaux et post-coloniaux, les administrations et les entreprises économique installées dans la région et au-dessus des sociétés Bijagós appartiennent à l'ordre patriarcal. Dès la période coloniale, il y a plus d'un siècle que la soumission des sociétés Bijagós dans une société globale patriarcale a obligé à des transformations profondes de leur structures traditionnelles. En conséquence, l'intégration des sociétés Bijagós dans la société coloniale les a transformées en de sociétés patriarcales. [...] Les sociétés Bijagós en raison de son intégration dans la société coloniale, en premier lieu par la violence militaire (les guerres de ‘pacification’), ensuite par le commerce et les impôts, ont constitué deux systèmes productifs juxtaposés à des buts différents, l'un pour le marché (l'huile de palme, le poisson), et l'autre pour l'économie domestique. Les principaux agents économiques de ces deux systèmes de production sont sexuellement divisés, c'est-à-dire, les principaux acteurs du système du marché sont les hommes et les principaux acteurs de l'économie domestique sont les femmes. La société coloniale en valorisant l'économie marchande a donné aux hommes, dans une société, au départ, à réciprocité sociale entre les sexes, les moyens pour qu'ils assurent une domination masculine, et, en conséquence, à constituer une société ‘patriarcale’ proprement dite (1990: 17-18).

This vision, however, does not reflect the real importance of women in the economy of the islands. With the worsening of the economic situation of the country, women

have put in place 'informal' economic strategies (Galli and Funk 1992, Havik 1995) that have frequently become the only support for urban families (Sheldon 1996, 2002), giving women a central position. Despite these new opportunities offered by informal trade however, for many young girls of the Praça marriage, or involvement with a wealthy man, was still considered the easiest and 'normal' path to wealth: beauty was acknowledged as an important capital to be spent on the market of modernity, and the commoditization of sex and beauty was considered a valid economic strategy[7]. In a sense, most girls thought about 'modernity' as something to be attained *through* a man[8].

Fieldwork with young men in the Praça was for me a challenging experience. I frequently had the feeling of being in a 'passive' situation: my 'informants' looked for me just to talk about their situation, expressing their rage against the culture of the villages, their longing for Europe, without any effort from my side to ask anything. As I was accustomed to a very different ethnographic practice, which implied a gradual approximation to an unusual topic of conversation (e.g. initiation), often sacred and secret, this kind of apparently spontaneous communication surprised me. The structure of feeling[9] I wanted to explore seemed to emerge immediately in almost *every* situation. I felt I was becoming a kind of bar-ethnographer, whose maximum effort was sitting, sipping a beer and waiting. Far different from the heroic vision of the anthropologist of classic ethnographies.

I obviously cannot ignore that many people wanted to establish with me an opportunistic relationship: insisting on their dismal situation and their difficulties when talking with me was also certainly a strategy. The category of people I choose to talk about were the ones always ready to take advantage of a – supposedly - rich European, constantly looking for money and presents, offering themselves as helpers, interpreters,

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[7] It is important however to underline that the commodification of sexuality is a common phenomena in urban Africa, and does not necessarily equate to prostitution. As James Ferguson has noted writing about the same phenomenon in the Zambian Copperbelt, 'sexual relations always seemed to have a very strong economic content, and I found the concept of prostitution almost useless in describing the range of ways in which economic motives were intermingled with social, emotional, and sexual bonds' (Ferguson 1999: 186).

[8] For a deeper analysis of the gender relationships in the Praça, see Bordonaro 2003.

[9] This concept is borrowed from Raymond Williams through Philip Thomas (2002: 369), referring to 'a specifically interrelated – hence structured – set of elements (including semantic categories, feelings, practices, and relations) that are both a product of and a means of formulating understanding of lived experiences and that, though they escape formal definition, exert a palpable hold on social consciousness'.

informants etc. If it is true that the relationship between the ethnographer and the 'informants' is in many cases biased by the hope of economic benefits, this is not necessarily an obstacle, limiting the progress of investigation or altering the 'data'. We have on the contrary to accept the challenge of working in a political field where power relations, unbalanced economic situations and traditions of domination do affect our representations and must be re-integrated in our methodological concerns.

In my case, the opportunism of the young men had to be acknowledged as a feature to be accounted for rather than erased or overcome. It was part of the game, an implicit agreement between me and my interlocutors, an aspect of the social circumstances under which ethnographic knowledge was produced in our interaction. Moreover, I, too, was part of the game, because, as Karen Kelsky underlined, 'ironically, ethnographic fieldwork is another means for the transnational circulation of discourses about the West. […] The Western anthropologist is the native of that West/modernity/universalism that circulates transnationally' (1999: 247). When young men talked to me they were always facing what they considered to be a 'symbol of modernity': consequently and strategically, it was always important for them to state clearly that they were 'modern' too, in order to gain my approval, to show they were on my side, the side of 'progress'[10]. This does not mean that they were assuming a 'false' identity, opposed to a 'truer' one. Selfhood has been frequently described as a social performance (see for e.g. Herzfeld 1985: 10-11) and my identity as a 'Westerner' worked as a kind of catalyst for the very production of their narration of modernity. In this sense, conversations with my informants could be better described as a social process in which narrative identities were *produced*. Anthropological knowledge is inevitably built *in* the dialogical encounter between the ethnographer and the informants, and is not something achieved *through* it. Ethnographic practice is in itself an occasion for the *production* of cultural knowledge. This however does not mean that the anthropologist and his informants are the sole actors in this social process; rather, wider social and cultural phenomena are enacted and displayed in this intersubjective encounter (Quaranta 2004).

Conversations with the young men always took the form of largely unstructured interviews, more similar to free conversations, with little specific orientation from my

side. Only 10 interviews were recorded with a video camera, and later transcribed. The other ones were noted down after the conversation, as I did not take notes during the talks not to break down the spontaneity of the interaction. The boys however could not obviously be the only actors in my ethnography, and several other persons were interviewed: teachers, local administrators, NGO personnel, and missionaries.

Focusing on youth

It has been frequently underlined that the very category of 'youth' lacks a clear absolute definition and that in many situations it may be based on one's social circumstances rather than chronological age (see for e.g. James 1995: 45; Wulff 1995: 6). If we consider youth as both relational and culturally constructed, it seems very difficult to define it in any general way. Deborah Durham recently proposed, instead of providing a definition, to think of youth 'less as a specific age group, or cohort, but as a social 'shifter'' (Durham 2000: 116)[11]. In this way, 'as people bring the concept of youth to bear on situations, they situate themselves in a social landscape of power, rights, expectations, and relationship' (*Ibid.*).

Working in the Praça of Bubaque, I realized that in that context youth was only partially connected to a precise biological age, and even less was it defined any longer by the passage though ritual boundaries, as happened in the village social organisation[12]. The different situations of the men I worked with made biological age at times irrelevant for their self definition: some were already born in the Praça, others left their villages at different ages, to attend school and to look for a job in town. Boys of 12 and 20 attended the same class at school, sharing the same project, defying in the same way the authority of the elders, showing the same expectations. The social category of 'youth' was rather built by contrast with the category of 'elder', and in the Praça, the two semantic fields were a direct emanation of the ideological schism between 'modernity' and 'tradition'. Youthfulness in the Praça was associated with urban modernity, with the project of 'development', with the sharing of a certain lifestyle – all

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[10] For a similar argument, see Pigg 1996.

[11] A shifter is a special kind of deictic or indexical term that works not through absolute referentiality to a fixed context, but relates the speaker to a relational context ('here' or 'us' are such terms).

[12] See chapter 1 for a description of the age-based social organization at the village.

features which will be analysed in the following pages. Being a young Bijagó man in the Praça meant essentially opposing the social world of the village and sharing a project of personal 'development'. The people I met generally did not define themselves as *young*, but rather as the 'first developed generation', shaping their identity by contrast with 'underdeveloped' and 'non-modern' cultural aspects of their social landscape.

Young Bijagó men in the Praça did not constitute a homogeneous community. They often lived in very different personal situations: some resided alone in the Praça, attending school and trying to obtain help from relatives, missionaries and tourists; others had their parents, more often the mother, living and working in the Praça, and supporting their education; some others dropped out of school and just lingered, selling souvenirs to the few tourists, or simply begging for money and presents from the 'whites'.

Besides these differences however, a condition of double marginality could in sociological terms well describe the situation of the young men in the Praça. On the one hand they were marginal in the village, as their youth automatically placed them in a powerless and subordinate position in the rural social organization; even more so, as I will show, when they refused to acknowledge the authority of the elders and attempted to get rid of the gerontocratic institutions of the village. On the other hand, though, young men were also marginal in the context of the Praça, where - unemployed, students and without money as most of them were – they lived at the fringe of the market economy, ignored when not feared by the representatives of the state and by the adults. In this sense, what I am focusing on is not youth culture as a whole and in all its complexity, but rather, and more modestly, the articulation between young men's double marginality and the ideologies of 'modernity' and 'development'.

The predicaments of youth in Africa

If we consider the question of youth in Africa, we rapidly realise that the controversial role of youth in politics, conflicts and rebellious movements is one of the

major challenges in the continent today[13]. The issue is not only the involvement of child soldiers into warfare, as in the well-known cases of Somalia, Sierra Leone or Congo, but, more generally, that of the problematic insertion of large numbers of young people in the socio-economic and political order of post-independence Africa. Even educated youths are confronted with a lack of opportunities, blocked social mobility, and despair about the future. Many of the political antagonisms and conflicts in which youths are involved are produced by current demographic and socio-political contradictions. African youth, while forming a numerical majority, largely feel excluded from power, are socio-economically marginalized and thwarted in their ambitions. They have little access to representative positions or political power. Particularly exposed to the allures of modernity (even though not totally passive to them), youth are particularly aware of the incongruence between state modernism and global modernity, turning into ferocious critics of the governments (Mbembe 1985 is obviously a benchmark, but see also Collignon and Diouf 2001). This makes for a politically volatile situation in many African countries. Jean and John Comaroff recently wrote about South Africa (but this is the case for many other African contexts as well) that 'the dominant cleavage here has become generation' (1999: 284; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2005) and that youth in particular are the focus of rapid shifts in postcolonial and global economy and society. In short, it is agreed that African youth is today in crisis.

Beside this unquestionable datum however, there is a growing body of literature concerned with the analysis of the local agency of youth in Africa, highlighting the new and creative identities and cultural products young people are creating 'à l'intersection du local et du global' (Diouf and Collignon 2001: 13). In this respect, my approach is largely indebted to a relatively recent approach to the study of youth which has been called 'anthropology of youth' (Bucholtz 2002)[14], and that focuses the interaction

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[13] There is a growing body of literature in anthropology concerned with youth in 'Third World' countries and in Africa in particular. See for e.g. Mbembe 1985; O'Brien Cruise 1996; issues 73: 3 (July 2000) and 73: 4 (October 2000) of the *Anthropological Quarterly*; issue 80 (December 2000) of *Politique Africaine* and issue 18 of the journal *Autrepart*, edited by René Collignon and Mamadou Diouf (2001); the volume recently edited by Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (2005). This introduction, however, is not intended to be a review, and other works will be cited and commented in other parts of my work. However, De Boeck and Honwana 2005 is an accurate review of recent studies on youth in Africa.

[14] Even if anthropology did not focus until recently on youth as a specific and autonomous topic, it is important nevertheless to underline how the study of youth played a certain role in anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century, with the foundational ethnographies by Mead (1928) and Malinowski (1929), which established adolescence as a crucial topic of anthropological investigation, and as a result,

between the concepts of modernity and globalisation and the ambivalent engagement of youth in local contexts (see the seminal work by Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995). The anthropology of youth is characterised by its attention to the agency of young people and its interest in how identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local culture (Wulff 1995: 10; De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). It emphasises the here-and-now of young people's experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds. Youth become cultural actors and a consistent theoretical concern emerged, in order to show how young people are active agents in the construction of the meanings and symbolic forms which make up their cultures (Wulff 1995: 1)[15]. Following this invitation, recent works tried to overcome the sense of victimisation prevailing in much sociological work on youth in African countries, exploring the local reformulation of identity and strategies the young are putting in place to cope with their – often – difficult situation[16]. This stimulating approach focuses in particular on the local modalities through which young people adopt, transform and re-invent global and 'modern' cultural traits. Following this perspective, I took in my own analysis a particular stance on subjectivity, focussing on the fluid and hybrid nature of identity and its enacted character, trying to get rid of totalising notions of hegemony

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issues closely associated with this life stage – initiation ceremonies, sexual practices, courtship and marital customs, intergenerational relations – have long been a focus of anthropological inquiry. See Wulff 1995 for a good review.

[15] Specific researches on youth cultures, though mainly focused on resistance or deviance, have been conducted since the 1950s by sociologists. According to Helena Wulff, Talcott Parsons was the first to introduce the term 'youth culture' to mean a distinctive world of youth structured by age and sex role (Wulff 1995: 3). His focus was primarily American middle-class youth. The American sociological tradition in the following years led several works on the subject, approaching youth cultures mainly as deviant sub-cultures (see for e.g. Coleman 1961, Cohen 1972, Young 1974). Such researches moreover – as has been observed (Caputo 1995, Wulff 1995, Bucholtz 2002) – have usually approached youth from the perspective of adulthood, overlooking youth-centered interaction and cultural production in favour of an emphasis on the transition to adulthood, obscuring young people's cultural agency. Youth appear, but as potential adults rather than in their own right, reflecting the continuing dominance of development and socialization emphases in social science constructions of childhood and adolescence (Amit-Talai 1995: 224). Another trend in youth studies was inaugurated by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (the so-called Birmingham School) in the 70's and 80's, which, using a Marxist perspective, depicted working-class youth culture as class-based sites of resistance (see for e.g. Hall and Jefferson 1975, Willis 1977, Hebdige 1979). The Birmingham school has received a number of criticisms (see for e.g. Jenkins 1983, Lave et al. 1992), for the lack of attention to gender issues, for the lack of ethnographic and empirical work as well as for the scant attention paid to subjectivity (Wulff 1995; Muggleton 2000).

[16] See among others Argenti 1998, Gable 1995, 2000, Weiss 2002, Honwana and De Boeck 2005, Comaroff and Comaroff 2005.

and ideology and proposing a notion of resistance as appropriation, but without overlooking the power of wider cultural narratives and socio-economical forces.

In this process of appropriation I stressed the role of the faculty of imagination (chapter 7), acknowledged as a social practice of crucial importance to understand the local production of meaning and the shaping of 'global' categories (See also Ivy 1995; Appadurai 1996; Weiss 2002; Favero 2004). The concepts of 'imagined worlds' and 'possible lives' (Appadurai 1990, 1996) have been in this sense illuminating. According to this perspective, as Ulrich Beck underlined, identity is to be understood less in terms of geography, nation, ethnicity and culture, than in terms of how people dream (Beck 2000: 54).

The wider context: the state, 'development', and 'globalisation'

The issue of youth cannot obviously be addressed without reference to wider contexts. My main concern – young men's marginality in Bubaque – only becomes understandable in relationship with three broader issues: the quandaries of the post-independence state and the failure of the modernisation project; the impact of the ideology of development on local self-perception; the 'new' grand narrative of globalisation and its ambivalence in the African context.

The crisis of the state

I will focus at length on the state in Guinea-Bissau in chapter 4, highlighting both its colonial legacies (chapter 3) and the intertwining between the nationalist project and the issue of modernisation. There has been a dramatic shift in the social sciences concerning the role that the state had to play in Africa in the process of 'development'. According to the modernisation school that dominated development studies in the 1950s and 1960s, the newborn independent states in Africa had to play a major role in triggering the economic take off theoretically predicted[17]. As it is well known, modernisation

[17] As Wolfgang Knöbl (2002: 160) has underlined, there was no systematically codified theory: the label 'modernization theory' was actually applied to a variety of theoretically informed, non-Marxist perspectives within the disciplines of anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology and sociology, perspectives which were developed in the 1950s and 1960s to analyse developmental

theorists usually assumed that, once colonialism had shaken these underdeveloped countries out of their traditional immobility, they would embark on a process of modernisation that would make them traverse certain 'stages' towards a capitalist system (see emblematically Walt Rostow's *Stages of economic growth* [1960]). Considerable empirical work was produced indicating certain historical regularities associated with economic growth, the idea being that once identified they could then be deliberately introduced or manipulated (through aid schemes and 'development planning') in the 'underdeveloped' countries to initiate or accelerate the growth process. 'Traditional society' might set up barriers but these would be overcome by modernising elites, aid and foreign capital. The first generation of post-colonial 'development plans' were couched in a language that suggested conscious efforts to move economies from one 'stage' — usually the 'pre-take off' stage towards the 'take-off' stage. In all this, the key role was played by 'modernising elites' guided by the aspirations of nation building and development. The 'developmental state' was seen therefore as not only desirable but also possible and able to be facilitated by training programmes, aid, military support, etc.

By the mid-1970s, this linear view of capitalist development began to lose its dominance largely due to the criticisms of the dependence school that generally denied that capitalism in the periphery could play a historically progressive role. On the contrary, modernisation theory was denounced as the most explicit and systematic blueprint ever created by Americans for reshaping foreign societies (Gilman 2003: 5) and as an explicit political project in the post-war era (see for example Gunder Frank 1971; see also on this issue Latham 2000; Engerman *et al.* 2003).

In development studies, the idea of the 'developmental state', has been criticised since the 80s, in part for the blatant failure of most projects of development and the manifest quandaries of most states in Africa, in part for the general shift in mainstream development economics, from state-assisted growth to liberalism and free-market

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problems in countries of the so-called Third World. Since then modernization theory suffered heavy criticisms from the dependency and world system theorists (André Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein dominating the scene), and at the end of the 1970s, Wallerstein could celebrate its metaphorical funeral (Wallerstein 1983 [1979]). For a good analysis of literature on modernization theories in the social sciences, see Smith 1997; Arce and Long 1998; Probst, Deutsch and Schmidt 2002. It is important to remember however, that the present day ideology of development and its international

theories. Actually, most African states proved that the argument of the modernisation theory about the stages of economic growth was wrong. Moreover, in the last years, several authors pointed to a situation of ‘state decay’ for many African nations, characterised by the general withdrawal of the state from the territories. This situation has been underlined for e.g. by Patrick Chabal (1996), ascribing it to a multiplicity of factors (economic crisis, political instability, ‘re-traditionalisation’ [see Forrest 2002 for the specific case of Guinea-Bissau], marginalisation on the international scene). As Filip De Boeck (1996) proposed writing about Zaire, we must acknowledge the actual absence of a centralised state structure and consequently focus upon the local strategies of survival and resiliency in the face of collapsing national structures (1996: 75). Robert Thornton (1996) has proposed a similar view of African postcolonial states, which he depicts as countries but little more, with a highly limited sovereignty. This view is also shared by Jean-François Bayart (1989), who reveals in his own analysis the hollowness of the state in postcolonial Africa. Naerman (2000) too has dealt with the disintegration of the African state.

Development

Though the idea of modernisation as a teleological process of social change directed towards a ‘Western’ model has been contested and abandoned in social sciences, a similar vision is still very common in the ‘development industry’ and is exported by means of international agencies which ‘propose’ development recipes that should lead to market economy, pluralist democracy, and mass consumption, granting freedom, growth and welfare. The literature on this issue is vast, and it is not my goal here to offer an exhaustive review of the field, but merely to highlight a few basic elements. The notion of ‘development’ has been in this sense heavily criticised since the 60s by several scholars. Already in 1962, Dudley Seers criticised development economics for its ethnocentrism and exclusive economicism: ‘most economists – wrote Seers - are, in any case, rather incompetent at assessing and allowing for the non-economic elements of the picture’ (1962: 328). Moreover, he continues, ‘what usually happens is that the

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apparatus *is* profoundly biased by the idea of Western modernity as human destiny and as only possible way-out for the Third World countries. See *infra*.

model the economist consciously or unconsciously uses turns out to be the sort of model suitable for a developed country', ignoring qualitative factors, and 'sweeping recommendations that derive rather from ideological bias than from the study of the local problem' (1962: 329,331). According to Seers, authors and lecturers focusing on development economics, not only concentrate on the economies of some developed industrial country, but present their abstract models as universally valid (1967: 4). In a later article (1979) Seers, considering the discipline of development economics, traced its ancestry in part to colonial economics. The other part, according to Seers, was political opportunism with regard to the development of 'backward' countries, on the part of both their own governments and the major capitalist countries, who saw in development an efficient means of fighting the communist threat. 'Development economics in the conventional sense', wrote Seers, 'has therefore proved much less useful than was expected in the vigorous optimism of its youth. In some circumstances, it may well have aggravated social problems if only by diverting attention from their real causes' (1979: 712).

In the 90s, with the spread of liberalist policies and of the ideology of globalisation, 'development' as a model of planned social changed has been heavily attacked by a number of scholars[18], who denounced its bias in favour of a unique American cultural and political model and set of values, and pointed at the strong lines of continuity between colonial and developmentalist discourses and policies: the project of development has been charged with being a continuation of the 'civilising mission' (Biccum 2005: 1006, 1018; Latouche 2004)[19]. James Ferguson (1999) in this sense has underlined that the 'conceptual apparatus of development provided a new means of organising and legitimating an only-too-real inequality that was already very well established. […] "Development" was laid on top of already-existing geopolitical hierarchies; it neither created north-south inequality nor undid it but instead provided a set of conceptual and organisational devices for managing it, legitimating it, and sometimes contesting and negotiating its terms' (1999: 248). The radical critique of the

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[18] See, among others, Escobar 1991, 1995; Sachs 1992a; Esteva 1992; Hobart 1993a; Crush 1995; Ferguson 1994; Smith 1997; Moore and Schmitz 1995; Mills 1999; Cooper and Packard 1997.

[19] I will highlight these continuities in the specific case of Guinea-Bissau in chapter 3 and 4. The Portuguese agronomist Marina Temudo (1998) has recently offered an interesting and critical description of how the 'industry of development' works in Guinea-Bissau.

notion of development, despite its formal transformations, remains one of the main theoretical points of recent critiques of capitalism and globalisation (see for e.g. Latouche 2004).

As I will stress in chapter 2, 'development' (*desenvolvimento*) was one of the key words in young men's conversations in Bubaque, one of the main interpretative frames they used to understand and explain their condition and the situation of their country. Their marginality, their self-perception, as well as their awareness of the Archipelago and of Guinea-Bissau as a whole as 'underdeveloped' places, rested on the adoption of 'development' as main social narrative, a model, as has been underlined, strongly biased in favour of Euro-American social and economical standards, which places Africa at the bottom of a unilinear evolutionary scale.

The feeling of marginality I found among the young in Bubaque (and the consequent wish to migrate), in other terms, did not merely depend on the objective perception of economic imbalances and of the unequal distribution of power. The experience of underdevelopment and marginality also rested upon the adoption and the sharing of a 'culture of development'. The paradox of marginality – observed Anna Tsing – is that it places people both inside and outside the global traffic (1994: 289): they can neither escape nor fully participate, they are defined on its basis, but defined as excluded. Gustavo Esteva claimed in this sense that when the term underdeveloped was popularised by the president of the US Truman in 1949:

> two billion people became underdeveloped. In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority (1992: 7)

In this sense, the perception of marginality depends on a peculiar self-positioning on a single line of progress, accepting the centres *as* centres and sharing their values. The perception of poverty and marginality is in this sense a cultural construction[20]. Francis Nyamnjoh stressed emphatically that:

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[20] On the notion of poverty and its social construction see Illich 1992, Rahnema 1992, Escobar 1995: 21; on the specific case of Guinea-Bissau (Temudo 1998 II: 130; Trajano Filho 2002, 2004).

> Development to the Africans entails self-denial, self-evacuation, or self devaluation, and the glorification of everything Western. […] Africans have thus been invited to devalue themselves, their institutions and their cultures by cultivating an uncritical empathy for Western economic, cultural and political values which are glorified beyond impeachment. They are presented as having little chance of progress as Africans or blacks, and invited to intensify their assumed craving to become like the whites in Europe and North America. The entire paradigm is impatient with alternative systems of thought and practice […] Modernity as hegemonic mode of social life and organization of European origin thus poses as a giant compressor determined to crush every other civilization in order to reduce them to the model of the industrialised West (2000: 5).

Young men's interest in 'development' compelled me to face its local contemporary relevance and its genealogy. What I will try to demonstrate in the following chapters is that, first, modernisation theory and development ideologies did not constitute a novelty with respect to the colonial theories of social and cultural evolution which justified the 'civilisation mission'. Secondly, I will emphasise that the theoretical demise of modernisation theory[21] does not mean that a model of planned social change based on ethnocentric models and values have been abandoned[22].

Globalisation: old wine in new bottles?

In recent decades, 'globalisation' has come to be considered as the golden path to development, the final solution for the inequalities of the world: in its name democratisation and economic liberalism have been prescribed as universal recipes to grant every human being an easy access to a 'better' life (see, for example Fukuyama 1992). Actually large parts of contemporary globalisation studies remain premised on assumptions of convergence and unilinear modernisation. What we should ask ourselves, together with Anna Tsing, is if globalisation theories contain pitfalls for engaged social scientists similar to those of modernisation theory: 'Many

[21] See however Inglehart and Welzel 2005, for a contemporary reassessment of modernization theory. In addition to this, contemporary political rhetoric on globalisation seems to show frightening similarities with issues of modernization (see *infra* Conclusion).

[22] Development has been also acknowledged as a continuing political project, or even as an argument justifying contemporary imperialism. Ivan Karp, among others, rightly pointed out that the development ideology is one of the constituting features of a global system that is heir to colonial and imperial domination (2002: 88).

anthropologists are able to look at the dreams and schemes of modernisation with a critical distance. We need this critical distance, too, in studying globalisation' (*ibid.*: 351). Is globalisation a new version of modernisation (with all the theoretical and political biases of the latter)?

There is obviously an enormous body of literature concerning the various aspects (economic, social, cultural, ideological, etc.) of recent transformations generally labelled as 'globalisation'. As far as anthropology is concerned, the mainstream tendency has been to underline how the 'familiar lines between "here" and "there", centre and periphery, colony and metropole become blurred' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 10. Kearney (1996) is also a benchmark). The idea that the 'global cultural economy' cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models (Appadurai 1990, 1996: 32; Kearney 1996: 8) has become very common, as well as the notion that the increase in cultural contact does not necessarily entail homogenisation towards a single Western cultural model (see for e.g. Chambers 1994, Hannerz 1996, Appadurai 1996, Meyer and Geschiere 1999, Friedman 1994c). On the contrary, most cultural and anthropological studies today tend to highlight the local resistance to global capitalism, with high *hosannas* and celebrations of creativity and anti-homogenising tendencies. These dynamics are certainly highly relevant to understand how people in local context react and appropriate wider cultural and economical influences.

On the other hand, however, I would suggest that the celebration of the local creative consumption of the products of the increasingly global culture industry must not make us overlook important political and economic issues associated with Euro-American influence and with colonial legacies and their consequences in specific local contexts (see Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Escobar 1995, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996, Ferguson 1999). In fact, the persistence of strong asymmetries in the world economy, the technological dependence of the African countries, and the imperialistic and neo-colonial strategies of the Euro-American governments, while obviously leaving room for local agencies, seem to contradict the forecasts of disappearance of centres and peripheries and the promises of a more equal and borderless world. As Donald Donham pointed out, recent literature focussing on cultural flows, cosmopolitanisms and alternative modernities 'has sometimes been carried out remarkably innocent of the hard edges of global economic and political reality' (2002: 254-5).

Without denying local phenomena of creative consumption and resistance, I am simply stressing that, in exploring in our ethnographies the specific processes of construction of locality in the interplay with wider contexts, we need to attend also to the power of dominant cultural narratives, while paying close attention to the resistances and the reaffirmations of subjects positioned in particular relations of inequality (Rofel 1992: 107). Moreover, it is imperative to point out that such phenomena do not necessarily entail the overshadowing of discriminating categories: an ethnographic approach to specific contexts often reveals, beside resistance and agency, the persistence or the rise of hierarchies and inequity, in spite of the optimistic fairytale of the advancing democratisation/globalisation of the planet. Despite the major narrative of globalisation, the economic world order continues to create marginality as much as connections. As Ferguson pointed out, 'what we have come to call globalisation is not simply a process that links together the world but also one that differentiates it. It creates new inequalities even as it brings into being new commonalities and lines of communication. And it creates new, up-to-date ways not only of connecting places but of bypassing and ignoring them' (1999: 242).

My point however in this sense is not to denounce the evil of the supposedly 'new' world. I am rather interested in how these asymmetries are perceived and represented in a local specific context, how the unequal relationship of the margins to the centres produces fascination as well as frustration in the peripheries of the 'global order' (chapter 7). For the young men of Bubaque paradoxically, the main effect of the increase in transnational connections and circulation of meanings was a more acute perception of marginality, a sense of forced limitation to a too local context from which it was difficult to flee. Despite individual creative efforts, which revealed an evident local agency, the opening of wider horizons and the multiplication of imagined and fascinating life possibilities also made exclusion and frustration increasingly evident. On the one hand, they witnessed the widening of their horizons, to new stimuli for the imagination; on the other they suffered from a chronic lack of means. As Achille Mbembe ironically underlined, for the poor in Africa globalisation only seems to mean 'licking at the shop-window' ('*lécher la vitrine*', quoted in Meyer and Geschiere 1999: 5). This dialectic between global availability and global affordability, between fascination and exclusion, triggered manifest feelings of marginality and peripheriality

among the young Bijagó living in the Praça, despite their undeniable creative capacity to rework and appropriate global categories and values.

From this point of view, 'globalisation' seems a notion bringing little novelty to the analysis of local contexts in Africa. What the idea of globalisation implies in fact is the absolute newness of contemporary economic, political, and cultural dynamics. It indicates a new 'age', utterly different from the former one – a new deal. Looked at from Africa however, 'globalisation' seems to be little different from other narratives that have become out of date, such as 'modernisation' or 'civilisation' - models of social and political change just as unilinear and ecumenical. As Samir Amin asserted in a lapidary way, there is nothing 'new' about globalisation (2004). 'Globalisation – maintained Neil Smith – is only the latest stage of uneven development […] an increasingly pure form of imperialism' (1997: 182)[23].

The undersides of modernity

> Modernity, or its absence, sets economies, regimes, peoples, and moralities off from one another; fixes them generally in the calendar of our time (Geertz 1995: 136)

All the constructs I have so far considered (civilization, modernization, development, globalisation) - all equally unilinear, evolutionary and ecumenical - share the same theoretical framework: modernity[24]. What does it mean to speak of modernity in Africa? What sense does it make to employ this term in the African context? As an analytical tool of social sciences for understanding change, 'modernity' has received countless criticism in the recent decades. A key-word of the grand narratives of social evolution of Western social and political science, this concept proved to be too ideologically

[23] See also among many others, Biccum 2005, Hardt and Negri 2000. See also the insightful and provocative Harootunian 2004, showing remarkably the continuity between modernization and development programs in the Cold War era and contemporary imperial US politics. A benchmark is obviously Chomsky 1998

[24] Even contemporary development sociology continues to base much of its argument on notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' which are not problematised: emblematically Jean-Jacques Salomon, Francisco R. Sagasti, and Céline Sachs-Jeantet in their introduction 'From tradition to modernity' to *The*

biased and theoretically inapt to describe social change in Africa. As John Comaroff lucidly underlined:

> Modernity is a European cultural term with a specific ideological valence and a very particular history. It is not an analytical concept, let alone a universal standard of comparison among societies. Its export – in the civilizing mission of colonialism, in development schemes, in social scientific discourses – was part of the imperialism of that history and of the history of imperialism (2002: 130).

This is not to overlook the fact that contemporary African reality has much to do with the impact and reaction to 'expansive markets and mass media, of commoditization and crusading creeds, of books and bureaucracies' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: xiii), as much as with the colonial and postcolonial Euro-American expansion. But

> Precisely because it *is* so closely connected to Western ideologies of universal development, modernity serves ill as an analytic tool for grasping European expansion, most of all from the vantage of the colonized (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: xii-xiii).

If there is novelty in the world today, it is problematic to understand the multiplicity of the present in terms of 'modernity' (Appadurai 1996: 2) without falling back on the pitfalls of modernisation theory.

Multiple modernities?

To overcome this difficulty, several authors recently proposed that modernity should be conceived in the plural, and that we should talk of 'multiple modernities' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: ix). On this topic Brian Larkin speaks about 'parallel modernities', referring to 'the coexistence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are often subsumed within the term "modernity"' (Larkin 1997: 407). With a slightly different meaning, Appadurai (1991) writes about 'alternative modernities', and Marilyn Ivy about 'coeval modernities' (Ivy 1995)[25]. A

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uncertain quest: science, technology, and development published in 1994, claim lapidarily that 'Whatever its pace and level, development is a journey between tradition and modernity'.

[25] The literature on the subject is vast: see among others Arce and Long 1998, Gaonkar 2001, Eisenstadt 2001, Lichtblau 1999, Rofel 1999, Piot 1999.

central aim of the alternative-modernities literature has been to destabilise the Eurocentric presuppositions that are built into this conception by demonstrating that there is far more variety in the way in which the constitutive elements of analytical modernity are configured and lived than has commonly been grasped (Karlström 2004: 597). However, wonders acutely Joel Kahn (2001: 659): 'if modernity can never be disembedded from particular historical contexts, can it ever be conceptualized in the singular without retreating to the formalistic and procedural notion of a pure modernity? If the modern cannot be abstracted from context and singularised, is there any use in speaking of modernity at all?'. I do agree in this sense with Mikael Karlström that when modernity is dislodged from its socio-evolutionist moorings, it 'melts into air' (2004: 597).

Moreover, what I also find worrying about the idea of multiple modernities is that it might – with the honest goal of acknowledging local interpretations – lead us to overlook the unevenness, disempowering effect and ideological features 'modernity' (in the singular) still has, leading directly to a politically and analytically disabling position (Foster 2002: 57). This relativizing step, adds Donald Donham, implicitly smoothes out what are in reality vast differences in power and wealth in what must be seen today as an interactive global system: 'by pluralizing and relativizing, it suggests that each modernity is on an equal footing' (2002: 242). By accepting the idea of alternative modernity, we dismiss the epistemological and political need for an alternative *to* modernity. Even in its local appropriations, modernity always keeps a marginalizing and Eurocentric underside (see *infra* this chapter).

An ideology of aspiration

Discarding modernity as an appropriate analytical tool for understanding social and cultural change does not mean overlooking the powerful hold that this *idea* has in many popular fields of discourse[26]. Even if the idea of modernity and its dual paradigm have been criticised and largely abandoned in the social sciences, we cannot ignore that it still originates and inspires a wide range of plural worldviews and multiple real social

practices, both in local contexts, state policies and international institutions. In fact, as Stacy Pigg observed, nowadays, one seems to come upon the project of modernity virtually everywhere (1996: 94). As Robert Thornton has rightly remarked:

> Despite the fragmentation of modernism in the West, the aporias of reason, the politics of pastiche, the crisis of authenticity and the pervasive presence of simulacra, the Third World appears to be embracing modernism and modernisation as never before. This is occurring just at the moment when Western intellectuals are facing the end of a prophetic positivism and are moving beyond the promises and the premises of the modern with a sense of disillusionment […] While it is clear that postmodernism and the postcolony have something in common, it may not be the rejection of modernity itself (1996: 137).

Several authors have underlined how we are often left with the local persistence of this category as an ethnographic datum to be explained in a specific local context (see for e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Rofel 1992, Pigg 1996, Ferguson 1999, Schein 1999): notions of being and becoming modern, aspirations to become modern, confirms Knauft (2002: 4), are a palpable and potent ideology in many if not most world areas. James Ferguson, writing about urban workers of the Copperbelt region, observes on this topic that

> their conceptions of town and country [...] were not simply compatible with the modernist metanarratives of social science; they were a local version of them. Modernization had become a local tongue, and sociological terminology and folk classification had become disconcertingly intermingled in informants' intimate personal narratives. [...] Listening to informants discuss the contrast between 'the village' and 'the town', or 'African' tradition versus 'European' modernity, I often had the unsettling sense that I was listening to an out-of-date sociology textbook. It became clear that even if modernization theory had had its day at the level of social theory, it would still require to be attended to as ethnographic datum. […] that which once presented itself as *explicans* was beginning to make itself visible as *explicandum* (1999: 84).

My concern is therefore with what Knauft refers to as 'the force of the modern as an ideology of aspiration' (2002:33), particularly with regard to its linear or directional

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[26] There has been a huge debate about modernity and postmodernity. The analysis of this literature is however beyond the scope of this study. See however, among many others, the key texts of Habermas 1981, Vattimo 1985, Latour 1991, Berman 1983, Giddens 1991a, Gilroy 1993.

chronotope[27] — the conception of a collective temporal trajectory from an inferior past to a qualitatively different and superior future, often positing a radical disjuncture between the two. It is with modernity as a distinctive temporal ideology (Karlström 2004: 597) that I will be primarily concerned, and with its local appropriations. What I propose is to shift our attention from modernity-as-a-fact (modernisation) to modernity-as-a-myth, considering modernity as a kind of social myth, as well as its diffusion and appropriations in specific local contexts.

In this vein, several scholars (see for e.g. Rofel 1992, Pigg 1996, Ferguson 1999, Schein 1999) recently proposed to consider modernity as a dichotomic social narrative that operates like a diacritical marker, which *produces* a real bipolar social milieu. According to Lisa Rofel (1992), 'we need to retain the sense of modernity as an ideological trope – both in Europe and elsewhere. More than a specific set of practices, modernity is a story that people tell themselves about themselves in relation to Others' (1992: 96). Modernity appears then to be primarily an interpretative device for social self-reflection. A similar interpretation has been elaborated by Stacy Pigg (1996), who claims that modernity is something like a worldview, 'a way of imagining both space and people through temporal idioms of progress and backwardness' (Pigg 1996: 163), a geography of imagination that creates progress through the projection and management of alterity (Knauft 2002: 18).

We cannot obviously ignore that commitment to a model produces real social facts. Modernity, as an inspirational idea, has social effects through the production of social identities. As Louisa Schein (1999: 363) has underlined, 'in producing such social identities in the name of the modern, modernist dichotomies become stabilized, superimposed on the messier social terrain in which persons are not easily sorted into binary categories'. As such, the idea of modernity provides clear orientation for social actors by giving easily understandable meaning to complex processes of social change.

Modernity as a temporal ideology is always also an *ideology of value*[28] (Knauft 2002: 28), drawing on and perpetuating deep legacies of capitalist and colonial exploitation (Karp 2002). It creates a difference of prestige, a social distinction (Bourdieu 1979). To understand the hold that the idea of modernity has in local context,

[27] Chronotope is a term invented by Michail Bachtin to refer to the premises about space-time intrinsic to and constitutive of genres of text.

we have to explore the historical processes through which specific social forces transform(ed) *a* narrative into *the* narrative, an interpretation of social change into a value to pursue, a word-order into a world-order. This process is the European colonial experience.

Modernity/Coloniality

Modernity, as a feature of imagination and as a project, is linked to European colonial experience (Trouillot 2002). As such, the idea of modernity creates a basic difference of value between the West (and its *mimesis*) and the rest, appearing in this light as the legitimising ideology of European expansion (Castro-Gómez 2002). As the Comaroffs have underlined (1993a: xii), modernity should be seen as less a historical condition than a political project, whose aim has always been to centre the West and marginalize the rest: it needs therefore to be thought about in the framework of capitalist expansion and its related ideologies.

The explicit connection between modernity (as an ideology) and coloniality has been made vigorously by the so called modernity/coloniality research group, which puts together a number of Latin American scholars (among others Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Arturo Escobar. See Escobar 2002)[29]: one of the goals of these scholars has been exactly that of re-reading the 'myth of modernity' in terms of modernity's 'underside' (Escobar 2004: 217; Mignolo 2000), drawing attention to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism as constitutive of modernity and identifying the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity itself (*ibid.*, Dussel 2000, 2002; Castro-Gómez 2002). As Santiago Castro-Gómez underlined (2002: 276), *coloniality* should not be confused with *colonialism*: while *colonialism* refers to a historical period, *coloniality* references a technology of power that persists today, founded on the 'knowledge of the other'.

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[28] Gilroy speaks in a similar fashion of the 'cultural force of the term modernity' (1993: 56).

[29] Influenced by the Indian Subaltern Studies Group and by dependency theory, this group is associated with the work a few central figures, chiefly the Argentinean/Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, and the Argentinean/US semiotician and cultural theorist Walter Mignolo. There are, however, a growing number of scholars associated with the group, particularly in the Andean countries and the USA. In recent years, the group has gathered around several

Coloniality is not modernity's 'past' but its 'other face'. Modernity/coloniality could be than considered as a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself and that relies on 'a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as centre' (Dussel 2000: 471; Quijano 2000: 549). We might therefore talk of the project of modernity as an exercise in 'epistemic violence' (Spivak 1988; Castro-Gómez 2002). The final epistemological goal of this approach is therefore, as Escobar puts it, 'to assert the need to move beyond the paradigm of modernity within which the Third World has functioned as a key element in the classificatory hierarchy of the modern/colonial world system' (2004: 224-5).

Despite its primary and fundamental link with Euro-American political dominion, the categories of modernity can be – and continually are - appropriated outside the West as political and social tools to sustain new forms of power. As Gilles Deleuze wrote, commenting on Nietzsche, 'in general, the history of one thing is the succession of the forces striving to seize it' (Deleuze 2002: 6). The narrative of modernity is continually appropriated by different social forces in local contexts, employing its promoting value in local power strategies. Modernity is also a language through which new powers (independentist leaders, postcolonial elites, competing political parties or urban youth) can express themselves and emerge.

Nevertheless, the idea of modernity cannot be considered an absolutely empty category, which can be filled in with local meanings, conserving no traces of its original colonial project. On the contrary, it always preserves some traces of its dominative mode, claiming a distinction between the 'West' and the rest of the world, identifying the Euro-American urban society as apex of human progress and defining all other cultures as its periphery (even within the geographical space of Europe itself. See Dussel 2000, 2002, Quijano 1999, 2000). The devaluation of Africa implicit in the narrative of modernity, re-presents itself under the form of local ideas concerning development and missed progress (Arce and Long 2000: 5): in my specific case, the local appropriation of the idea of modernity in Bubaque, while on the one hand it empowered the young, allowing them to assess their independence, will and aspirations,

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projects and places in Quito, Bogotá, Mexico City, and in Chapel Hill/Durham and Berkeley in the USA. Escobar 2004 is a good introductory text.

on the other hand, on the global scene, it defined their situation as underdeveloped. The idea of modernity is at the same time a self-affirmation and a self-negation. Ambivalent and ambiguous, it creates in Africa schizophrenic identities wandering in that marginal global space where the discourse of race and the idea of modernity collide, in African towns as well as in Fortress Europe (see on this topic Fanon 1952, Gilroy 1993, Bhabha 1994, Quijano 2000). In African contexts, modernity is already from the start a 'negated modernity', as it elides the enunciating subject (the African) in the act of its enunciation: the idea of African inferiority implicit in colonial modernity, is still present in the so-called post-colonial world/word order. This trace is never completely erased despite the localisation of the idea of modernity: as Mudimbe observed (1988:4-5), the paradigm of modernity designated for Africans also the spaces of marginality, 'the intermediate space between the so-called African tradition and the projected modernity of colonialism'.

Despite the local interests it served, the narrative of modernity in Bubaque was always also a reflection on the relationship between one specific place (the island, the Archipelago, Guinea-Bissau) and what was accepted as the very centre of modernity, Europe; a local discourse on the 'possibilities and perversities of the African present' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: xiv), on the global geography of 'development' and the position of Guinea-Bissau in it. As Clifford Geertz underlined:

> 'Modernity' may not exist as a unitary thing. 'Modernization' may mean quite different things when applied to different matters. 'Modern life' may not appeal to everyone equally. Yet that does not prevent them, or the idea of them, from setting the terms in which countries like Indonesia and Morocco, thrashing about somewhere between 'backward' and 'advanced', are these days perceived, discussed, analyzed, and judged, both by the world at large and by their own populations (1995: 140).

The narrative of modernity produces a world of centres and peripheries, creating a teleology whose ultimate referent is somewhere else, in the 'developed world': it places cultural traits and individuals at different levels of the same ladder of progress and evolution. In Bubaque, if on the one hand it produced an antagonism between urban youth and rural way of life, on the other it placed the Archipelago and Guinea-Bissau at the 'beginning' or at the 'margins' of the mainstream of modernity itself. Despite young men's proud statements of modernity, within whose framework they constructed their

identity in opposition to the village ‘tradition’, they also pictured their condition as marginal and peripheral on the global chessboard of progress, feeling largely excluded from the benefits of development. The same construct that made them define themselves ‘developed’, made them feel marginal and far from the centres of ‘production of modernity’: modernity turned out to be also a narrative of global marginality and exclusion, and, as I have already underlined, an ideology of aspiration[30].

[30] Bruce Knauft pinpointed the same dynamic in Papua New Guinea (2002b), defining the self-marginalization implicit in the idea of modernity, ‘the alternatively modern dimension of subordination and disempowerment through cultural distinction’ (2002b: 121-2).

1. In the village: an overview

While I was sitting on the stairs of the UICN[31] buildings, facing the old harbour, Beto, a young man I had already met during my previous stay in Bubaque, recognised me and came closer. We shook hands and he sat beside me. Beto was 24 at that time[32]. He was born in the village of Ankamona, a few kilometres from the Praça, where he moved when he was 12 against his father's will. The year before he had finished the ninth year at the state high school in Bubaque[33]. To continue his education, his *formason* (formation), he had to move to Bissau: then, he hoped, *sai fora* – get out - of Guinea-Bissau, towards Europe. He told me he had to carry the burden of education all by himself, because his father did not agree with his decision.

'What did your father want?', I asked.

'He wanted me to become like him!', he answered. Beto started a long attack against the 'culture of the village' – *kusa di kultura*, 'the things of culture' as he defined it, that he perceived as an obstacle to his *desenvolvimento* – development.

'My father', he continued, 'wanted me to stay in the village. In the village people live like animals, my father lives like an animal. Yes, people live like animals, they live like this', and he eloquently put the hat in front of his eyes, 'they don't see!'

What they did not see, and what Beto, at the contrary, realised and pursued, was 'how things go, how the world turns' – *kuma ki kusa na kuri, kuma ki mundu na vira*.

Then he pointed his index finger to his temple and insisted: 'They are delayed in their brain. Here in Bubaque, in Guinea, we have a delay of centuries by comparison with Europe. Centuries.' The main reason for this situation was, according to Beto, the

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31 Union International pour la Conservation de la Nature, a Swiss association devoted to the preservation of the natural habitat of the Archipelago.

32 March 2002.

33 The education system in Guinea-Bissau is based on the 12 grades Portuguese model. There is basic EBE (Ensino Básico Elementar, 1st to 4th), the EBC (Ensino Básico Complementar, 5th and 6th) and the ES (Ensino Secundário, 7th to 12th). In Bubaque, one can attend up to the 9th year, than has to move

lack of education and the attachment to the 'things of culture'. Some women and children passed by, bringing baskets to the market:

'Those women', Beto asked me, 'did they go to school? Do those children go to school? Their parents don't send them to school: if you didn't go to school, you don't even think that your children have to. We are the first generation that starts to develop itself (*kumsa desenvolvi*).'

This conversation – similar to many others I had with the boys I met in the Praça - reveals two interconnected aspects of the young men's worldview I have already underlined at the end of the Introduction: the contrast with the village and the elders, and the feeling of marginality. This dichotomic social vision however, was not a plain description of local cultural dynamics: rather, it must be considered as a salient trait of young people's social imagination, emerging at the crossroads between local logics concerning age and status, and the dualistic social narrative of modernity diffused by the state and the development industry since independence.

Anthropological researches in other contexts (Gable 2000, Rasmussen 2000, Rea 1998, Sharp 1995), however, have called into question the all too easy explanation according to which the tension between the tantalising promises of modernity and the expectations of tradition-minded adults may be thought to create resentment among the young people (Bucholtz 2002: 529). Youthful challenges to adult authority are widely documented, but the phenomenon is not always so intimately connected to modernity as this scenario might suggests, and it is unlikely that rapid social change *in itself* triggers disagreements between younger and older people. This is not to ignore the fact that economic and political change can alter important elements of the social structure, but rather that, as Leis and Hollos (1995) have argued, cultural factors, such as kinship structure, may also affect how change is negotiated between generations. It is, therefore, necessary to give an overview of the social organisation in the village, before analysing young men's rejections and accusations.

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necessarily to Bissau, to attend the 10th and the 11th grades. The 12th grade must be attended in Portugal. See however chapter 6.

Age grades and age classes

In Bubaque, an analysis of the social organisation of the village reveals that the generational divide is one of its basic features. The main social distinction is that between young men (b. *iamgbá*[34], 'the children') and elders (b. *iakotó*) [35]: juniors are educated to respect the elders, sharing their goods with them. A complex system of age grades and age classes leads the young men through several steps towards the status of elder: the initiation ceremony (b. *manras*) is the apex of this highly hierarchical social organisation based on age that some authors have defined a gerontocracy (Silva Marques 1955: 294-295).

Age grades become increasingly structured: from a young (b.) *nea*, (b.) *omgbá*, and (b.) *kadene* no specific behaviour or strict observance of social norms is expected, which, on the contrary, is the case for the following grades. We have in other terms a distinction between informal and formal age grades (Bernardi 1984: 15): while the former are merely loose age categories (like our 'child', 'boy' etc.), the latter correspond to social positions with specific status and prerogatives (Bernardi 1984: 17). In Bubaque, only the passage from one formal age grade to the other (b. *kanhokam*, *karo*, *kabido*, *kassuká* and *okotó*) is marked by a specific ceremony.

The n'ubir kusina

The passage from one formal age-grade to the next is not automatic, and does not necessarily correspond to biological age; it is, rather, subject to a set of ritual payments to the members of the upper age-grades. These payments consist mainly of rice, palm

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34 Bijagó language has been classified as a main independent branch of the Western-Atlantic sub-family (Sapir 1971; Ruhlen 1987:101; Segerer 2000: 4). Important morphological and lexical variations have been reported from island to island. Segerer (2000: 10) has circumscribed four main groups, while Luigi Scantamburlo (2000: I, 7) writes of five main variants. All variants however have nominal classes (Segerer 2000: 16; Scantamburlo 2000: 18). In this work, I have adopted a simplified transcription, as proposed by Scantamburlo (2000). To distinguish between Kriol and Bijagó terms, the latter ones will be preceded by the letter 'b.' Other terms in italics must be understood to be in Kriol.

35 This is not intended to be an exhaustive description of the social organisation of the inhabitants of the island of Bubaque. What I want to underline here is just the importance of the generational opposition within the village social organisation. For basic anthropological descriptions of the communities of the

oil, fishes, palm wine, clothes and *kana*[36]. To share their wealth with the elders is the main duty of young men: in this way they progress in the age-grade system, acquiring new knowledge and obtaining respect from the elders of the village. To honour the elders in order to become an elder, to grow up, this is the ultimate meaning of the social philosophy in the village: when they are older, men will be allowed to marry and to be acknowledged as legal fathers of their children, enjoying social prestige and economic sustain.

This principle originates a complex ritual structure informing the entire community, called (b.) *n'ubir kusina*. The phrase *n'ubir kusina* (or *n'ubitr kusina*) synthesises the complex meaning of this institution. *N'ubir* means 'ask for' or 'offer', but offer with the idea of having something in exchange, while the term *kusina* designates both the dignity of being an elder and the presents which are offered to the elders (Henry 1994: 105). In Kriol, the term is translated in Bubaque with *paga grandesa*, literally to pay the status of elder. More than a single ritual, the *n'ubir kusina* could be defined as a general logic, a founding rule of the social organisation of the village. The *n'ubir kusina* is described by the young as a difficult path, a hard labour, even though indispensable to reach the status of adult, with everything this status implies: the right to the land, to marriage, to legal paternity, and to a serene path to the other-world. The idea underlining this logic is that the desired goal of the young men is to become an elder, to belong to the group of those who eat and no longer of those who offer, of those who enjoy the presents and not of those who have to work to make them (Henry 1994: 106). The very expression *n'ubir kusina*, suggests that one has to make presents to the elders, that one has to pay the elders to become an elder himself.

The *n'ubir kusina* is the law *par excellence* among the Bijagó: it involves several villages in its organisation and co-ordination, and it is the key-stone of the whole male age-grade system, including all the ceremonies referring to the promotion of the age-groups, as well as the (b.) *manras* itself, the male initiation. As marriage, social paternity and access to rice fields are all linked to the grade one has reached in the

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islands produced in post-independence period, see Scantamburlo (1991 [1978]), Gallois Duquette (1983), Mendes Fernandes (1989, 1995), Henry (1994), Sousa (1995), Pussetti (1999, 2001, 2005).

36 The *kana* is a spirit made from the juices of the sugar cane. See infra note 49 for the importance of this spirit in the economy of the region.

system, it is easy to understand that the *n'ubir kusina* is really one of the basic elements of the social organisation of the Bijagó (Henry 1994: 106).

Women, moreover, are as much involved as men in the duty of honouring the elders, but they do it while possessed by the spirits of the young men dead before their initiation: as is well known (Gallois Duquette 1983, Henry 1994, Pussetti 1999, 2001), the spirits of young men who died before their initiation cannot reach the 'other-world', and have to wander on hearth, waiting. Possessing women, they can undergo initiation *within* the female bodies, completing in this way the path they could not accomplish while alive. Women, however, do not have an autonomous system of age grades similar to the male one: the bijagó language distinguishes only between the young woman (*kampuni*) and the older and married one (*okanto*), and it is only when possessed by the male 'returning spirits' that they pass through the steps of men.

The *n'ubir kusina*, Raúl Mendes Fernandes has underlined (1989: 18,19), basically consists in the:

> pagamento de prestações e contra-prestações que seguem dois movimentos: um que vai das classes de idade inferiores às classes de idade superiores, e outro, das classes superiores às inferiores. O primeiro movimento […] parte de baixo para cima, ou seja, a classe inferior deve oferecer prestações à classe que lhe é imediatamente superior. Estas prestações são constituídas, em primeiro lugar, por bens de subsistência (arroz, óleo de palma, peixe, crustáceos, vinho de palma) e, em segundo lugar, pelas mercadorias adquiridas no mercado (panos, aguardente, objectos domésticos, objectos de adorno). A importância desta segunda categoria de bens prestativos, as mercadorias, tem aumentado à medida que a sociedade bidjogó se integra de forma crescente na economia de mercado. […] Para os jovens rapazes, os ciclos prestativos conduzem-nos ao *manrase*, que è a prestação suprema pela qual os jovens mudam de estatuto social e ganham o direito a ser socialmente adultos […]. O segundo movimento parte de cima para baixo, quer dizer dos anciãos aos jovens. Os anciãos, em função das prestações oferecidas pelos jovens, acordam-lhes um estatuto social superior.

Nea, ongbá *and* kadene*: the informal age-grades*

Nea (b.) is an informal age grade - merely a name to indicate the children from birth to three years approximately, independently from gender. This period is characterised by a tight relationship with the mother: the child never abandons her back except at night (Gallois Duquette 1983: 88), and it is exclusively breast fed. (Scantamburlo 1991:

59, Gallois Duquette 1983: 88). *Ongbá* (b.) as well is an informal grade, a category indicating the child from the weaning to six years approximately (Scantamburlo 1991: 59). In this phase the child still remains close to his mother, playing with his friends. The young boy still lives naked, while the girl wears, from her early age, a short skirt of vegetables fibres. No working activity is required to the children; however, some elements show that he has a subordinated position in the village. He eats after the adults and often only some rice, since the meat or the fish has often already been consumed. Moreover, they do not have the right to speak: in public situations, they are constantly silent, merely recording what the adults say without taking part in the conversation, but ready to obey to the orders. During the following stage, lasting approximately five years, the boy is called (b.) *kadene* (an informal degree, as in the two previous cases): the young man wears short pants, accompanies his father in the hunt, and learns fishing techniques. It is during the age-grade *kadene* that ritual beatings begin (Gallois Duquette 1983: 90): an adult gathers them several times in the forest and hits them with a branch, testing their resistance and strength.

Kanhokam

Between twelve and seventeen approximately, the young man belongs to the age-grade (b.) *kanhokam*. It is in this case a formal age-grade. The access to this grade is marked by a specific ceremony called in Bijagó (b.) *n'ubitré kanhokam*, 'ask for the *kanhokam*'. It is a secret ceremony that is carried out in the thick of the forest. During this ritual passage, some basic knowledge of the traditional pharmacopoeia is imparted: more specifically the young men are taught to use plants to chase away the snakes and to protect themselves from their poison, but also to become invulnerable to weapons. The young *n'anhokam* (plural of *kanhokam*) are also instructed to make the (b.) *n'oratokó* (singular *koratokó*). The *n'oratokó* are made carefully knotting fresh palm leaves following specifies patterns, and are the material support attracting powerful and potentially dangerous spiritual entities associated with the forest. The utilisation of the *koratokó* is multiple. Henry (1994: 89) maintains that the *koratokó* is used to consecrate a place in the forest used for the ceremonies. According to Gallois Duquette (1983: 62-63), the *koratakó* is a negative spirit one should address in secret in the forest to

express violent and antisocial desires, that would be inappropriate to the public ceremonies in the village. Scantamburlo claims that the *koratakó* was once linked to witchcraft (1991: 67), but that it is currently used to defend oneself against witchcraft and ill fate, and that it is one of the magical powers that the Bijagó fear most. Knotted palm leaves are often placed close to the gardens, on fruit trees or at the entrance of specific areas of the forest, in order to protect them from thieves and from strangers (ibidem: 69). The *n'anhokam* are well known for their warrior ethos, a feature that emerges in spectacular way in their dances, when they often handle wood swards and shields, or even imitations in wood of western rifles.

Karo

All the documents available about the Bijagó describe the life of the (b.) *karo* (pl. *n'aro*) as a paradisiacal period, entirely dedicated to the pleasures of dance and love. In this phase of his life, the young man acquires the right to live in a house of his own, that he generally shares with others *n'aro*. He also has the right to 'marry', even though only in the (b.) *eshoní* form. Bijagó society distinguishes in fact two types of relationship between a man and a woman:

a) *eshoní*: the young man has the right to permanent relationship and to have children with several marriageable women. He has not yet the right, however, to own a house to live with his lovers, to claim social paternity, nor to own his own field to grow rice. During male initiation, these relations have to end, and none of his previous lovers is allowed to become his spouse in a future wedding.
b) (b.) *koneió*: the adult man (b. *kassuká*) can marry permanently with the woman he wishes, build a house of his own and own a rice field.

The *eshoní* 'marriage' does not grant to the *n'aro* the paternity of the children of which they are biological parents. Nevertheless, to have many *eshoní* relationships, to have many women, is what is socially expected from the members of this age-grade. The number of women conquered is a reason of pride for the *karo*, whose arms are often adorned with iron rings obtained from the hammering of tin cans, indicating the number

of women he had a relation with. As a matter of fact, the *karo* are, to the eyes of women, champions of virility and of manly seduction. Having many children is also a matter of pride: the generative and sexual powers are key elements of an ethos that stresses the physical strength and the virile beauty. Strength, resistance to fatigue and pain, a loud and manly voice, all are deserved qualities of the *karo*. The young man in this phase of his life does not own his own field, and even if he works in the field of his father, at the moment of the crop he cannot claim any rice. The *n'aro* are socially encouraged to be beautiful, brave, generous, skilful dancers and musicians. If they refuse to help their father in the work in the fields, if they do not participate to the maintenance of their family, they are not blamed. The *n'aro* spend most of their time in the forest, extracting palm wine, palm oil or fishing. They often go sell palm oil to Bissau, coming back with scarves, clothes and jewels with whom they adorn themselves during their famous dances. This, however, does not imply that the *n'aro* are not involved in the logic of the *n'ubir kusina*: when the time of initiation gets closer, the *n'aro* are gathered in the forest and ritually beaten by the elders, to whom they have to make a huge quantity of gifts and offerings.

Young men belonging to the *karo* age group before initiation constitute an age class, whose members will move synchronically through the following rituals that regulate the passage from one age grade to the next. The age class is called in Bijagó *manras* (as the initiation itself), but every class has its specific name (b. *anhominka, apudutá, iatangúnh, iapúda, iassúga…*). The members of the same age class, however, are not of the same age, as access to the grade *karo* occurs individually or in small groups, when the required offerings have been put together.

Manras*: the male initiation ceremony*

What happens during the initiatic retreat in the sacred forest, the (b.) *manras*, is a strictly secret parcel of Bijagó culture. For the Bijagó, revealing the secrets of the initiation ceremonies is one of the most terrible crimes, exposing the transgressor to the mortal risk of the revenge of the ancestral entities that supervise the *manras*. 'If a Bijagó speaks, he will die', the elders say. Danielle Gallois Duquette reports that a civil servant on the island of Orango that wanted to help her in her survey of the plastic arts

of the Archipelago, addressing the inhabitants of the village of Angonio, said: 'You can tell everything about the *iran*[37], but nothing about the *manras* or about the forest' (Gallois Duquette 1983: 97).

For this reason there are no ethnographic accounts of the initiation ritual, except the unpublished notes of Father Formenti, a missionary in Bubaque since 1968, who, having been admitted to the *manras*, noted down a description of this ritual. These notes seem to have mysteriously vanished, and all we are left with is the synthesis Danielle Gallois Duquette made of this document in her own work (1983). All later descriptions of the ritual, including Christine Henry's, are based on Gallois Duquette's interpretation of Formenti's note, and it is not worth here making one more summary of a summary. Some new elements have been added by later investigations of mine on the issue (Bordonaro 1998, Pussetti and Bordonaro 1999), but they are not relevant for my main argument here[38].

What is important to highlight, is that the *manras* is the apex of this highly hierarchical social organisation based on age. This specific ritual, a crucial step for the social construction of men, imposes to the whole age-class a period in the forest variable from island to island. During this phase the young men live without any contact with the daily life of the village, facing numerous and difficult ordeals. What the analysis carried out this far on the *manras* have revealed, is that the age-based hierarchy that characterises Bijagó social organisation rests also on the progressive acquisition of secret knowledge through the initiatic path[39]. Initiation divides the male population into two groups, one subordinate to the other: those who 'know' and have the right to the status of adult, and those who do not know yet, and are therefore treated as 'children'. In this sense, the initiatic process could also be described as a political management of knowledge: initiation and the age grades system link knowledge and power, structuring the entire population of the village hierarchically on the basis of the sharing of secret knowledge. The *manras* is conceived as a necessary step granting the inheritance of knowledge and therefore access to authority and higher status. On this principle,

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37 *Iran* is the general Kriol term for any 'spirit', as well as for their material support (carved statues, amulets, etc.).

38 On male initiation in the Archipelago see Scantamburlo 1991, Gallois Duquette 1983, Henry 1994, Pussetti and Bordonaro 1999.

39 See infra chapter 6.

authority rests firmly in the hands of the elders, who manage, through the elders' council, daily life in the village, as well as the progress of the initiatic process. Secrecy in facts, as unshared powerful knowledge, reinforces the power of the elders: in practice, more than the very knowledge that is kept secret, it is the exclusion of a certain group of people from a specific knowledge that makes the secret an important instrument of social control and distinction (La Fontaine 1985: 185, 186).

Kamabi

According to the traditional rules, this age grade lasts between six and nine years after the initiation ritual. It is the hardest phase in a man's life, a long rite of passage to the more responsible life of the *kassuká*. During this period, the man cannot enter or sleep in any house, but dwells in a simple hut at the margins of the village or in the forest. Sexual relationships are strictly forbidden, and at the beginning of this phase the (b.) *kamabi* (pl. *n'amabi*) can't talk to women, not even to his own mother. The segregation from the opposite sex is so strict that he can't remain in the veranda of a house if there is a woman present. The *kamabi* does not possess anything, not even his clothes, and must carry out the heaviest tasks at the village. The elders can ask him for any kind of help and they can't refuse.

Before leaving this age grade, the *n'amabi* have to undergo six ceremonies where they are ritually beaten. Moreover, all this period is spent working and putting together the goods to make large offerings to the elders, to whom the *n'amabi* give cows, goats, pigs, rice, fish and palm wine (Scantamburlo 1991: 62). Their hair is shaved and they are not allowed to wear any ornament: their only adornment are the scarifications (b. *ikento*) on their chest and abdomen, that witness the passage through the initiation ceremony. The traditional costume of the *kamabi* is a simple loin cloth made of goat skin, a handkerchief around his head, and a long spear of wood with a shield, symbols of force and war. Nowadays, especially in Bubaque, these rules are less strict: the *kamabi* can also wear European clothes, and he can even marry before quitting the age-grade (see *infra*).

Kassuká

Finally attained the status of adult, the (b.) *kassuká* has the right to marry permanently (*koneió* union) with a woman (though not with one of the partners he had when he was *karo*), he is honoured by the younger men and receives their gifts, he is allowed to take part in the elders' council, and owns a house and a field. He also has a closer relationship with the spirits, spending a part of his time to make them offerings. The *kassuká* usually wears expensive European clothes, gold and pearl necklaces, bracelets and rings, showing their wealth and power.

Okotó

Ten years after, the man reaches the apex of the age-grade system, turning into an (b.) *okotó*, a true elder. He has learned a lot along his life, and he knows perfectly the Bijagó moral code, everything about the laws and rules, about the relationship with women, the secrets of pharmacopoeia and of the spirits. (Gallois Duquette 1983: 96). He doesn't have to work any longer, as he is sustained by the younger men, spending his time arguing with other elders, drinking palm wine, smoking tobacco and making offerings to the spirits. Even though authority in the village is shared between the elders' council, the 'king' (b. *oronhó*), the priestess (b. *okinka*), responsible for female initiation ceremonies and for the (b.) *orebok* possession cult[40], and the (b.) *oum*, the sacred slit-drum (b. *kumbonki*) player, the elders still seem to hold the highest position, taking *de facto* decisions on ritual, religious and juridical matters.

Transformation

Social norms at the village show violent imposition of authority and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1972), consequently triggering frequent criticisms and negotiations of these very rules. The social organisation described above, upon which young people,

40 This ritual is a prescribed, collective and non-pathological case of spirit possession. All women, embodying the 'souls' (b. iarebok) of the men dead before their initiation, pass through an initiatic path paralleling the male one, allowing those 'souls', potentially dangerous, to complete the process they could not achieve while alive (see Sousa 1993; Henry 1994; Pussetti 1999, 2001).

elders and anthropologists seem to agree, is far from being static and unchangeable. Reconstructions of the complex history of the region (see Brooks 1993, Mark 2002, Hawthorne 2003 and *infra* chapter 3 and 4) have shown that the communities of the islands and the core elements of their social organisation underwent dramatic transformations. The numerous cultural contacts and the changing economic and political situations can't leave in this sense any doubt about the dynamic character of the communities of the islands, revealing once more how the idea of static and 'traditional' societies is largely inappropriate to the African context.

More recently, despite the accusations of the young men of the Praça who stigmatised the steady adherence to 'tradition' of the elders, there has been - especially on the island of Bubaque - an attempt to adapt some aspects of the initiation ceremony and of the age-grade system to the exigencies of the young and to their gradual involvement in the social and economic structures of the Praça, as well as to respond to the new rules introduced after independence by the PAIGC (Gallois Duquette 1983: 25. But see *infra* 4). The length of the *manras*, for example, has been largely reduced and has been limited to the month of school holiday, in order to allow participation of students, and the period of isolation imposed to the young after the initiation ceremony (b. *kabido*), has become looser, and is frequently ignored. Despite these adaptations, the preservation of the age-grade system appeared to be very problematic in recent times, at least in Bubaque, where I could witness in a certain time span how this apparently high regulated social mechanism was much less flawless than elders wanted to admit. Emblematically, the *manras*, the vital element for the progression of people through the age grade system, is constantly delayed, and has not been realized since 1987, paralysing a whole generation of young men, who are confined to the status of 'children' despite their growing older. It is frequent in Bubaque today to meet *n'aro* (pl. of *karo*) aged forty or even older. The paralysis of the system can be ascribed to a multiplicity of factors: in part it can be imputed to the economic difficulties people had to face in recent years (which however reveals the not so easily admitted dependence of the ritual economy of the villages on the money economy of the Praça. But see *infra*). However, this unprecedented delay must also be attributed to the resistance of many young men, who deprived the villages of their economic contribution due to their gradual shift towards the world of the Praça, with the perspective of easier access to

status through involvement in the market economy. Despite the evidence of these recent transformations, appeal to the preservation of tradition as made by the elders and the stigmatisation of the immobility of village social life, as put forward by the young men, are very common, giving us a glimpse of the strategic and ideological use of the concepts of tradition and modernity. It is important to acknowledge the function of the appeals to tradition, as well as to modernity, in the construction of contrastive identities and in the preservation of, or confrontation with, elders' authority[41].

Since opposition between generations is a structural element of village social organisation, the link between modernity and youth turns out to be far more problematic than it might have appeared at the beginning. The youth/elder opposition, emerging as a salient element in the words of the young of the Praça, must be thought of as an articulation between the dualities implied in the idea of modernity and a local social stratification based on age[42]. In other terms, the contrast between youth and elders was not induced by the external penetration of the myth of modernity: rather young people in Bubaque, in order to overcome their political, economic and cultural marginality, adhered to the narrative framework and to the symbols of modernity to attempt to build a contrastive and effective identity in the urban context, defying the authority of the elders and aspiring to attain new forms of power and social status. As I will show later, this move represents for young people a dead end, an attempt doomed to failure due to the peripheral position of Guinea-Bissau in the global economy and to the ambivalence of 'modernity' itself.

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41 Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Werbner 1998, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993.

42 This is also the case in many other African contexts, see for e.g. Argenti 2002, Bayart 1984, 1989, Gable 1995, 2000

2. 'Who cares for Bijagó culture anymore?'

Four dialogues

I will report now four cases that exemplify how young men defined their identity in contrast to the values and the ritual practices associated with rural life and emblematised by the elders.

Agostinho

Agostinho, 25 years old, was born in Canhabaque, an island close to Bubaque, in the village of Bine. He was attending the eighth class of high-school, and he frequently lamented his situation as a student-worker. When he was 12 he left the village, against his family's will, who wanted him to follow the normal path prescribed for the young men at the village; his decision to move to Bubaque, leaving the village and going to school, deprived him of any family support. His father thought he was old enough to afford a living by himself: if he chose to abandon the world of the village he had to face the consequences of his act. He was an adult now: he had therefore to arrange a living, hunting or collecting palm fruits in the morning and going to school in the afternoon. In the weekend Agostinho studied what he had not had time to study during the week.

His attitude towards the culture of the village was more nuanced than in the case of Beto. He insisted often on the necessity to give up 'those things that delay us', especially male initiation, the *manras*: this ritual, he claimed, was too hard (male initiation as it is practised on the island of Canhabaque is well known in all Guinea-Bissau as the hardest and cruellest, and some boys – the hearsay goes –die), and too long. Completing the whole initiatic process meant – according to him - being 'free' when one was already too old to do something else, to achieve a different *formason* – formation. According to Agostinho, several attempts had been made in recent years to

convince the elders of Canhabaque to shorten the initiatic period, but they had always been reluctant. Male social organisation was stigmatised as an obstacle to personal and social *desenvolvimento* – development.

Who cares for Bijagó culture anymore?

Agostinho was not alone in criticizing the initiation ceremony. On the contrary, this theme was a central element in the conversations I had with the young. In another occasion, in November 2000, while I was sitting outside the house of Tcharte Banca, the famous wood carver and charismatic healer of the village of Bijante, on the island of Bubaque, three boys, wearing jeans, shirts and Nike shoes sat with me in the shadow of a huge mango tree. During the conversation, I tentatively asked some questions about the *manras*:

'How long does it last today?', I asked.

'Three months, but if you attend school it can be shorter, just one month… so we don't loose much time with this *brinkadera*.'

Now, *brinkadera* in Kriol means 'joke, game, party'.

'*Brinkadera*?', I asked in amazement.

The three boys started haranguing against 'traditional customs', which don't lead anywhere, don't prepare for the world outside and delay the development of the people and of the country.

'The *manras*? A waste of time! Look at my mother: what did she have from life but children? Look at my father, he doesn't own anything, how was Bijagó culture useful to him? Enough with these things that detain us, that are not useful and don't make anybody get a damn! Who cares for Bijagó culture anymore?'

They told me with eyes sparkling with indignation, that in some island of the Archipelago there were still persons that had never seen a car and when arriving in Bubaque for the first time 'Here', they had to be informed, '*this* is a car'. They declared their ambitious projects: first Bissau, to conclude their secondary education, then Europe, mirage of education, wealth, and success.

Domingo Carlos da Silva

Domingo Carlos da Silva was born in 1980, in Bijante (Bubaque). He attended the ninth year at the local high school, and shared with Agostinho and with many others a difficult situation in the Praça, sharing his time among the necessity to earn money to afford a living and the will to attend school. He was brilliant, intelligent, and stubborn. He faced the difficulties he was living in, accepting them as a necessary consequence of his choice and as a sacrifice for the development of himself, of the islands, and of his country. Domingo agreed on the general *atraso* – delay – of Bijagó culture (*kultura*). The archipelago was described as the 'less developed' region of Guinea-Bissau, and the cause was, according to him, the excessive attachment to the values of the culture of the villages. '*Kusa di kultura*', he used to say, 'delay us and detain our development (*desenvolvimento*). We have to abandon them'. Education and formation abroad were, according to him, the only way to draw the Archipelago out of its condition of underdevelopment (*falta di desenvolvimento*).

> 'I was born in a very poor village, Bijante. Life at the village for young people is not very fulfilling. If you grow up in a village, like me, you follow culture (*kultura*), you work, you follow many forms of culture. Moreover, children do not attend school. Within a village, there must be *karo*, *kanhokam*, there must be different age-grades (*idades*), there must be *kadene*, *karo*, *kabido*…there are many grades. You pass from one to the other, like at school, from 1st class to the 2nd, from 2nd to 3rd, and so on. We have to undergo all these passages until the last initiation (*fanado*), and when you are over, you are already too old, you cannot do anything else except exploit the younger ones. We suffer from this situation (*no sufri realidade*), and young people have to run away and stay in town, where they have different problems. But they see different people (*odja pikadur diferenti*), they get the rhythm of the world as it really is (*i toma ritmo di kuma, mundo está asin*).'

During the last elections, Domingo had been a member of the electoral commission on the island of Caravela. He spoke of this island with irony and sadness, focusing on its deficiencies and 'backwardness':

'Caravela is a very isolated island, and when you get there you discover that other people are in a situation much worse than here in Bubaque. *I ka ten nada, i ka ten hospital, i ka ten luz, i ka ten furu, i ka ten strada…* – there isn't anything, there is no hospital, there is no electricity, there are no wells, there are no streets…you cannot communicate by radio. Villages are tiny and far one from the other, rounded by thick vegetation. Trees are huge and scaring at night. Some people never saw a car, young people can't write or read, they don't know any game, draughts or whatever. Well, they played football…but they didn't play 11 against 11, but 6 against 6. We had to explain them how you play football, we showed what are the right positions, and then, when they started to play *krekkekrekkekrekke*', Domingo laughed reproducing onomatopoeically the confusion of these 22 boys fighting disorderedly for the ball. 'At night', continued Domingo ironically 'the young meet at the disco. By the light of the moon, they turn up the volume of the radio and dance!'

'Finally, the young do everything following culture. Most of them undergo initiation. They follow culture (*e na sigi kultura*). Young people there, they don't know anything, they suffer from culture.'

'Can you see now how culture worsens young people's life? Culture worsens their life. Of course, culture has its importance to make you famous[43] (*sedu famoso*) at the village, you have a woman, you have a house, you have children, but these children don't have any stability. There is a great confusion among the children. For example, there is competition between two women. However, you see, they make competition for nothing. It has no importance at all! Your man doesn't own a car, he doesn't own anything: what are they competing for? It has no importance at all. And the children suffer from this instability. When you have a woman at the village, you have the right to work a rice-field, you have the right to collect palm fruit and palm wine, you have the right to fish, you have the right to make your own life outside school. That's what you do until you have the age to be someone old (*garandi*), and you cannot walk or do anything. So, you take your son and you put him in the same situation. So your son too has to look for a woman, has to be a famous one (*famoso*), while his father exploits him. He can work his rice-field and have many women, he has a lot of

rice, he is given a famous name (*nome famoso*), he becomes a famous young man…there are a lot of them in Canhabaque. They have many children and not even one of them has a pair of shoes! Do you see how culture works? You arrive in a village, you play drum *toc toc toc* until the sun rises. You have to play obligatorily, because people have to dance…you see, once the idea was to transmit things orally, and not through writing. Is this the life young men want?'

'Most young people move to the town because they want to know the world. Young people must realise that we have to abandon culture a little. Because if we cling to culture we cannot cling to school. We have to focus our attention on school. Like this, we get a chance for our future.'

'What do the elders think about this?', I asked.

'Elders don't agree if you decide to move to the town. The elders want you to stay at the village, to be a *karo*…. *katababum katababum katababum* katababum', Domingo imitates the rhythm of the drum. 'When we make a ceremony, we must give them a huge quantity of palm wine. The elders want you to "dress your cloth" (*mara pano*), to put your bandanna on (*mara lenço na cabeça*)[44], to become a famous one, with women falling at your feet. At times, we pretend we do agree with all that. We don't dare to challenge them, and we say we will leave school and join them at the village. When we go to the village, "what do you do at school? What are you doing?", they ask. Bijagó elders want you to have many women. One elder gets up, he sits, like this, and he eats. Another one comes, he drinks. That's what matters to them and that's why they don't allow young people to settle in town. They want to drink and eat and that's all. At the village, if you misbehave, if you disobey to the elders, you are not well considered. If you give food and wine, they all agree! They give you many women, but women have no value at all! You have many women, you have a lot of children and that's all!'

'How do you think things can change here in Bubaque?', I asked.

'Only education might change our situation. Only the school. A young man sits at his desk, goes to school, and gets some lessons. He tries to develop his mentality

[43] Being famous is an important aspect of the ethos associated to the *karo* age-grade.
[44] Both are distinctive garments of the *karo*.

(*desenvolvi si mentalidade*), but he does not develop thanks to culture (*mas i ka na desenvolvi pabia di kultura*)!'

Xarifo

Xarifo was 22 when I met him in 2002. Despite his age, he was attending the 7th class at the *Liceu* (the high school) of Bubaque.

'I was born in a very poor village, the village of Bijante. There isn't anything there. I was born in a village different from other places, like for example Bissau, or here, the Praça, where you can have a life that is transparent to other lives (*bu tene um vida mesmo transparente a otro vida*). I am attending the 7th class. If I were born in a developed country, I would be at a higher class, but here…'

'Why did you start school that late?' I asked.

'I started school later because before I stayed there at the village, I only made the 'things of culture' (*só fasiba kil kusas di kultura*). Different things…well, we live in a milieu different from others. We live in a very poor place. At that time, one could come and tell you to dress your costume up, and go play in the square of the village (*brinka na bantaba*). Sometimes you took your notebooks to go to school, and the elders told you 'no! Go dance, with your colleagues'. And you had to dress up the costume of the dancer, and go dance in the village…I passed through all that many times. I was a great *kanhokam* dancer. I used to dance, I danced in the street as far as the village of Bruce, and women followed…'

'However, I have come to see that that life is not a good life. I've realized it is not a good life because I came to the Praça. I saw other people, boys of my age; I saw how they were dressed…sometimes in the village people stay naked in the street. I have come to see that this is bad. I came to the Praça, I saw how the other boys were dressed (*é ta bisti*), and then I went to the village and I realized that it wasn't possible to live like that for a human being. I tried to move to the Praça, I used to sell mangoes at that time. I bought my clothes, I went back to the village, I wore my clothes in front of my friends, and they stared at me in admiration. Then I saw that boys like me went to school in the Praça, and I realized that was very good. I

matriculated here in the Praça, selling mangoes to make some money. I put some money together and I enrolled. It was not my father who paid; it was not my mother. They did not help me; I made that effort all by myself. If I had not made that effort, I would still be in that sealed-off life (*vida empatada*) in the village. I have come to see that it isn't possible, I just had to move to the Praça, together with my colleagues. Then I saw my friends in the Praça as they 'fell in love' (*namoraba*), had one girl, and had *amor*. And I understood that it was right. When I passed to the 4th class, I moved here in the Praça, to stay together with my school-mates. In my opinion I think I have to make all the efforts to study and get out (*sai fora*) to free the people from those things. I will free my brothers to make them live in a truly transparent environment.'

'I think that the things of culture just have to be dropped. We have to work hard at school, for our education, we have to get out (*sai fora*), we have to see how things run, because, you see, this is a very poor country, a very poor country, Guinea-Bissau. And here, on the islands, it is even poorer. Here we are delayed just because here there are villages, there are things. We are delayed because people at that time refused to go to school. That's why things are delayed. People refused to go to school and followed the things of culture.'

'There are people without a job, people without anything…they just go and go in the streets. Someone steals. Those things of culture just have to be dropped. We get out, we see how things run, and how people live. And we bring everything back here. If I get out I will take advantage of those things, I'll come back here…I think it is the better way to 'build' (*kumpu*) the Archipelago. Here it is very poor, we live in a very poor place.'

Modern binary oppositions

What astonished me most at first when talking to my young interlocutors, were the recurring dichotomies perfectly suited to that 'aesthetics of nice oppositions' proper of the ideological trope of modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: xii).

All the young men I talked to gave great importance to the fact that they were living in the urban context of the Praça, which they opposed neatly to the rural environment of

the villages. Moving to the Praça, getting in contact with the urbanities, was described as a kind of revelation, and, of course, of liberation. Young people had to 'run away and stay in town', where they realised that life at the village 'was not a good life'. Life in town allowed young people to 'see how things run', to 'see different people (*odja pikadur diferenti*)', to 'get the rhythm of the world as it really is (*i toma ritmo di kuma, mundo está asin*)'. As Xarife incisively said, in the Praça 'you can have a life which is transparent to other lives'. This character of transparency to alterity and to the outer world was contrasted with the closeness of the life at the village, which was 'sealed off' and 'unfulfilling'. Young men who stayed at the village 'didn't know anything' and didn't *have* anything but women and children. They didn't even dress properly ('people stay naked in the street'), leading a life that is not suitable for a human being. Villages and town seemed to be opposite sites in the moral geography (Thomas 2002) of the inhabitants of Bubaque; the contrast between the rural and the urban contexts, was the inscription in space of the modern dichotomies that oriented the lives of the young men of the Praça. The opposition between the villages and the Praça became a spatial symbol of the contrast between closeness and openness, delay and progress, tradition and cosmopolitanism. As Philip Thomas has noted, the rural/urban contrast contributes a crucial spatial element to the geography of postcolonial modernity, and the terms 'town' and 'country' are tropes by means of which people formulate their understanding of time and place as having been transformed by processes that have fragmented the very landscape of people's lived world (Thomas 2002: 368 and 376. See also Ferguson 1992, 1999).

The contrast between life at the Praça and at the village was also denoted by the adjective and substantive *branko*, 'white', identifying locally 'white people' (Westerners) but also emblematically, persons who had an urban behaviour and life-style. In Kriol, the expression *bai sedu branco* – 'go become white' – was used at the village when somebody adopted a way of life associated with the urbanities and with the institutions of the modern nation state: settling in town, having a wage labour, attending school, wearing 'Western' clothes[45]. This expression was often employed by

[45] The idea of the 'West' has been heavily criticized in the last years. Using this term, I am always referring here to a product of local imagination, not to a specific 'place' with homogeneous cultural traits and historical background.

the elders at the village to comment bitterly about the life of the young men residing in the Praça.

When asked to explain why the villages tended to remain closed in themselves, the boys complained that life at the village was dominated by culture, *kultura*. In their words, *kultura* (or *kusa di kultura* – things of culture) stood for the basic elements of the social organisation of the village, as well as for the ethical principles, the way of life and vision of the world attributed to the rural world[46]. The 'things of culture' were held responsible for the *atraso* (delay) in which was considered to linger the Archipelago. Consequently, the young men in the Praça strongly opposed the authority of the elders and refused to fulfil their social obligations towards them, claiming that these restrictions and impositions hindered their individual ambitions and development. According to the boys, *kultura* and its guardians, the elders, limited young people's chance to develop themselves (*desenvolvi*), also blocking the 'evolution' of the entire Archipelago.

The use of the term 'culture' by the young men of the Praça deserves our attention. Terence Turner (1991), reports that in the 80s the Kayapo Indians in Brazil started to use the Portuguese term *cultura* for their traditional customs. According to Marshall Sahlins (1993), this reflects the effort of the Kayapo to keep their autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the world around them. However, in the case of the young men of the Praça, the use which is made of the term *kultura* seems exactly the opposite, and totally in accordance with the opposition between local culture and development typical of modernisation and development theories. *Kultura*, for the young men, is not a declaration of pride and autonomy facing the intrusion of the state or of development agencies: rather it is a stigmatisation of the rural and backward world of the villages as opposed to 'development', *desenvolvimento*.

It is according to this vision that, in the eyes of the young men, *kultura* and the school were at odds and impossible to conciliate. As *kultura* kept young people and the Archipelago in a situation of delay (*atraso*), the school might trigger personal and regional development (*desenvolvimento*). The contrast between *kultura* and the school was constantly exemplified opposing the life of the *karo* at the village, and that of the

[46] Another term with the same meaning often employed was emblematically *tradison* (tradition), often used in the phrase *tradison di Bijagó*.

student in the Praça. The life of the *karo* was invariably caricaturised and despised. While pertaining to this age-grade, the young man is socially expected to cultivate his ability as a dancer and his physical strength, adorning himself in the most attractive outfits to seduce women (Pussetti and Bordonaro 1999). If he proves to be a good dancer, a strong and beautiful man with a loud voice, he can become a 'famous', a man of renown, who can vaunt many affairs and many children. The situation of the *karo* however, is not as idyllic as it might seems: while he is in this age-grade (that precedes the duress of initiation), the young man must work the rice-field of the elders without keeping anything for himself; he must continually collect and offer palm wine and fishes to the elders of the village; he cannot marry in a definitive form, and his fatherhood is not socially acknowledged. In the paradoxical description the young men of the Praça gave, the *karo* was a kind of lazy and ignorant individual, victim of his own uncontrolled sexuality, compelled by the elders to dance and drum all day long. His unproductive life was opposed to that of the urban student, who worked hard at school to develop himself, knew how things go in the world, and was a circumspect manager of his sexual appetites.

The young men of the Praça pictured themselves as *desenvolvido* (developed) in contrast with the population of the villages, which was stigmatised as backward, underdeveloped, uncivilized, blocked in an ancestral past. As a matter of fact, in various conversations, cultural traits associated with the village and which were still alive, were described as though they were an element of a far past. '*Antigamente* (once) – they started - it was like that…' removing disturbing and 'non-modern' elements of the present by placing them in the past. In this vision, age-grades, initiation ceremonies, payment to the elders and almost every other aspect of village life were despised as 'survivals', fragments of another epoch, doomed to disappear in order to allow development.

In particular, it was the process of gradual acquisition of knowledge and status implied in the ascension through the age-grade system that was discarded as useless. This points to a deep crisis not only of the political authority of the elders (who could no longer force young people to undergo initiation), but of the system of values upon which it was based as well: to become an elder was no longer considered necessary or desired by the young men. The hegemonic authority of the elders, who detained power

and at the same time dispensed it, granting the acquisition of status, appeared in jeopardy. The symbolic violence of the hierarchical/generational system had lost its character of uncontested evidence, and was rejected as no longer able to grant the achievement of the new positions of authority and to new forms of wealth.

In accordance with their rejection of *kultura*, all young people in the Praça refused to utter a single word in Bijagó, speaking instead in Kriol, a language strongly associated with the urbanities. Even though most young men had spent several years of their life in the villages, and were therefore proficient in Bijagó, I never heard a single conversation between them in this language, which was used exclusively when interacting with the elders. Those among the young men I met who were already born in the Praça, attending school since their childhood and spending their formative years in a multicultural milieu, refused drastically to even learn Bijagó, claiming that it was totally useless in the 'developed' context of the Praça and for their life.

I summarise in the box the dualities that oriented the young men of the Praça.

Village : Town (Praça)

Elders : Young

Kultura : School

Karo : Student

Atrasado : *Desenvolvido*

Past : Present

Closed : Open

Elders' Authority : Individual freedom

Bijagó language : Kriol

The opinions of the young men seem to bring us far from phenomena of 'reworking' or 'reformation' of tradition others ethnographers described in other African contexts. I will rapidly consider here two significant examples. Eric Gable, who worked in Guinea-Bissau among the Manjaco in the 80s, underlined how a group of young people in the Bassarel region, though 'willing to be modern', did not reject 'tradition' as a whole, but rather tried to promote local customs and at the same time to negotiate with the elders in

order to reform 'tradition' according to new exigencies and needs. This very logic of reformulation of 'tradition', maintains Gable, is itself an internal logic of Manjaco culture and not – as it could be supposed – an effect of 'acculturation' or 'colonization of consciousness' (Gable 2000; see also Piot 1999, for a similar perspective though in a different context). As a second example, I will consider the recent ethnography Richard Fardon has produced (2006) about the Chamba people of Nigeria: here he observed an ethnic loyalty and pride pushing towards a 'modernisation of tradition' that seems inconceivable at present among the young men in the Praça.

The striking difference with the Chamba people is probably due, and this confirms Fardon's analysis, to the fact that the nationalist project in Guinea-Bissau substantially failed, as I will show in the next chapters. The Bijagó in this sense did not have to 'resolve their national role' as the Chamba had to do, to have access to political power within the national state, also because *as Bijagó* they had been and are largely excluded and marginalized after independence from the management of state power. By the urban elite, they were and are considered 'bush' people who did not even participate in the liberation struggle (see *infra* chapter 4). Proclaiming their ethnic affiliation was therefore of no use for young people in the Praça – who seemed rather to avoid referring to themselves as Bijagó, and talked to me about the 'misfortune of having been born on the islands' – in their attempt to 'make themselves modern'. Moreover, as I will show in chapter 4, within the nationalist project, ethnic loyalty was always ambiguously considered.

The Manjaco case – which on the contrary shares the same political context – is only apparently different from the one I am describing in Bubaque. The reformist attitude that the young members of the 'culture club' show, is not, as we realize, spread among all Manjaco youth, but rather an ultimate and limited reaction - as Gable himself underlines – to a process of social and economic change ('the broken land') that put at risk the very survival of the Manjaco community in itself: 'in short, «the land» had «broken» as youths either abandoned the village, or as the economic inequalities generated by emigration bred envious dissention' (Gable 2000: 196). The 'culture development club', though responding to local logics, emerged to 'repair the broken land' (Gable 2000: 196) in a situation brought about exactly by growing youth migration towards urban areas, a long lasting phenomenon among the Manjaco. Gable

claims later: ‘almost certainly the young leaders of the Culture Club are a minority. Most of their peers would rather escape the village for the city, and are as irresponsible and feckless as human beings tend to be anywhere and everywhere’ (*ibid.*: 201). The wider context described by Gable then – though he does not focus specifically on it – seems similar under several aspects to the one I found among the Bijagó in Bubaque (where I worked exactly with those ‘irresponsible and feckless’ young men who decided to move to the town), but probably due to the limited effect young people’s defections still had, nothing really similar to the Manjaco ‘culture development club’ has yet appeared in the context of the villages, even though, as I have underlined, the elders in Bubaque accepted modifying some aspects of ‘tradition’. It is probably a question of time, and I cannot but agree with Gable that revisions and reformulations of ‘tradition’ are already part of the history of the communities of the islands, and that there are certainly local modalities of coping with socio-economic change: in this sense modernity and Europe are certainly not the prime movers of social change (Gable 1995).

These differences and variations teach us finally that social change inevitably takes a specific and local form, making it futile to work out a general theory of ‘globalization’ or modernisation. As Van Binsbergen, Van Dijk and Gewald have pointed out:

> The experience and the process of globalization may vary infinitely, due to factors that are related to the internal functioning of societies undergoing globalization. However, instead of looking for immutable features to explain this differential, we ought to be looking at different strategies of agency among members of those societies: modes of selection, appropriation, creation and transgression of boundaries, as applied by specific actors at a specific time and place, and in the context, not so much of new concerns brought and imposed by globalization, but of ongoing concerns towards whose conflictive realization globalization provides new material, new ammunition and new formats, without initiating these concerns themselves in the first place (2004: 18).

The town and the villages: blurring the lines

Young men’s opinions yield a picture of Bubaque as a split world, where traditional villagers live separately from urban dwellers, where the rural way of life is at odds with and disconnected from the Praça, where the ritual economy of the *n’ubir kusina* is neatly separated from the market economy of the harbour. Though this diachronic and

distopic representation is the central theme of my investigation, it is important to state clearly, as a warning, that we are handling here a social narrative reproducing the dichotomies of the myth of modernity – we are far, therefore, from the complexity and quandaries of local history and cultural dynamics. Though this is not my main goal, it is obvious that the split social reality young men offered to me has to be questioned. The risk in fact is that the reader might think that focusing on these dichotomic narratives employed by the young men, I confused their representations with the complexities of local cultural and economic processes. It is important to re-stress – I apologise for the repetition - that my issue is young men's representations and uses of the narrative of modernity in order to overcome and to interpret their marginality (not realizing that the very project of modernity is responsible for it), and that I am not proposing modernization as a suitable paradigm to describe social processes in Bubaque. I have, in other terms, to criticize the dualism town/village, modern/tradition etc., at the same time as I show how and why this dualism emerged in the words of my informants.

First, it is important to question and overcome the picture of the village as static and immutable, neatly opposed to the Praça. The village as a contained and sealed off cultural and political reality never existed outside colonial representations: as I will show in the next chapter, cultural and commercial contacts always characterised the communities of the Archipelago[47]. Actually, considering the constant movement of ideas, goods and people between town and village in contemporary Africa, the dichotomy has lost much of its explanatory value (Van Binsbergen 1999: 283. On the dialectic between town and village, see Ferguson 1999 and *infra* chapter 4 and 7). Town and village have become increasingly complementary and interdependent.

From the economic point of view for example, Bijagó villages are not self-sufficient and they have to buy rice and many other commodities for their physical and symbolic survival. The villages in Bubaque are embedded in the market economy that, in turn, greatly benefits from the people living in the villages. On the one hand then, the villagers sell some of their products in the marketplace (fish, palm wine, palm oil and nuts, wood…), on the other they buy many products in the Praça, also to sustain their ritual economy. The main road of the island, connecting the villages to the harbour, is

crowded in the first hours of the morning with people carrying their products to the market.

In Bubaque, many things that are offered to the elders by young people are acquired in the market place, in a context of cash economy. Rice, oil, *kana*, tobacco and clothes, are all paid for in CFA francs[48]. The elders perfectly realise the importance of cash, and we are really in presence of a mixed system, where the cash economy contributes greatly to the ritual economy of *n'ubir kusina*. The elders do not blame the cash economy in itself and the new strategies to acquire wealth young people are carrying out: they recognise that the access to a cash economy might bring about an increase in the offerings. In this sense, they are not stubborn defenders of an immobile system. Nevertheless, they obviously contest the individualistic strategies of young men who want to seek fortune for themselves and their family only, escaping the redistribution of wealth typical of the village economy[49].

The villages and the Praça are not therefore two worlds, and the narration of modernity is just an ideological frame which hides a much more intractable reality, made of less pure and draconian alternatives. Filip De Boeck has argued that in the face of changing African realities, 'our standard frames of analysis, such as the classic dichotomy between rural and urban, no longer fit an increasingly 'exotic', complex and

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[47] At least until the Portuguese intervened heavily at the beginning of the 20th century, enclosing the islands in a 'national border' and disconnecting them from the flows of trade that had characterised the shores of the Upper Guinea coast for several centuries (see Friedman 1994c for a similar perspective).

[48] The CFA (Communauté Financière d'Afrique) franc is the currency of the countries of the UEMOA (Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine), that includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, and – since 1997 – Guinea-Bissau.

[49] The link between the ritual economy of the village and the market economy of the Praça (but not only) might well be suggested if we take a look at the history of *kana*, the rum which is one of the most appreciated forms of payment and tribute to the elders in every occasion (On the *kana* economy see Birmingham (in Alexandre 2000) and Curto 2002). In every ritual, as well as simply visiting an elder, the most valuable gift is always the *kana*. As such, this spirit is deeply associated with the world of the villages. However, at a closer look, the *kana* gives us important clues about the openness of the society of the islands, and about its involvement with trade since the 17th century. According to Hawthorne, *kana* was introduced in Guinea-Bissau and used as a form of payment by the so-called Cape Verdean *ponteiros*, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The *ponteiros* were Cape Verdean immigrants that occupied *pontas* of land in Guinea-Bissau, seeking their fortune as merchant-planters. Contracting labourers from the local populations, they grew mainly rice and sugar cane. The *ponteiros* were 'adept cane farmers and master *kana* makers' (Hawthorne 2003: 191-192). The introduction of *kana* in the Archipelago is not only relatively recent, but its appearance is linked to the growing importance of goods trade in the region. This situation seems to continue nowadays, since nobody grows sugar cane on the islands, or makes *kana*, which is in fact imported by (usually non-bijagó) traders in the Praça, where it is sold to the villagers.

chaotic world that seems to announce the end of social life and the societal fabric as most of us understand it' (1996: 93).

The opposition between developed urban milieu and traditional villages and the contrast between the identities associated to these environments, appear much less neat to in-depth analyses (which is not, I repeat, my main goal), while young men's identities turn out to be much more problematic, complicated and incongruent. Without overlooking the importance of the dualities, which were probably the most evident aspect of their self-definition, other elements emerged during our conversations, clues that pointed to the persistence and maintenance of local logics and to the rise of new magic. Besides their claims of utter detachment from the 'culture of the villages', the young men cannot be considered as completely autonomous, totally new, because – as Richard Werbner rightly underlined - 'intractable traces of the past are felt on people's bodies' (Werbner 1998: 3). The criticism of the elders' authority, of ritual offerings, of the initiation ceremony for example – which might be interpreted as manifestations of scepticism and disenchantment – did not entail a rejection of certain forms of 'magic': witchcraft, sorcery, the power of new spiritual beings (like Serpente[50]). The elders themselves were often accused of maintaining their power and oppressing young men with magical means.

In this situation of generational contrast, in fact, the conflict between elders and juniors was frequently expressed in the vocabulary of sorcery. Young people often accused the elders of the villages of thwarting their individual ambitions by means of 'magical attacks'. Sorcery was considered an important instrument of social control in the hands of the elders, arousing in the young fear for their very life and for their physical and mental health. This kind of magical attack was said to cause headaches, pains and dizziness, determining school failures and therefore restraining social promotion. According to the young men, the magical power of the elders could even upset and disturb those who had already left the Archipelago and worked abroad, making them come back to the islands without any apparent motivation. Situations in which elders are accused of using witchcraft to hinder the social mobility of youngsters have become quite frequent in Africa, where the introduction of market economy often

redraws social hierarchies on a non-age base (see for e.g. Auslander 1993). As has been observed, witchcraft beliefs provide an idiom for the discussion both of social obligations and attachments, and of the dangers of violating and betraying those obligations and attachments (Ferguson 1999: 117). In Bubaque, magical attack was particularly feared by those whose purpose is the accumulation of wealth for their own exclusive benefit. The refusal to share wealth with one's own domestic group (a circle which might become really wide) and with the elders, could easily trigger envy and jealousy (already in themselves potentially dangerous) and entail more structured magical attacks. Sorcery in this sense operated as a powerful levelling force, which inhibits any attempt at economic enterprise. The issue of magical economy and of witchcraft emerged in recent African ethnographies as strictly linked to that of modernity, especially in relation to strategies for acquiring and controlling wealth (Argenti 2002). As Jean and John Comaroff underlined (1993), sorcery and witchcraft are not something relating to a 'traditional village society', but rather ways in which the modern capitalist economy is experienced and conceptualized. It is the vocabulary of an occult economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) that speaks of a manifest cash economy, generally describing dramatic shifts in power relations (see also Geschiere 1997). The widespread Mammi Wata cult (present in Bubaque with the name *Serpente* or *Serafinte*) (Drewal 1988; Masquelier 1992) and the Bori cult of Niger for example - not to mention countless witchcraft associations such as the *famla*, the *msa* or the *djambe* of Cameroon (Argenti 2002; Warnier 1993; Geschiere 1997) - are typical in their reification of the powers of seduction and of the material trappings of western wealth and modernity, seemingly making available to their devotees the fabulous riches that the majority of Africans can only dream of, and yet which are regularly paraded in front of them by the elites of their countries (Argenti 2002).

We have always to keep the idea of 'modernity' and 'tradition' as two imported discourses ideologically and strategically used by actors to maintain or subvert power relations; as orientating notions in a fluid social world far more complex and

[50] *Serpente* is a local form of the better known Mami Wata cult, which is spread all along the Guinea Gulf. It is a powerful and dangerous spirit, polymorphous and enchanting, with whom it is possible to make a deal in order to benefit from good luck and wealth. See also *infra* page 72.

intractable[51]. The opposition between rural and urban culture, as well as the associated perceptions of marginality and centrality the young men manifested in Bubaque, should therefore be thought of less as the reflection of a world split between tradition and modernity, but rather as a problem of self-representation, an issue, as I will show, inevitably linked to the relationship between the Archipelago and the colonial and post-independence governments and their modernization agendas.

Conclusion

As Anna Tsing (1993, 1994) showed, the perception of marginality depends on a specific self-positioning of the local into the global. The local, Pigg observes – as local, as marginal, as parochial – comes into being through engagement with the wider systems of many beyonds (1996: 192). It is in this positioning that a place can be perceived as peripheral, or on the contrary, as a location of resistance and pride. It is a problem of self definition, of defining one's own identity at a higher level. 'Yet – writes Tsing – the form of the magic through which the local is created as a site of powerlessness or pride cannot be predicted from a global formula' (1994: 280): we need to study single cases, paying attention to political and local specificities, and to historical background. How a specific place defines itself as marginal, has to do very much with how that place *was* and *is* defined as marginal, and by whom. The development of cultural marginality – underlined Rob Shields - occurs only through a complex process of social activity and cultural work: marginal places have been placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other (1992: 3,4). The experience of modernity as marginality, as Mudimbe (1988: 4) noted, has its roots in the categories of colonialism and in the inequalities they underwrote and continue to underwrite (see also Dussel 2000). The presence of the categories of modernity in the Archipelago and the contrastive identities they generate must be investigated not only in their present and local contingencies, but also in a

[51] Obviously, the adoption of the conceptual dichotomy modern/tradition *produced* in Bubaque a sort of social dichotomization: the narrative of modernity, ideological and false though it can be, produces real social differences as those who adopt it claim their difference not only in discourse, but also in symbolic social acts like dressing or drinking, proclaiming different expectations and moral values, taking real decisions about their life.

historical and genealogical perspective. My purpose in the following chapters (3 and 4) will therefore be to find out in recent local history and in colonial and post-independence ideologies, the origins of the trope of the Archipelago as underdeveloped region and of the rural and urban environments as contrasting and opposed.

Following the seminal work of Anne Tsing (1993) I will consider how the representation of the Archipelago as out-of-the-way place was constructed over time through the grand narratives of 'civilisation' and 'evolution' - in colonial times - and through their equivalent in the post-independence period, 'progress' and 'development'. In both epochs, the narrative of civilisation/development produced an image of the Archipelago and of rural Guinea-Bissau in general as backward, marginal, and as an obstacle to the main path towards progress. My aim is to show how the communities of the Archipelago were portrayed according to the discourse of modernity long before the young men of Bubaque proclaimed their difference, showing the historical origins of the discursive formations and representational tropes young men are employing today.

3. How the Bijagó became primitives

The Archipelago of the Bijagó preserved for several centuries a crucial position in the economic and political landscape of the Senegambia region (Mark 1985, 2002, Brooks 1993, Bowman 1997, Forrest 2003, Hawthorne 2003). In the late Nineteenth century though, the Portuguese government undertook a series of military campaigns to occupy the territory of Guiné. With 'pacification', the Archipelago was confined to the margins of the empire: a savage place, reluctant to undergo the process of 'civilisation'.

Western representations[52] of the inhabitants of the islands changed accordingly, describing them at first romantically as noble warriors, then as ferocious rebels, and finally as primitives sticking stubbornly to their traditions (see for a similar case among the Maasai, Hodgson 1999: 125). 'Bijagó culture' was invented and re-produced over time in a cultural and political space crossed by references to wider contexts (Western trade, Portuguese colonialism, post-independence nation-state, global capitalism), and it is important, for the relevance these tropes still have in current processes of identity formation, to describe how this image of traditionalism and underdevelopment was produced in a power saturated context[53]. The 'Bijagó' themselves, as a distinct and homogeneous ethnic reality, are a product of colonial taxonomy that, as in many other cases in Africa (Fabian 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Pels 1997, Apter 1999, Piot 1999, Amselle 2001), essentialized under a single ethnonym communities in dramatic competition and with a rather fluid identity (Gallois Duquette 1983, Scantamburlo 1991, Henry 1994). Historically in fact, as Peter Mark underlined, 'the complexity and intimacy of cultural interactions in seventeenth-century Gambia, Casamance, and

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[52] Colonial representations have been acknowledged as the main place of materialization of colonial power and ideology, and as such, they have been functional to the upholding of specific relationships of domination (Stocking 1991, Dirks 1992, 1993, Pratt 1992, Stoler 1992, Pels and Salemink 1994, Said 1995, Pina Cabral 2001).

[53] See Tsing 1993.

Guinea-Bissau are reflected in the existence of fluid and dynamic sociocultural identities that challenge any clearly delimited classification' (2002: 88).

From trading centres to the periphery of the empire

Raiders and slave traders

Placed at the entrance of the river Geba estuary, the Archipelago always had a key position in the geography of the Senegambia region (Mark 1985, Henry 1994, Forrest 2003, Hawthorne 2003), participating in the local trade with Europeans since the XVI century[54]. Indeed, as Walter Hawthorn underlined, 'from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries Bijago were among the most important slave producers and traders in the area of Guinea-Bissau' (2003: 101). Raiding the villages of the coast, the Bijagó made captives that were brought to the islands and sold to the Western slave traders. 'These raids, continues Hawthorne, were so effective that by the seventeenth century, Bijagó had transformed their islands into major slave-trading centres frequented by Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, and Spanish merchants. On many of the islands, slave-trading ports were created to meet a growing international demand.' (2003: 102). The name *biojo*, frequently found as a family name in central and South America, derives probably from the very term Bijagó. As Kent Russel Lohse has emphasised:

> Renowned boat-builders and fishermen, by the seventeenth century, the Bijagó had redirected their traditional activities overwhelmingly to slave-raiding on the mainland, and re-exported large numbers of Upper Guinea Africans from several ports throughout the islands. Europeans applied the name *biojo* both

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[54] The population of the archipelago is not perfectly homogeneous: from one island to another, some noteworthy differences are evident at a linguistic and socio-cultural level. This is probably due to the different origin of the inhabitants of each island. Recent historical works, in fact, have shown that the islanders have a continental origin, linking the population of the archipelago to the great migrations caused by the expansion of the empire of Mali, in the 13th century (Mota 1974; Scantamburlo 1991 [1978]; Gallois Duquette 1983; Henry 1994). The history of the people of the coast of Guinea is linked to the birth and expansion of the Mandingo kingdom of Kaabu (on the history of Kaabu, see Lopes 1999) to the East of the Geba River. The foundation of Kaabu dates back to the second half of the 13th century and is attributed to one of the generals of Sundjata, Tiramang Traoré. Most of the people living in the plains of the region – like the Felupe, the Beafada, the Manjako – were pushed towards the coastal regions they occupy today (Bowman 1997: 32-34). It seems likely that the Beafada occupied the territories of the coast that belonged to other groups, pushing them towards the islands (Mota 1974: 244).

to the Bijagó themselves and to their victims, such as Biafaras, Balantas, and Nalus (Lohse 2005: 99-100).

There are accounts of these raids in many documents of the seventeenth century. In 1607 Mangalí, king of Bisegue, a Beafada kingdom situated between the Rio Grande de Buba and the Tombali river, wrote personally a letter to the king of Portugal, promising to embrace Christianity and to accept the Portuguese authority, but asking him to send ships to stop the raids of the Bijagó (Brasio 1968: 241-242). In 1608, Father Fernão Guerreiro wrote that the Beafada kings were ready to convert themselves and to become vassals of the king of Portugal, if he could help them to stop the raids of the Bijagó in their territories (Brasio 1968: 206-207).

Manuel Álvares in his *Etiopia Menor e descrição geografica da Provincia da Serra Leoa* of 1616, describes the Bijagó as ferocious warriors devoted to raiding and piracy: '…on the continent they burn the houses, the villages and the churches. The worst people of this Ethiopia. They say that the sea has no king, just as they have no king, even on land' (quoted in Hawthorne 2003: 92).

These raids terrorised all the villages on the coastline of Guinea-Bissau (Mota 1974: 259-260). These incursions, which had the purpose of pillaging the villages and not of effectively occupying a territory, were generally led by a single village, but in some cases, several villages might form an alliance putting together a fleet of up to forty canoes (Henry 1989b: 196). When Western traders started buying slaves in the sixteenth century, the communities of the Archipelago put on the market the prisoners made during their pillages. Obviously, this commerce intensified their raids, for the trade allowed the Bijagó to acquire iron-bars, cows, clothes and other valuable goods (Mota 1974: 267; Henry 1994: 42; Hawthorne 2003).

The slave trade did not disappear in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Quite the opposite, as René Pélissier underlined, 'it is likely that the influence of the traders was intensified in this period, mainly from its basis in the Archipelago of the Bijagó, where some islands (Galinhas, Bolama, etc.) are real trading centres of whom the Portuguese authority, impotent or conniving, perfectly knows the existence' (1989: 43), regardless of the Luso-British treatise of 1810, in which the Portuguese agreed to 'cooperate effectively for the cause of Humanity…forbidding severely and completely abolishing the commerce and trade of slaves' (Carreira 1981: 17). The Archipelago, due

to its independence and its strategic geographical position, was for a long time a shelter for the traders, allowing them to keep on their - now illegal – commerce, which was still flourishing in 1849. Slave raiding remained therefore a basic aspect of Bijagó economy through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century (Hawthorne 2003: 103. On Portugal and the abolishment of the slave trade, see Marques 1999, 2000).

Micro-independence[55]

Until 1900, the Archipelago remained independent from the political and military control of the Portuguese as well as of other European nations. Despite several French and British interventions both to settle in the Archipelago and to revenge raids lead against their ships, the situation of the region could well be described a 'micro-independence': 'The Archipelago must be considered in 1853 as *res nullius* for the Europeans' (Pélissier 1989: I, 117). This situation actually was not limited to the islands of the Archipelago, as the *Guiné Portugueza* – which wasn't declared *província* until 1879, having been previously under the authority of the *governador* of Cape Verde - was not effectively occupied and controlled by the Portuguese (Castro 1978: 336). 'The Portuguese dominions on the African mainland – writes Richard Hammond - were quite limited in extent so far as direct sovereignty was concerned […] Given their military and administrative resources, this state of affairs was inevitable. The relics of empire that were left to Portugal by this time […] were, for the most part, fortified trading posts dependent on sea or river communication' (1966: 38, 42)[56]. In 1843, Honório Pereira Barreto[57] published the *Memoria sobre o estado actual da Senegambia Portuguesa, causas de sua decadencia, e meios de a fazer prosperar* (now in Walter 1947), condemning the lack of authority in Guiné and underlining the complete independence of indigenous populations. Barreto promptly realized the strategic importance of the islands of the Archipelago, and with all his means tried to preserve the Portuguese right over those territories, warning the colonial government in Lisbon of the threat of French

[55] For the history of Guiné in the 19th and 20th century, see also Silveira 1998, Alexandre (ed.) 2000.

[56] For recent analysis of the weakness of Portuguese colonialism, see Trajano Filho 2004 and Hawthorne 2003: 177-181.

[57] Trader and, for a short period, governor of Guiné, Barreto is an important character in the 19th century history of the colony. See Pélissier 1989 I: 62 and following.

or English intervention. He travelled several times to the islands, trying to reinforce the Portuguese presence in the region. The account of his expedition of 1856 is important to understand the attitude towards the Bijagó at that time:

> Desde março de 1853 em que os franceses foram atacar a ilha de Canhabaque, que apliquei toda a minha atenção sobre as ilhas do Bijagoz […] Em dezembro d'esse anno de 1853, uma esquadrilha inglesa veio à referida ilha de Canhabaque para exigir uma satisfação pelo assassinato feito num official inglês; recorreram, porem, à minha mediação e tive a fortuna de acabar a questão a contento de ambas as partes. Longe de aumentar ahi a influencia estrangeira cresceu a nossa, apertaram-se mais os laços de antiga amizade, que desde tempo immemorial sempre ligou os portugueses e os bijagoz. […] Os franceses vieram fazer novo tratado de paz e amizade com os de Canhabaque em novembro de 1854. O governador da Gambia foi tambem ali em abril de 1855; uns e outros deram grandes presentes aos gentios. Os navios de guerra de ambas estas nações visitam aquella ilha sempre que por ella passam, levando alguns presentes. Só as autoridades portuguesas nunca lá foram nem procuraram ter relações politicas com aquellas ilhas (in Walter 1947: 119).

Barreto visited the island of Canhabaque with offerings and presents for the *régulos*, and concluded his report suggesting that: 'Seria conveniente que o governador da Guiné visitasse todos os annos estas ilhas, que são tão frequentadas pelas Nações estrangeiras, quer de guerra quer mercante' (in Walter 1947: 128). Without real authority over the islands, the Portuguese privileged diplomatic means to acquire some influence over the people of the Archipelago: presents, friendly relationships, treatises. The inhabitants of each island, for their part, took advantage of the situation, keeping diplomatic relationships with different European nations, as politically and commercially independent entities.

Even though in this period the culture of the Archipelago was almost unknown, the Bijagó were respected for their strength and courage as warriors, and for the tenacity with which they preserved their independence. The image of the pirate still prevailed, as the Bijagó were well known and feared for their pillages of foreign ships sailing in the Archipelago. Emblematically Marcelino Marques de Barros described in 1882 the Bijagó as:

> um povo de feições muito regulares e de proporções athleticas, o qual parece que intencionalmente inventou uma língua impossivel, modulada pelo rugir das feras e pelo grasnar dos corvos e dos papagaios; que tingiu o cabelo de vermelho, o qual desperta a idéa do sangue; que soube fazer brilhar no espirito de

seus guerreiros uma fé vivissima na transmigração das almas e na resurreção dos corpos; que imita nas suas festas o costume das aves e quadrupedes com uma habilidade impossivel de se descrever; que sabe fabricar elegantes farpões e azagaias trilingues, as quaes joga com muita destreza; que habituou os seus argonautas a fazerem voar sobre as ondas pesadas canoas carregadas de laranja, durante seis a oito horas seguidas, sem alimento, sem agua e sem lume, embora abrazados pelo sol ou fustigados pelos vendavaes; que costuma seus filhos desde cedo a tornarem-se quasi insensiveis ás dores, a ponto de lhes ser indifferente carbonizar um braço ou fazer abalar a alma por meio de uma corda pendente do tronco de uma arvore; costumes estes, que não podiam ter outra origem senão na necessidade em que em algum tempo se viu de se tornar formidavel a seus inimigos. Esse povo, verdadeiramente interessante por muitos respeitos e que se destaca de entre outros povos seus conterraneos, é o *bujagó* (Barros 1882: 721-722).

This description witnesses a balanced military relationship, marked by the 'romantic vision of "martial tribes" of valiant enemies and freedom-loving warriors' (Pels and Salemink 1999: 25).

This situation of relative independence would continue for several years, not only in the Archipelago, but in most regions of Guiné as well. It was only after the Berlin Conference of 1885 that the Portuguese carried out military campaigns to effectively occupy the territories, facing a strong local resistance. The first campaigns were aimed at 'pacifying' the coastal and internal regions, sparing the Archipelago (Mendy 1992: 42)[58]. The necessity of effective occupancy of the territories was also determined by the gradual shifting of the demands of the Atlantic economic system. The abolition of slavery and the industrialization of Europe and the United States brought about a new need for 'nonslave goods that would fuel industrial growth and feed the desires of a growing middle class' (Hawthorne 2003: 177).

The 'pacification' of the Archipelago

The Archipelago was one of the last zones to be fully 'pacified'. Several campaigns had to be carried out, especially when the implementation of the *imposto de palhota* (the hut tax) and of forced labour triggered several uprisings (Guerra 1994: 196). The island

[58] The independence of most of the local population continued up to 1913. Between 1907 and 1909, uprisings sprung out all over the territory, engaging the Portuguese troops in several operations. The 'hero' of the pacification campaigns in Guiné was captain Teixeira Pinto. Under his command the Balantas and the Oincas were finally submitted in 1913, the Papeis, the Manjacos of Xuro-Caixo and the Balantas of Mansoa in 1914, the Papeis of the Island of Bissau in 1915 (Guerra 1994: 196).

of Canhabaque in particular required three campaigns to be reduced to 'obedience' (1917, 1925, 1935) (on 'pacification' see among others Pélissier 1989, Mendy 1992, Henry 1994, Reis 2001, Forrest 2003).

The institution of the hut tax was important for several reasons, not all of them economic: it was also considered an important step in the process of 'civilisation' the Bijagó had to undergo. As Malyn Newitt observed, 'the levying of this tax had a threefold significance. First, it was a symbol of submission […] Secondly the tax had a vital fiscal purpose to bail out the bankrupt colonial administration […] Thirdly, the tax had a socio-economic purpose or, as the Portuguese themselves would have said, a civilising purpose. It was designed to introduce Africans to the joys of living in a capitalistic society by creating an artificial need for them to earn cash' (1981: 55-56; see also Lopes 1982: 63). Significantly, after pacification, in order to prevent tax evasion, all Bijagó adults (16 years old or older) had to bring with them a 5 centimetres aluminium disk with the inscription *Guiné Portuguesa*, which had to be punched to show that the tax had been paid. Any Bijagó found without this disk was immediately arrested and obliged to pay the tax. Moreover, nobody could leave his island without showing evidence of his payment and without the *caderneta indígena*, a kind of ID card issued by the authorities (Mendy 1992: 52).

These measures are extremely significant as they show the gradual confinement of the people of the islands to their region, and the parallel creation of the trope of the closed-in-itself population[59]. The process of pacification imposed dramatic limitations on the mobility of the islanders, whose canoes had travelled for centuries along routes that not only linked the islands to one another, but also to the coast (Henry 1989a, 1989b, 1994; Hawthorne 2003). The character of 'isolatedness' and cultural immobility so frequently attributed to the inhabitants of the islands in colonial literature, has little to do with the geographical position of the Archipelago, and is openly in contradiction with historical data. Rather it must be ascribed to recent geopolitical and historical dynamics. Actually, colonial campaigns and policies immobilised the people of the Archipelago: destroying their canoes, limiting through national boundaries the possibility of contacts, and restricting movement from one island to the other.

[59] The Austrian ethnologist Hugo Adolf Bernatzik, who visited the Archipelago in 1939, left us an interesting description of the Bijagó in the years immediately after pacification (Bernatzik 1967).

Pacification imposed also a dramatic change in the economy of the islands (Mota 1954: 316-317): from traders and pirates the islanders were forcefully transformed into 'peaceful farmers' and 'lazy fishermen', as the colonial propaganda started describing them[60].

As Gupta and Ferguson underlined, neat cultural difference and closed ethnic compartments are what have to be explained rather than taken for granted as initial conditions (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). In this sense it is important to underline that after pacification, regional territorial division created a circumscribed place where a culturally-defined 'thing to be ruled', the Bijagó, were to live. In other terms: one place, one culture (see Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997, 1997a. Pels and Salemink 1999: 26). The territory of Portuguese Guinea was divided into three *concelhos* (Bissau, Bolama and Bafatá) and nine *circunscrições*, fragmented in several *postos admistrativos*, managed by the *chefes de posto* (Castro 1978: 341-342). The *circunscrição* of the Bijagó had its central administration in the Praça of Bubaque, on the island of Bubaque, and was divided into five *postos admistrativos* (Santos Lima 1947): Bubaque (including the islands of Bubaque, Rubane, Soga, Orangozinho, Canogo, Ametite and Meneque, with *posto* in the Praça of Bubaque); Roxa (the island of Canhabaque, with *posto* in the village of Inorei, Canhabaque); Uno (including the islands of Uno, Uracane, Eguba and Orango, with *posto* in the village of Anonho, Uno); Caravela (including the islands of Caravela, Carache, Unhocomo and Unhocomozinho, with *posto* in the village of Betelhe, Caravela); Formosa (including the islands of Formosa, Ponta and Maio, with *posto* in the village of Abu, Formosa).

At the level of the village, Portuguese administration assigned a role to the village headman, the so-called *regedor*. The *regedor* was seen simply as the government's agent in the villages. He was expected to aid the government to collect the taxes and to recruit carriers and labourers. Actually, few *regedores* were chosen from traditional chiefly families as none of these could be persuaded to take on such a hated task, and frequently former government soldiers were given the job (Newitt 1981: 104-105). Commenting on the *regedores*, José Mendes Moreira wrote:

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[60] The fact that isolation and marginality are the outcome of political and military (colonial) interventions rather than inherent features of specific (cold) societies has been remarked insightfully by Jonathan Friedman (1994c: 4-5. See also Kahn 2001). The case of the Bijagó and of the societies of the Upper Guinea Coast is in this sense emblematic.

> Tais chefes são meras figuras decorativas, sem prestígio e sem autoridade, simples fantoches apenas responsáveis quando se trata do pagamento do imposto ou de relações com a autoridade administrativa local, sendo ordinàriamente escolhidos de entre os mais ridículos e inofensivos dos seus concidadãos, por quem não têm respeito nem consideração (1946: 107).

Especially in acephalous communities (like the Balantas and the Bijagó, for instance), the imposed chiefs, the *regedores*, were never accepted as real authorities (Lopes 1987; Forrest 2003), showing a resistance and defiance towards colonial authority even after the end of the pacification campaigns. Actually, as Joshua Forrest has underlined (1992, 2002, 2003), in the case of Portuguese Guinea, colonial dominion over its peoples would prove to be short-lived and contested:

> Although annual taxation drives and forced labour provoked enormous hardships, the colonial state in Guinea was largely unsuccessful in introducing a system of appointed, plain chieftainships. […] Thus, while the colonial state held power at the national level, indigenous power structures at the local level remained at variance with the political preferences of the colonial state and acted as a *de facto* brake on the state's policy capacity (apart from once-a-year taxation and forced labour campaigns) (Forrest 2002: 237)

Occasional skirmishes belied the apparent pacification of the province, as did the passive resistance that proved that 'the political sovereignty of Portuguese colonial state' had not been accepted (Forrest 2003: 140). Prompted by the infrastructural weakness of the administration, a policy of state terror was 'reactivated' whenever 'its sovereignty was seriously challenged' (*ibidem*). The main causes for these acts of defiance were tax collection and forced labour: many inhabitants migrated to neighbouring territories, notably Senegal and Guinea Conakry.

This weakness of the colonial state to impose itself at the local rural level, a weakness which will prove to be fatal during the independence war and which will be a heavy legacy for the post-independence state (Lopes 1987; Forrest 2003), had an important consequence for the symbolic perception of the territory. With administration mainly concentrated in towns (Bissau, but also Bafatá, Farim, Bolama, Cacheu, etc.), colonial power came to be associated with the urban areas, in opposition to the rural ones, where the impact of colonial rule was sporadic and marginal. Colonial modernity,

with its ideology of civilisation and (later) of progress and development, was and was perceived as an eminently *urban* phenomenon, or at any rate as radiating from the urban centres. The *postos* were considered by the colonial government as civilising centres, with civilising effects on people who frequented them. Metaphorically, as we shall see in the analysis of representations of the Bijagó of this period, civilising the natives always meant 'drawing them out of the forest'.

The urban/rural divide, created by scattered Portuguese colonial presence in Guiné, will prove to be one of the main conceptual frameworks for interpreting local reality long after the end of the colonial regime. The opposition between village and town we have underlined in the words of the young men, and that, as we shall see, is an important aspect of post-independence development policies, undoubtedly has colonial origins. It is a 'moral geography' (Thomas 2002) that started to be drawn on the territory and in the consciousness of the people by the discontinuous presence of colonial authority. Significantly, and revealing the colonial origin of the distinction between the country and the town, those moving to the Praça to attend school or to work, are said, as we have already underlined in the previous chapter, to *bai sedu branko* (go become white). What is more, the urban area of Bubaque is still a *kusa di branco*, a thing of the whites, where many 'white things' are found: the school of the whites (*skola di branco*), the drugs of the whites (*mezinho di branco*) etc. In this respect, it is interesting to quote here Silveira who, referring to the 1825-1890 period of Guiné, writes:

> A designação de branco na Guiné, equivalente à de português quando as relações eram com estrangeiros, aplicava-se a todos os grupos sociais livres que viviam em torno das praças. Todavia, a designação de branco era reservada não só aos metropolitanos mas também a todos aqueles cujo poder económico e político se destacava dos demais, independentemente da cor da pele (Silveira 1998: 233).

Weakness in the rural areas will be fatal for the maintenance of colonial rule over Guiné at the outset of the anti-colonial war in 1963. In a few years, through mobilisation of the rural communities, the PAIGC succeeded in liberating vast regions of the country, confining Portuguese authority to a few urban areas (and to the Bijagó islands, for the difficulties of access. See chapter 4). By 1968, the PAIGC controlled most of the territory of the country, and was replacing with its own Party organisation the weak and

inconsistent structures of the colonial government. The Portuguese army was sheltered in the urban areas, from where it conducted air raids, bombarding the liberated zones with napalm bombs. In this tactical situation, the opposition between urban and rural areas became even tenser. As the guerrilla was organised in the forests and in the rural areas of the country, the town was associated with loyalty to the Portuguese government. Several campaigns were put in place in those years by the colonial government to persuade people to move from the rural to the urban areas, stigmatising the life in the 'forest' as unhealthy, dangerous etc… Handouts were circulated or dropped on the liberated areas by planes.

In the Archipelago, the spatial display of colonial authority followed a similar pattern, with the government concentrating in the Praça of Bubaque (which was *sede da circumscrição* and *posto administrativo* at the same time). Significantly, an 18 km road was built in the last years of the Portuguese presence, linking the Praça with the southern coast of the island, facilitating the penetration of the government in the rural areas (see Thomas 2002 for the importance of the 'road' as symbol of modernity and heritage of colonial policies).

Actually, the contact the Bijagó had with colonial administration was limited to the *chefes de posto* and its *sipaios* (African soldiers), who sporadically collected the taxes and organised forced labour (Newitt 1981: 162, Guerra 1994: 198). Contact with the central government was null. With these premises, it is not surprising that the Archipelago, even after pacification, with its fame of primitive, rural, out-of-the-world place, was not among the preferred destination for the Europeans working and living in Guiné. Colonial officers were not eager to carry out their duty far from the central administration, in a remote and secluded region, little civilised and mostly abandoned. According to the census of 1950, only 18 'whites' resided in the whole *circunscrição* (Carreira 1959: 556), with a 'civilised'[61] population of 116.

The *chefes de posto* strove to limit the duration of the initiatic ceremony: the *manras* could last in some islands up to five or six years, and the local authorities, wanting to exploit the men for work, restricted the period to a few months. Another severe limitation to the freedom of the islanders was the obligation to leave one's island and go work in the factory for the extraction of palm oil to get enough money to pay the taxes.

This factory, built in 1913 by the Germans (Carreira 1962: 69; Gallois Duquette 1983: 22) was in the Thirties, according to Pélissier, the most important firm in Guiné (1989 II: 252). Property of the *Companhia Agrícola e Fabril da Guiné* (AFRIFA), this factory owned palm tree plantations in Bubaque, Rubane and Soga and the right to buy palm fruits from other five islands. It also built in those years some 300 km of private road and a cement pier from which a cargo ship from Hamburg transported the oil directly towards Europe (*ibidem*; Sardinha 1965). Except for this factory, no firm for the exploitation of natural recourses was established during colonial times in the Archipelago, and no evident material structure was built, except the colonial administration buildings (Gallois Duquette 1983: 21).

The end of the pacification campaigns brought about also an expansion of missionary activity, mostly in those territories (like the Archipelago, but also in the northern Felupe regions) where colonial authority had been and continued to be contested[62]. Luís António de Carvalho Viegas, promoter of the Canhabaque campaigns and governor of Guiné from 1932 to 1940 (see Carvalho Viegas 1937), wrote in 1936 that the catholic missions should settle where they could prove more useful to colonial projects, like among the Bijagó, to 'modify the exoticism of their way of life and to show them the benefits of work' (Carvalho Viegas 1936: 333-336. See also Pinto Rema 1982). According to Pinto Rema, though (1982: 456), the Archipelago had already been included in the zone of missionary influence since the start of the missionary activity in

[61] On the ideology of civilization, see *infra*.

[62] Catholic missions were a very effective controlling apparatus in the hands of the government of Lisbon. The missionary project in Portuguese colonies has rightly been defined by Paulo Valverde as 'um trabalho simultâneo que visa cristianizar – ou antes catolizar – civilizar e portugalizar' (Valverde 1997 : 77), or, in other terms, 'impregnar de portuguesismo a paisagem africana' (Rego 1961 in Valverde 1997: 91; see also Schouten 2001; Paulo 2001). The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Lisbon regime was officially based on an agreement between the Vatican and the Portuguese Republic ratified by the *Acordo Missionário* (May 1940) and the *Estatuto Missionário* (April 1941). According to the *Acordo*, the Portuguese government supported the missions, gave them territories, dispensed them from the payment of taxes, at the same time as it paid the missionaries' salaries, retirement and travel expenses. In exchange, the Vatican accepted that the nomination of any bishop and archbishop in the colonies had to be submitted to the approval of the Portuguese government. The *Estatuto Missionário* defined Portuguese catholic missions as 'institutions of imperial utility and eminently civilising purpose', while the missionaries had to 'devote themselves in the colonies exclusively to the diffusion of the catholic faith and to the civilisation of the indigenous population'. Every mission had to hand in once a year to the governor of the colony a detailed report on its missionary activities. The *Estatuto* delegated to the missions the education of the population, the programs having to adhere to the 'orientations of the Political Constitution'. On the catholic missions in Guiné and in the Portuguese Empire, see Valverde 1997, Schouten 2001, Guerra 1994: 345-346.

1931/32. However, a stable mission in the Bijagó region - the Imaculada Conceição de Bubaque - was created in Bubaque only in 1942, remaining dependent on the mission of Bolama until 1954 when it was occupied by father Arturo Biasutti of the PIME of Milan (Pinto Rema 1982: 511, 638, 652). The buildings of the Mission however, were built only in 1957. The urgency to activate effectively the mission of Bubaque was underlined in 1953, due to the 'growing influence of the Protestants among the Bijagó and to the displacement of indigenous and European people brought about by the creation of the palm oil factory' (Pinto Rema 1982: 652). According to Pinto Rema, Protestants arrived in the Archipelago in 1952, mainly in the islands of Bubaque and Orango, and in 1955 had converted some 30 people. The mission of Bubaque had, beside the central headquarters in Bubaque (the 'Imaculada Conceição') two other churches: S. Pedro de Eticoga, in the village of Eticoga, Orango Grande, and Beata Mafalda de Abu, in the village of Abu, island of Formosa. The three missionary schools of the region, to whom had been given by the Portuguese government a monopoly over indigenous education, counted few pupils: a total of 67 in 1953/54, and 103 in 1954/55 (Pinto Rema 1982: 561)[63]. The activity of the mission however, both in educational and catechistic terms, was rather limited in the Archipelago, at least until independence.

The civilizing mission

The pacification campaigns dramatically changed the power relations between the Portuguese and the community of the islands. Representations of the Bijagó during the pacification campaigns and in the following years offer an image very different from that of the noble warrior. The islanders appear as an obstacle to the 'civilising mission' and to the exploitation of the Archipelago's natural resources, stubbornly sticking to their independence and culture. It is important to remember that the last pacification campaigns happened at a time when Portugal defined more precisely the ideology regulating the relationship between the metropolis and the colonies. These are the years of the 'imperial mystique' (Castelo 1998, Alexandre 2000: 24), and 1930 is the year of Salazar's *Acto Colonial*, inaugurating a new imperial, nationalist and centralising phase

[63] For the education efforts of the mission of Bubaque, see chapter 6 where the topic of education will be considered at length.

in Portuguese colonial administration (Castelo 1998: 45). Civilizing the indigenous populations becomes, according to this edict, part of the 'organic essence of the Portuguese Nation' (quoted in Castelo 1998: 46).

The construction of difference and the attribution of identities we observe in colonial literature of this period rested on the paradigm of 'civilisation'. The 'civilising mission' had in fact a crucial importance for the justification of Portuguese colonialism (see Alexandre 2000: 21; Pina Cabral 2001a), especially during the Estado Novo. The civilisation process was supposed to integrate Africans into Portuguese society, making them catholic, Portuguese in culture, and part of a wage-earning, marked-oriented economy. As Sarmento Rodrigues (governor of Guiné since 1945) summarised, 'to make them like us' (quoted in Galli and Jones 1987: 35). The local native policies in the colonies were based on the distinction between the *civilizado* and the *indígena*[64], introduced in 1914 by the *Lei Orgánica da Admistração Civil*. Newitt summarised the regime's definition of *indígena*:

> The *indígena* was considered to be part of a community ruled directly by a chief, and subject in the first instance to African customary laws. He enjoyed access to communal land, paid the native tax, and was liable to perform a variety of services which might include acting as a carrier, serving with the police, labouring on public works and acknowledging a general obligation to contract himself as a worker. Theoretically, this policy aimed to educate the African to lead him towards his ultimate social destiny as a *civilisado*, but in practice it was designed to do three things – to maintain the structure of African traditional society, to provide income for the colonial exchequer, and to produce a ready supply of labour for government and private projects (1981: 101).

The communities of coastal Guinea, as we have seen, did not fit at all in this static vision of the indigenous African community, the rural population being highly dynamic and involved in complex trade and migration networks since centuries.

According to the legislation, an African could apply to the local administration for a certificate of *civilizado*, in order to enjoy theoretically all the rights and obligations of a white Portuguese (Oliveira Marques 2001: 25 and following). The *indígenas* had to pass

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[64] A comprehensive labour law was issued in 1899 and a land law in 1901, but the codification of all the decrees affecting the *indígenas* was not carried out until the early days of the Estado Novo, and was incorporated in the *Estatuto Político Civil e Criminal dos Indígenas* of 1929. The legislation was revised

a ‘civilisation’ test that verified his ability to read, write and speak Portuguese ‘correctly’; his employment; his 'good behaviour' and his abandonment of ‘tribal usages and customs’. By the end of colonial rule, relatively few Africans had achieved the status of ‘civilised’, principally because they saw no advantage for themselves in abandoning the status of *indígena* (Newitt 1981: 100-101). According to the 1950 census, only 1.478 *negros* were *civilizados*, in a population of 502.457: a percentage of 0.39 which reveals that Portugal’s policy of assimilation was not being seriously pursued (Chabal 1983: 17, 20). The legal distinction between *civilizado* and *indígena* (despite minor changes in the legislation) continued up to 1961, when it was abolished and all Portuguese Africans were in theory accorded equal status with metropolitan Portuguese (Newitt 1981: 186).

The civilising mission was also implemented, during the Estado Novo and with the improvement of colonial administration, by means of pragmatic and paternalistic policies carried out locally by the *chefes de posto*, promoting the ‘development’ of population in the rural areas (Galli and Jones 1987: 35-6), even though the interest of the Portuguese in developing the economy of their colonies was always scant (Galli and Jones 1987: 38). The preconceived and dualistic vision the Portuguese administrators had of the African rural communities emerges neatly in the development planning that was promoted from the 1950s. Despite the analysis of scholars like Avelino Teixeiro da Mota and António Carreira, who considered the bad administration of trade and agriculture to be responsible for the lowering of agricultural productivity in Guiné, preconceived ideas about the rural communities and their mode of production still emerged in the writings of the local functionaries. Galli and Jones, who explored in detail the transformations and effects of colonial policies on peasant economy (1987), claim that even the most progressive functionaries:

> began their analyses with the assumption that most Guineans lived traditional lives on a subsistence level characterized by low productivity. For them, ‘tradition’ was the major obstacle to development rather than inappropriate administration, patent neglect of infrastructure and coercive policies. The assumption that ‘traditional’ societies could be ‘modernized’ by state policies fitted the Portuguese view of the relationship of *civilizado* and *indígena* (1987: 45).

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in 1954, when the term *assimilado* came to replace *civilisado*, but it was only abolished only in the major reforms of 1961.

> Substantially, agricultural low production and lack of development had to be ascribed to the backwardness of indigenous agriculture, and to the resistance to change, imputable to what was called 'tribal mentality' (1987: 49).

The pacification campaigns and the later colonial policies were supported by the self-legitimating ideology of 'civilisation', which portrayed the smashing of indigenous resistance as an act of generosity of the colonisers who felt justified in overcoming any opposition. According to this paternalistic perspective, the 'primitives' had to be accompanied or even forced into the path towards civilisation, because, even if they were not able to realise it, colonialism was for them an immense step forward in the ladder of progress. Those objecting the occupation of their territories, were refusing their very progress, and such an absurd behaviour legitimated the recourse to the force, for the savages' good. Pictured as disobedient children or aggressive lunatics, the 'primitives' are finally reduced to not-self-sufficient individuals who have to be educated and brought, despite their will, on the main path of history and progress.

Referring to the inhabitants of the island of Canhabaque, 'recanto insubmisso da Guiné' (Carvalho Veigas 1936-1939: II 157), Luís António de Carvalho Viegas, *governador* of Guiné from 1932 to 1940, and promoter of the final campaign against the inhabitants of Canhabaque (1935-1936), wrote:

> [Eles] confundem o espírito de rebelião com o estado de indisciplina de uma população que nunca encontrara correctivos educadores […] necessitando a imposição de um regime de disciplina. […] a sua rebeldia que não se distinguia por aspecto algum de fúria assassina ou de declarado ódio ao branco […] Perante tais circunstâncias que provocavam, de nossa parte, o seu abandono às inclinações naturais dum ser inculto levando uma vida primitiva, não é de estranhar que fôsse, em absoluto, avêsso à submissão e à disciplina (Carvalho Viegas 1936-1939: II, 158-160).

At the end of the campaigns against the Bijagó, with the final smashing of their military resistance, the inhabitants of the islands could well be described by colonial administrators and anthropologists as repentant children. José Mendes Moreira write emblematically, in his *Breve ensaio etnográfico acerca dos Bijagós*:

A fabula da insubmissão perpétua e irredutível dos bijagós, pedra de toque de insinuações abertas ou semi-veladas com que se pretende amesquinhar a nossa capacidade colonizadora, foi completamente desfeita com a última campanha de Canhabaque em que a energia e decisão do governador de então, souberam transformar um momentâneo estado de agitação e rebeldia, na mais completa submissão, ordem e atacamento à nossa soberania. […] O canhabaque é hoje ordeiro, pacífico, trabalhador, pagando pontualmente os seus impostos, sem que, para isso, seja necessária qualquer espécie de coacção. Reconhecendo que da sua submissão só lhe adviriam benefícios, é ele próprio a testemunhá-la, erguendo com os seus próprios recursos um monumento simbólico da paz e concórdia restabelecidas e da sua integração na vida económica, administrativa e política da Colónia. […] Após a liquidação pela fôrça, demonstrativa da nossa superioridade, uma política de persuasão e atracção pela generosidade e pela demonstração prática da utilidade e dos benefícios materiais e morais que para ele resultam da sua obediência ao nosso domínio. Por isto, somos levados a crer que, sob o ponto de vista da assimilação política, o bijagó não é refractário à colaboração e integração na orgânica administrativa da Colónia (1946: 113-114).

Archibald Lyall, who visited the Archipelago in 1938, left us a less ideological and rhetorical picture, giving us a glimpse of the continued local resistance to colonial power. I quote some scattered passages from his 1938 text:

[They are] very independent little people […] they do not want the white man […] have a strong objection to paying taxes. All they want is to be left alone. […] Some tribes have never taken to civilisation because they lack the intelligence to adapt themselves to it; the Bissagos for the diametrically opposite reason that they are too intelligent to be taken in by it. They have […] the quickest brains of any race in Guinea. […] they watch everything the white man does, criticising, weighing, absorbing, sometimes approving, more often rejecting. If the Bissagos are among the most primitive peoples in West Africa, it is from sheer conservatism and certainly not from lack of ability to be anything else. The cardinal difficulty about the Bissagos is […] their damned lack of wants. […] Civilisation spreads by the creation of progressive needs. (262)

The Bissago has never taken the first step on the slippery slope. He has no needs. […] To him the *branco* is simply the man who dresses up his hereditary enemies in khaki uniforms and red tarbooshes, gives them rifles and brings them to his islands to force him to pay taxes. (263)

Not the Portuguese officials themselves could tell me what they gave the Bissagos in return for their taxes. When I asked them, they considered the question carefully; then they said with commendable candour: "Nothing. Absolutely nothing." The Bissagos do not want trade, for they grow or make all they need, and once those needs are satisfied they have no wish to work any more. […] They have no need of roads […] they prefer their own medicine man […] The islanders do not need peace, for they have always been completely protected from their enemies by the treacherous currents and sandbanks of the archipelago, and they have always kept the command of the sea. (264)

It is part of the unending fight to make the Bissagos pay their taxes that no Bissagos may leave his island without a *caderneta indigena*, a little identity booklet, and the stamped aluminum disc which shows he has paid his tax. […] the *chefe de posto* collected the money, entered the payment in his book and filled in a *caderneta indigena* from the pile at his side. Armed with his caderneta, the Bissago was next passed on to a clerk, who punched his aluminum disc and hung it around his neck. (284)

Despite the evident sympathy of Lyall for the people of the islands, it is evident how the image of the static, isolated, stubborn and conservative primitives becomes to emerge, being superimposed on the former identity of warriors, traders and pirates. The dynamic traders and sailors have become peaceful farmers, since they don't want trade anymore and grow all they need. Imposed confinement is gradually becoming an idiosyncratic and ancestral character.

After WWII: anthropology and exoticization

With the end of WWII, responding to the new necessity for Portugal to justify to the newborn United Nations the occupation of the colonies[65], colonial policies (at least officially) and consequently colonial representations, changed. Portugal had to promote various administrative reforms in its colonies, and to alter the native legislation. The *Acto Colonial* was revoked in 1951. The racist theories of the imperial mystique of the 30s were gradually transformed in an idyllic vision of a multicultural society, to which the Portuguese were supposedly historically predisposed. Officially, the regime adhered to the luso-tropical theory, officially denying the violent and racist character of colonial administration in the *territórios ultramarinos*[66]. Since the 50s, the luso-tropicalism, with its idea of a natural and historical vocation of the Portuguese people for the 'civilising

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[63]For a rigorous analysis of this period, see Silva 1997.

[66] Theory elaborated by the Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). As Cláudia Castelo underlined, luso-tropicalism 'pressupõe que o povo português tem uma maneira particular, específica, de se relacionar com os outros povos, culturas e espaços físicos, maneira que o distingue e individualiza no conjunto da humanidade. Esta «maneira» é geralmente qualificada com adjectivos que implicam uma valorização positiva: «tolerante», «plástica», «humana», «fraterna», «cristã»' (Castelo 1998: 13). The Portuguese were allegedly the colonisers that best fraternised with the 'inferior races', and Portugal was a nation historically designated for the 'good' colonisation. According to Freyre, Portuguese natural tendency to mobility, the absence of racial prejudices, the openness to mixing, Christian love, the capacity to adapt to different physical and cultural milieus, created a 'Lusitan civilisation', based upon racial harmony and progressive integration. About luso-tropicalism see also Léonard 1997, Moreira and Venâncio 2000, Sousa 2001.

mission', was the sociological theory sustaining epistemologically the Portuguese colonial ideology. In fact, the adoption of the luso-tropicalist vocabulary in the official documents of the regime is merely an act of propaganda, aimed at legitimising on the international level Portuguese colonial presence in Asia and in Africa[67]. To those who asked Portugal to concede autonomy and independence to their colonial territories, the authorities simply replied that they were not colonies at all, but *territórios ultramarinos*, parts of the Portuguese nation, and that their inhabitants shared the same rights and opportunities as those residing in the metropolis. In fact, even if the native legislation was formally abolished in 1961 (when many liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies had already started their activity), colonial practical policies and life in the colonies did not change much.

In Guiné, this new deal was marked by the appointment of Commander Sarmento Rodrigues as Governor in 1945. The new colonial policy passed also through the promotion of scientific research on the indigenous population: in 1945-1946, the Ethnologic and Anthropologic Mission in Guiné, headed by Magalhães Mateus carried out a large survey of the native population focusing on questions of anthropometry (Magalhães Mateus 1946), according to the interests of Portuguese anthropology of the time[68]; in 1946 the *Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa* was also created, to study and promote the cultures of the colony, constitute an ethnographic museum and edit the *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* (Pinto Rema 1971: 21. Carvalho 2002, 2004).

Portuguese anthropology and ethnography were fundamentally allied in yielding representations consonant with the paternalism and primitivism of the regime (see Gallo 1988; Roque 2001)[69]. Donato Gallo (1988) – examining the classified essays of the

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[67] Actually, the theory of Freyre about luso-tropicalism was never accepted by the Lisbon regime. The idea of a 'luso-tropical civilisation', where different cultures under Portuguese influence exchange cultural elements among themselves – being Portuguese culture just one of the partners, at the same level of the others – was not in harmony with the idea of the superiority of Portuguese culture, which was a basic assumption of the ideology of civilisation (Schouten 2001: 167).

[68] For a long time, anthropological researches in the Portuguese 'Ultramar' were almost entirely devoted to biological anthropology, anthropometrics and the collection of material culture (Areia 1985 : 139). The Portuguese colonial regime, for its part, took advantage of the anthropological interest for human physiology, which seemed to ease the evaluation of the utility and aptitudes of the natives (Duarte 1997; Schouten 2001:164; Pratt 1992; Gallo 1988). The fieldwork of Jorge Dias among the Maconde of Mozambique in the late 50s was a late phase and almost an exception (Schouten 2001: 160. See also Pereira 1986).

[69] In Portugal, anthropological researches were undertaken with certain delay in respect to other major European colonial powers (Pina Cabral 1991, 2001; Castelo 1998; Schouten 2001), and at the end of the

Centro de Estudos Políticos e Sociais of the 1950s and the dissertations of the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas Ultramarinas* between 1960 and 1975 - gave us a glimpse of the continuities and similarities between Portuguese anthropological knowledge and the project of colonialism.

As Pels and Salemink wrote about the pacification processes throughout Africa, 'the initial horizontal relationship evolves into a vertical one: war into policing, reconnaissance into overview' (1999: 25). The people of the Archipelago, tamed, become objects of investigation for the anthropologists. It is in this disciplinary field - where power and knowledge are interwoven – that the Bijagó acquired a stabilised and irreducible difference: as Nicholas Thomas has underlined, anthropology often produces 'a discourse of alterity that magnifies the distance between "others" and "ourselves"' (Thomas 1991: 309). In an orientalistic and exoticizing perspective, the inhabitants of the islands were produced in colonial anthropological literature as the different *par excellence*, the inheritors of ancestral customs[70]: the 'anomalous' socio-political organisation, the status of women, the attitude towards death, the cruelty of the initiation and the beauty of their sculpture were underlined, constructing an image of the ultimate primitive, the irreducible and odd ancestral savage. In an aura of exoticism and oddness, some Bijagó (men, women and children) were abducted from the islands and exposed in a Disneyland-like Bijagó village reproduced in Lisbon in occasion of the Exhibition of the Portuguese World of 1940.

This transformation of the Bijagó into an exotic object, fitting the colonial collection of curiosities, is witnessed emblematically in a *despacho* of the late 40s, that the

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40s, Portuguese anthropology could well be considered a newborn discipline (Sousa 2001: 186). Between the end of the nineteenth century and 1974, Portuguese works of anthropology not only were rare, but they did not follow the international evolution of this discipline (Schouten 2001: 157). As Maria Johanna Schouten has underlined, during the *Estado Novo*, the cultures of the colonized were commonly considered poor and inferior, unworthy of much interest: this might explain the scarcity of anthropological works focusing on cultural aspects (Schouten 2001: 166-167). The connivance of anthropology and colonialism is obviously not a Portuguese peculiarity. Several studies on early anthropology have shown how the newborn human science shared at least some basic assumption with the ideology of the colonial project. Genealogically, anthropology derives (for its 'objects' and its methods) from the Euro-American colonial experience of the late 19th and 20th century (Pels 1997, Pels & Salemink 1999, Apter 1999, Asad 1973, Said 1994, Mudimbe 1988, Fabian 1983). Several critical works in the anthropology of colonialism have shown the continuities between the ethnographic method, anthropological theory and colonial discourse - what Talal Asad defined 'colonial connections of anthropology' (1973: 13). Anthropology, continues Asad, is 'rooted in an unequal power encounter between the West and Third World' (Asad 1973: 16).

[70] On the trope of the timeless savage, see obviously Fabian 1983.

administrador of Bubaque of the time, Augusto Santos Lima, sent to the *chefes de posto* of all the islands of the Archipelago. This document contained detailed instructions about the procedure for welcoming officers visiting the islands (in N.A. 1990). For the visitor, the inhabitants of the villages had to offer a show of traditional dancing, singing and outfits that the local authorities had to organise in every detail. The inhabitants of the islands had to *perform* those aspects of their culture that the colonial gaze acknowledged as traditional, folkloristic and impressively exotic, for the benefit of colonial authorities. The brave warriors had become not only objects of knowledge for the scientists coming from the metropole, but also inoffensive symbols of the richness of 'traditional' cultures of the colony, exotic objects to be displayed, preserved, exhibited and consumed in their insurmountable difference.

There are many passages in colonial texts written after the pacification campaigns witnessing this process of exoticization of the habitants of the Archipelago. Landerset Simões writes in 1935 an emblematic passage:

> [São] uma trîbu que me apaixonára pelo excêntrico viver que dela ouvira. Senhores de ilhas encantadas, mais berços verdejantes que torrões, o *bijagó* era, para mim, mistério que atraia. A sua vida económica assente em base comunal, campo duma melhor distribuição da riqueza; a sua vida social, tendo por fulcro um regime patriarcal; a sua vida familiar, com características incontestáveis de matriarcado, sintetizavam, a par do primitivismo de certas manifestações, um instinto superior de vida como resquício de civilizações adiantadas, mas desaparecidas no transcorrer de muitos séculos. De onde teriam vindo os seus ascendentes? Da lendária Atlântida?… Da Etiópia?' (Simões 1935: 145).

Underlining the eccentricity of the Bijagó, António de Almeida[71] wrote contemptuously in 1939:

> Os bijagós, considerados o povo mais inculto da Guiné, vivem em regime poliândrico, cabendo às mulheres a liberdade de abandonarem os homens quando o entenderem. Comem ratos, cobras e macacos, caçados ou falecidos da doença, acontecendo comerem galinhas com penas e as vacas sem as esfolhar' (1939: 24).

[71] Born in 1900, António de Almeida became one of the most relevant figures of Portuguese scientific milieu. During the 30s and the 40s worked in Angola, where he invented what he later defined anthropo-biology.

The anthropological production about the culture of the Archipelago after WWII partly inherited this attitude[72]. In the first issue of the *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa*, José Mendes Moreira published in 1946 his 'Short ethnographic essay about the Bijagó', where he draws attention to the necessity to study the culture of the Archipelago:

[…] lançar um pouco de luz na penumbra semi-velada dos conhecimentos até hoje revelados acerca da tribo Bijagó […] Entre os diversos grupos étnicos que habitam a nossa Guiné é a tribo Bijagó aquela que ainda oferece o mais vasto e o mais ignorado campo de investigação à curiosidade do cientista. Escondido no matagal impenetrável dos seus palmares, geogràficamente circunscrito às ilhas que formam o arquipélago das Dórcades que hoje têm o seu nome, relutante ao convívio do colono, refractário à civilização e preguiçosamente rebelde à auto-integração na vida progressiva da Colónia, é o Bijagó o grupo étnico guineense do qual temos mais escassa informações acerca da sua psico-bio-etnografia (1946: 69).

This short passage assembles all the elements of the new image of the Bijagó the colonial gaze had produced. Here we find the mystery, the confinement to the environment of the Archipelago, where the Bijagó live hidden in the thick vegetation, shunning to any external contact and civilisation, and too lazy to integrate in the 'progressive' life of the colony. The essay by Mendes Moreira is an emblematic example of the process of construction of otherness. All along his essay, where the adjective *bizarro* (odd) is frequently used, the anthropologist reproduces, in the vocabulary of anthropology, the evolutionary and racist colonial ideology:

Estado de civilização – O bijagó é um dos mais primitivos povos da Terra. No ciclo evolutivo da civilização encontra-se em franca idade dos metais. […] Se atendermos à classificação de Morgan, colocá-lo-íamos na fase da *barbárie*, mas, tomando por base a linguagem escrita, é lógico que o temos de incluir entre os povos *incultos*. [81]

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[72] I will focus here only marginally on Portuguese colonial anthropology, and mainly on the work of Mendes Moreira, for its exemplarity. It is important to underline however that Portuguese anthropology in the later years of colonial dominion had a positive evolution, mainly thanks to the impulse given to the discipline by Jorge Dias in the 60s. The later works dealing with the Bijagó (Silva Marques 1955, Carreira 1962, Quintino 1962, 1969) show the gradual renewal of the discipline. However, it was too late, for in those same years and in all Portuguese African colonies, the independence movements started their struggle, making anthropological investigation often impossible.

… como artista pintores e escultores que são, transportam muitas vezes para a gravura ou alto-relêvo as impressões ou os pensamentos existentes ou elaborados no seu rudimentar *intelecto*. [86]

O bijagó não possui a mais rudimentar noção de higiene. Podemos até dizer que possui uma noção diametralmente oposta, que consiste em acumular sôbre si a maior soma possível de imundície. [89]

O vestuário do bijagó pouco difere da nudez paradisíaca. [89]

Todo o mal que lhes acontece não tem explicação natural; é tudo obra de feitiço … [95]

In 1946, the government of Guiné also promoted an ethnographic survey of the population of the colony. All the *chefes de posto* had to fill in a questionnaire, focusing on the most varied aspects of the life of the natives. This survey allowed Augusto Santos Lima, *administrador* of Bubaque at that time, to publish in 1947 in Bissau the most complete work on the Bijagó published during colonial rule. The introduction to this work, by Teixeira da Mota, is a good example of the new attitude inspired by luso-tropicalist theories:

…após a pacificação, ninguém desempenhou um tão grande papel civilizador e nacionalizador entre os povos nativos como o quadro administrativo. Os indígenas possuem hoje um profundo respeito e consideração pelas autoridades que os orientam, derivados da maneira leal e humanitária como são tratados. Por isso aceitam sem protesto o castigo dos seus ocasionais desmandos, certos sempre de que serão atendidos nas suas necessidades e olhados com sentido verdadeiramente humano. Entre nós os corações captam-se pelo espírito, e não pelas leis. A inflexibilidade da justiça, assim como a irmandade no trato, não têm para nós fronteiras raciais, culturais ou religiosas. É esse o humanismo universalista que há meio milénio andamos a espalhar por todo o mundo (Mota 1947b: 39).

And later, replicating the trope of the isolated tribe:

A tribo Bijagó, mercê de circunstâncias várias – sobretudo *o isolamento geográfico e o menor contacto conosco* – tem resistido particularmente à investigação etnográfica (Mota 1947b: 40-41. My italics)

Producing difference

Sex and work

In colonial literature about the Bijagó, two aspects are frequently highlighted for their sharp contrast with Portuguese ethics: the role of women and their sexual freedom, and the refusal of the ethic of work and progress.

Bijagó communities, as the Portuguese knew them, followed a matrilineal organisation, which granted an economic, ritual and political importance to women. According to Walter Hawthorne, this could be due to the fact that in the heyday of the slave trade, as war became the principal occupation of Bijagó men, agriculture became the principal occupation of Bijagó women (2003: 170.). The end of traditional warrior activity, reorganising social life around the village and agriculture, left women with a noteworthy importance in the organisation of the community[73]. The *iarebok* ceremony (in Kriol *dufuntu*), moreover, conferred (and still gives) women a crucial role in the ritual domain. Misunderstanding the meaning of these cultural traits, the first ethnographers imagined they had discovered a polyandric society, an ancestral matriarchal social organisation (one of the first step of human cultural evolution, according to evolutionist theories) where women enjoyed utter sexual freedom. Simões Landerset fantasised about 'free love' (1935: 148) describing the life of the unmarried girls:

> E passa desde logo ela, gentil figurinha de chocolate, no gracioso rodado do seu saiote de palha, única peça de vestuário a cobrir-lhe ancas e côxas, a perder-se em amôres com o seu *cabaro* (1935: 148).

Archibald Lyall, in the same tone, claims that 'the Bissago woman rules her own sex-life' (1938: 266). José Mendes Moreira wrote in his 1946 essay:

[73] I have elsewhere underlined how the impact of the colonial ideology of civilization and of nationalist ideas of progress gradually shifted the social organization at the village towards a more patriarchal model (Bordonaro 2003).

> A mulher bijagó atinge muito cedo a puberdade, sendo essa precocidade explicada não só pelo clima, como pela promiscuidade em que vive, facilitando exercitações sexuais mórbidas desde tenros anos, e, ainda pelos diversos excitantes de que faz uso inveterado, pela ociosidade em que vive, etc. (1946: 79).

> Entre os bijagós, é a mulher a organizadora do lar, pondo e dispondo a seu talante do seu domicílio [...] Após as cerimónias do *maurasse* (iniciação), as raparigas escolhem os rapazes da sua predilecção, com quem passam a viver em estreita cameradagem, praticando a livre mancebia e gozando todas as delícias do amor livre (1946: 98).

> É o bijagó uma das raras tribos da Terra em que a mulher ocupa um lugar primacial na organização familiar e social e, também, uma das raras tríbus poliândricas do globo. Como senhora absoluta do seu lar, escolhe o homem da sua preferência com quem cohabita enquanto este lhe agradar. Porém, se por qualquer motivo, se aborrece dele ou dá preferência a outro, irradia-o [...] Porém, esta pode também, sem irradiar o marido, admitir outro homem à possa do seu corpo. [...] É a regra geral entre os bijagós que a mulher casada *okanto* pode, além do marido, possuir numerosos amantes, o que, na realidade, sucede (1946: 99).

In these texts the 'tropics' have become what Anne McClintock defines ironically 'porn-tropics' (1995: 22), an imagined place where the Europeans could project their forbidden sexual desires and fears. In colonial representations, non-Europeans, especially women, were frequently imagined as excessively libidinous and incapable of controlling their sexual drives. According to Ronald Hyam (1990), the colonial borders offered to the Europeans the opportunity (real or imagined) for transgressing their rigid sexual customs. Foreign countries and people represented the possibility of new sexual experiences and could therefore easily pass from exciting to monstrous in the European imagination (Loomba 2000:159. See also Stoler 1989, 1995).

This exotic and paradisiacal image of the Archipelago survived for many years, until the last years of Portuguese rule. It is worth quoting here a few emblematic passages from an article by Francisco Valoura, published a few years before independence. Valoura writes of a 'marvellous Archipelago' (1972: 255), where young unmarried girls:

> em continua libertinagem, se entregavam a uns e a outros a ocultas, na mata cerrada, ora agreste ora amena. Praticavam aquele acto com a maior naturalidade, porque os *grandes* tudo lhe perdoavam. As crianças não sabem o que fazem – diziam (271).

[The girls] acenavam com panos e lenços garridos a desejar boa viagem […] Dezenas de *Canhocames*, *Cabaros*, e *Cabidos*, em incontida alegria, corriam, saltavam e cambalhotavam na areia [255]

In the description of Valoura, the Archipelago seems the kingdom of innocence and wonder, a 'land of friendly and hospitable people' (265), while the Bijagó are 'happy and unworried people', leading 'a life free from worry in a land where life is not wearying' (265).

Colonial discourse actually blurred the distinction between sexual mores and economic primitiveness. The refusal of work and accumulation was often imputed to moral and sexual degeneracy: underdevelopment and immorality were seen as one being the effect of the other. Consequently, a specific morality had to be imposed to modify, among other things, the intimacy of the savages, in order to trigger progress, civilisation and evolution. As Ann McClintock has underlined, the reordering of black labour and the black family was legitimised by 'the discourse on progress and degeneration' (1995: 234).

Associated to the fantasized exotic and libertarian sexuality in fact, another aspect of the behaviour of the inhabitants of the islands was stigmatised: their supposed refusal to work. As Maria Johanna Schouten underlined, 'according to the vision of many colonial officers […] the most important element of the civilising mission was teaching to work – that is to say, under the conditions imposed by the Portuguese (2001: 167) [74]. This obviously contrasted with the spirit of resistance of the Bijagó that refused to work under the conditions imposed by the colonisers, and ignored the fact that 'pacification' had deprived most men of their typical occupations: sailing and warfare. According to the Portuguese, the refusal to work had to be imputed rather to the laziness of the natives, a vice brought about by excessively generous natural resources, which did not stimulate accumulation. The 'discourse of the degenerative idleness of the blacks' (McClintock 1995: 252) is a common feature of European colonial ideology. Ann McClintock underlined that, 'the discourse on idleness is, more properly speaking, a

[74] On the European ethic of work in the colonial context, see Pels and Salemink 1999: 32.

discourse on work – used to distinguish between desirable and undesirable labour. Pressure to work was, more accurately, pressure to alter traditional habits of work. […] At the same time, the discourse on idleness is also a register of labour resistance, a resistance then lambasted as torpor and sloth' (1995: 253).

The supposed laziness of the Bijagó became almost proverbial in Guiné, revealing their utter backward status of civilisation. After pacification and with the introduction of the colonial system of forced labour, comments on this aspect became frequent, almost obsessive. In 1938, Lyall wrote:

> The Bissagos work solely to earn enough money for their taxes and not a hand's turn more' (284) […] Except to pay his tax with, money means absolutely nothing to him, because there is nothing he wants to buy with it. […] The Administrator of Bubaque, in the hope of civilising (that is to say, creating economic needs in) the Bissagos, ordered the company to pay its workers part of their wages in the form of cotton cloths. In a month or two the cloths were blowing in all directions about the bush, and the Bissagos were back in their raffia skirts and their goatskins (1938: 285).

Also Mendes Moreira commented on this topic:

> 'Rodeado por uma natureza generosamente pródiga que nada lhe regateia nem lhe exige esforços musculares violentos, mas, apenas o natural esfôrço de estender a mão ou dar alguns passos para obter o que lhe é preciso para o seu sustento e satisfação das suas necessidades, não admira que o Bijagó seja a expressão material autêntica da «Lei do menor esforço». É a personificação viva da preguiça e da indôlencia, resumindo-se a sua actividade ao exercício da pesca, apanha do coconote e à sementeira do arroz necessário ao seu sustento e ao pagamento dos impostos políticos devidos aos nossos direitos de soberania. Só o indispensável para não morrer de fome. Trabalho organizado, luta pela vida, propensão ao esfôrço produtivo – condição do melhoramento da sua vida material – tudo isso desconhece o Bijagó, ou melhor, nada disso lhe interessa […]. Tudo quanto se tem tentado para criar necessidades ao Bijagó, insuflar-lhe o instinto do progresso, interessá-lo na melhoria do seu nível de vida, tudo absolutamente tem esbarrado de encontro à sua indiferença, à resistência passiva ao trabalho, à sua predilecção pela vida livre, em plena natureza, na espessura dos seus palmares. E quanta vez não tem ele defendido de armas na mão esse direito de viver livre, ocioso e despreocupado? (1946: 74)

Silva Marques on the same tone wrote:

a Natureza dotou pròdigamente as ilhas dos Bijagós de palmeiras que lhe fornecem grande parte de alimentação e outros produtos que fàcilmente permutam com outros […] auxiliando-os, assim, a obter com um esforço mínimo a sua alimentação (1955: 294).

In 1962, António Carreira complained about the

impossibilidade de obtenção de mão-de-obra voluntária, remunerada, em condições de permitir a exploração económica de tão extenso espontâneo […] nula são as suas [dos Bijagós] necessidades de bens de consumo […] Não tem outras necessidades a preencher e por isso mesmo prescindem de angariar meios, além dos estritamente indispensáveis ao pagamento dos impostos e à alimentação […] preenchidos esses objectivos, a vida do Bijagó volta a estar limitada à extracção do vinho de palma e às danças, batuques e cerimónias no *Irã* (1962: 83-84).

This stigmatisation of the laziness of the Bijagó derives not only from the economic need to have people carrying out public works or working in local firms. In the civilisation process, work played a crucial role as an instrument to introduce the natives to the cash economy and to the ethic of accumulation. For this reason, the indigenous legislation declared that all Africans had a ‘moral and legal obligation to work’ (Newitt 1981: 107). Carlos Lopes reports an emblematic passage from decree n. 44309 of the Ministério do Ultramar (27 of April 1962), that was intended as a ‘rural work code’. The decree was issued to face the problems deriving from the coexistence in the Ultramarine Regions of ‘subsistence economy’ and ‘market economy’.

Não se trata principalmente de fornecer ao trabalhador alimento suficiente e racional, habitação higiénica confortável, salário justo e equacionado com as possibilidades das empresas e as necessidades familiares do trabalhador. Trata-se antes e muito principalmente de acompanhar de perto a evolução psicológica correspondente à alteração do sistema tradicional de vida, inevitável quando o salário vem substituir os recursos angariados, segundo as formas próprias da economia de subsistência. (…) A regularidade do trabalho assalariado introduz uma preocupação, nova em África, no espirito do trabalhador, a terrível noção do tempo. As obrigações contratuais implicam modificação muito importante na hierarquia dos deveres a cumprir, relegando para segundo plano certos deveres de convívio que tem sempre prioridade na estrutura tradicional, designadamente as festas gentílicas, as caçadas, todo o complexo e rico ritual da sociedade tribal. (quoted in Lopes 1982: 68).

In this passage emerges explicitly an important aspect of the discourse of civilisation: the incompatibility between traditional social organisation and the 'modern' ethic of work and development. The process of civilisation of the Bijagó had much to do with drawing them from their state of indolence, modifying those aspects of their culture that retained their progress. Significantly, the refusal of work and progress was associated with the thickness of the forest where they lived, with their religious ceremonies, dances and activities to which they stubbornly stuck. The attempts of colonial administration to 'civilise' the Bijagó were constantly frustrated, it was maintained, because the inhabitants of the islands did not give up their 'traditional' culture.

Civilize yourself or perish

The image of the population of the islands as immoral and stubbornly reluctant to undergo the process of civilisation had an unexpected evolution when, after the 1950 census (Província da Guiné 1950), new concerns were fostered by colonial anthropologists and administrators for the *preservation* of the Bijagó. Several appeals were made to save the people of the Archipelago from extinction. Some anthropologists admitted the necessity of an 'urgent ethnography'[75].

In 1951 Avelino Teixeira da Mota, commenting on the demographic regression of the Bijagó, wrote, putting together humanitarian and anthropological concerns with colonial economic interests:

> No nosso entender, é urgente *acudir* os Bijagós. Impõe-se um estudo profundo de toda a sua vida – língua, religião, psicologia, arte, organização social e económica. E a par disto a pesquisa das origens do estado sanitário e a elaboração de normas para o racional aproveitamento económico do arquipélago. Para que de todos estes estudos se possa extrair uma política de assistência que valorize devidamente uma população que é das mais inteligentes de toda a Guiné (Mota 1951: 665).

António Carreira in 1962 highlighted a 'demographic evolution marked by a strong and consecutive regression' (1962: 73), and maintained that between 1889 and 1950

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[75] The notion of the 'disappearing savage' is a representational trope recently investigated, among others, by James Clifford (Clifford 1986). On 'urgent ethnography' and its imperialist underpinning, see also Pels and Salemink 1999: 32, Rosaldo 1993, Pina Cabral 2001a: 506.

‘not less than 40.000 Bijagó had disappeared’ (1962: 78). He concluded claiming that ‘the Bijagó population is undergoing a serious crisis that puts it at risk of disappearance in two or three generations’ (1962: 90). Ten years later, three reports by journalist Antónia Maria Palla (1972), appeared in the *Século Ilustrado*, revealing a true concern for the extinction of the Bijagó, with tones that evoke what Renato Rosaldo called imperial nostalgia (1993: 69-70)[76].

When these scholars wondered about the causes of this demographic recession, they generally avoided any reference to the impact of colonial policies and military campaigns on the socio-economic life of the inhabitants of the islands. Rather they ascribed this crisis to the very social and cultural traits of the Bijagó themselves. As Pels and Salemink (1999: 32) underlined, ‘the dangers of extinction of an ethnic group […] was often essentialized as the inevitable outcome of the characters of the natives’.

Mota wrote in 1951:

> […] é natural que tenha influência no estado sanitário dos Bijagós o excessivamente imoderado uso que fazem do vinho de palma, pois são entre eles frequentes tremendas bebedeiras colectivas e ainda a sua bem conhecida falta de asseio corporal que contrasta com a dos povos do continente (Mota 1951: 665).

In 1955, Ruy Vieira, in an essay on the alimentation of the Bijagó, called attention to the supposed deficiency in protein intake among children living on the islands. Commenting on the fact that fish could well provide the necessary proteins, due also to its abundance in the sea of the Archipelago, the author stigmatises the ‘habitual laziness of the natives’, and the difficulty of reorganising the maritime tradition of the islanders around the new fishing activity (1955: 466).

In 1962, Carreira maintained:

> A decadência desta população tem causas remotas bastantes diversas. Umas são a resultante dos costumes e que ainda perduram em certa medida, talvez um pouco pela situação geográfica que dificulta o

[76] ‘Curiously enough, agents of colonialism – officials, constabulary officers, missionaries, and other figures from whom anthropologists ritually dissociate themselves – often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was ‘traditionally’ (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered

rápido acesso e uma fiscalização aturada nas diferentes ilhas. Outras provêm de um conjunto de doenças com carácter endémico, agravadas pelo estado permanente de alcoolização e pela ausência de higiene … tirania dos régulos … comércio de escravos … epidemias … a crença na transmigração da alma que leva fàcilmente (ainda hoje) o Bijagó ao suicídio, por quaisquer razões fúteis…podemos sintetizar essas causas: despotismo dos régulos; guerras com outra tribos, doenças; álcool; deficiente asseio corporal e das habitações; subalimentação (Carreira 1962: 79-80).

'…os males físicos podem ser considerados graves, mas bastante graves são também os de ordem económica e social. E a tudo não é alheio o fatalismo do Bijagó ao aceitar resignadamente a ideia de que pode morrer, com a «certeza» de que voltará ao mundo incarnado noutro homem ou… em algum bicho qualquer' (Carreira 1962: 90).

This picture of a community that cannot survive due to some fatal deficiencies of its culture itself, and that consequently needs, to avoid extinction, external interventions and help to give up those unsafe behaviours, is clearly the apotheosis of the civilising mission, that legitimised and portrayed the presence of the Portuguese in the colonies not only as necessary for the progress of the natives, but also indispensable for their very survival[77]. Colonial power had to protect Africans from themselves (Pina Cabral 2001: 509). The idea of moral degeneracy of the Africans invests here the domain of medicine and health: paternalist/benevolent colonial biomedicine worries about the consequences of the moral degeneracy of the savages on their health, putting in jeopardy their very survival. The opposition between primitiveness and civilisation, between resistance and assimilation becomes 'lethal'. The supposed threat of extinction of the Bijagó, points allegedly to the impossibility for 'traditional' cultures to survive by themselves. Traditional elements (socio-economical as well as cultural), not only detain natives from progress and civilisation, but also put their own life at risk. 'Evolve or perish!' seems to cry the angel of civilisation.

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or destroyed. […] Imperial nostalgia uses a pose of 'innocent yearnings' both to capture people's imagination and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination' (Rosaldo 1993: 69-70).

[77] A similar interpretation has been proposed by João de Pina Cabral who claims that the attribution of the practice of cannibalism to Africans established morally 'the necessity of the white power' (2001a: 505-6). For the notions of 'degeneracy' see Stoler 1989: 643; McClintock 1995

Conclusion

Without overlooking the phenomenon of resistance that the inhabitants of the islands opposed to colonial power[78], the policies of colonial government and its ideology of progress and civilisation succeeded in *producing* a widespread image of the rural African community as 'underdeveloped'. As Mudimbe underlined:

> Because of the colonializing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies (1988: 4)

Arguing about the colonial origins of local distinctions between traditional and modern, Hodgson wrote that the 'modern/traditional dichotomy was inscribed on the categories (such as ethnic identities) that were formed as part of the imperial project of imposing a modern order on the perceived chaos of the native' (1999: 144). On the same issue, Philip Thomas claimed, referring to Madagascar, that 'to speak of the rural and the urban, and tradition and modernity, is to refer to sedimented deposits of modernist narratives of development and progress that colonialism bequeathed to much of the postcolonial world' (Thomas 2002: 367. See also Pels 1997: 176-177, Gupta 1998: 8-9, 179-180).

The idea of a colonial legacy should not make us overlook that the narrative of modernity still inspires several *contemporary* social actors on the national and the international scene. The continuities between colonial and post-independence visions of rural societies, point to a common theoretical root and to a continuing political project. The idea of the incompatibility between 'development' and the most basic social and cultural traits of the African communities was accepted by most developmentist theories that oriented the policies of the educated post-independence elites. Those who had to be

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[78] Resistance and reaction to colonial power have been recently acknowledged as an important aspect of the 'colonial experience'. See, among others, Dirks 1992, Bhabha 1994, Prakash 1995, Loomba 2000.

civilised for their own sake, were the same ones that had to be *developed*, always, obviously, to their advantage, even if against their will.

4. 'Development' and the rural/urban divide

> Development in its manifold editions has been *the* best-seller of the late twentieth century, a best-seller that we all inhabit, a best seller read in many different ways and for many different ends (Mills 1999: 109).

'Development' is one of the crucial issues for understanding post-independence Africa, and probably one of the heaviest legacies of the notion of 'civilisation'[79]: as Stoler and Cooper underlined (1997), it is important to explore how 'the categories of colonialism have shaped postcolonial contexts and have been reworked by them'[80].

In this chapter, I will draw attention to the 'state modernism' of post-independence Guinea-Bissau[81] and to its impact on the relationship between local communities and the state. This analysis of the post-independence period is highly relevant for my argument, because it is in this context that the young men of Bubaque redefine their identity and develop their aspirations and criticisms, both of the rural world of the village and of the elites of the state. The notion of 'development', crucial in the nationalist ideology supporting the anti-colonial war, and later for the state of Guinea-Bissau, shares its basic assumptions with the colonial project of civilisation, reproducing the schism between 'village tradition' and 'urban modernity', while defining Guinea-Bissau on the global scene as an 'underdeveloped' country[82].

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[79] Mbembe 1985, Karp 2002, Escobar 1988, 1991. See also Introduction and Conclusion.

[80] On cultural transformation brought about by colonial rule and on postcolonial continuities, see, among others, Mitchell 1988, Mudimbe 1988, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Comaroff 1992, Dirks 1992, Cole 1998, Werbner 1998, Thomas 2002. Specifically on the continuities of Portuguese colonialism, see Lopes 1999: 238 and following; Feldman-Bianco 2001 and the whole issue 8(4) of *Identities* 2001; Carvalho and Pina Cabral (ed.) 2004.

[81] By 'state modernism', I intend here 'a state ideology of progress, modernization and development' (Liechty 1995: 168).

[82] For the analysis of a similar case in Lesotho, see Ferguson 1994.

Cabral, the PAIGC and the local communities

The history of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau is well known[83], and it is enough here to outline a few key events. In 1956, Amílcar Cabral[84] and Raphael Barbosa clandestinely organised the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). The PAIGC moved its headquarters to Conakry (Guinée) in 1960 and started an armed rebellion against the Portuguese in 1963 (Silva 1997: 47). Despite the presence of Portuguese troops, a contingent that grew to more than 35,000, the PAIGC steadily expanded its influence, and by 1968 it controlled most of the country, establishing civilian rule in the territory under its control and holding elections for a National Assembly. Portuguese forces and civilians were increasingly confined to their garrisons and larger towns. The Portuguese governor and commander in chief from 1968 to 1973, Gen. António de Spinola, returned to Portugal and took over leadership of the movement that brought democracy to Portugal and independence for its colonies in 1974.

Cabral's conception of development and modernisation had an important influence on the early formation of the local structures of the state during the war. His thought reveals an underlying contrast between modernity and the rural communities, a dichotomy that was to deeply influence the economic policies of the early years of independence.

Cabral, development, mobilization

'How do you say square root in Balanta?' used to ask Amílcar Cabral (quoted in Matos e Lemos 1999). This question, synthesizing the reasons for the choice of Portuguese as national language, is emblematic of the troubled relationship between the rural communities and the ideas of progress and development underpinning the nationalist movement.

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[83] On political mobilization and the independence struggle in Guinea-Bissau, see Chabal 1983, Davidson 1981, Lopes 1987, Rudebeck 1974, Dhada 1993.

[84] On the life of Amílcar Cabral and his experiences before the founding of the PAIGC, see, among others Chabal 1983, Castanheira 1995, Silva 1997.

During his early writings Cabral insisted a great deal on the *re-africanização dos espiritos*, as a necessary assertion of African identity to resist the alienation deriving from the colonial policy of assimilation (Chabal 1983: 42), accordingly with Fanon's theories and with the *negritude* cultural movement, developed in the 50s by French-speaking black intellectuals. However, when the contact with the people of Guinea-Bissau became closer, during the early phases of mobilization and the nationalist war, the relationship between the PAIGC and the local communities evolved in different and ambiguous directions.

In fact, the leaders of the nationalist movement were generally part of an urban educated elite, distant from the majority of Guineans living in the rural zones (Chabal 1983: 71; Lopes 1987: 30; Forrest 2003: 181). Cabral himself had his first contact with Guinean peasants in 1953, while carrying out the agricultural census of Guinea (Galli and Jones: 1987: 4, 55; Chabal 1983) and, like most of the higher cadres of the PAIGC and of the high rank personnel which managed the state after independence, was identified, in colonial terms, as a *civilizado*. During his first stay in Guinea, and even more later, when promoting political mobilisation in the field, Cabral realized how difficult it could be to gain the confidence of the rural population, convincing them of the necessity of a nationalist struggle (Chabal 1983: 68; Lopes 1987: 13) and of a change in their mode of production and social organization for the creation of a new society.

Even in the definition of the nationalist argument, the PAIGC accepted the colonial borders of Guinea-Bissau, without questioning the validity of these territorial limitations for the creation of a national unity. As Carlos Lopes rightly underlined, commenting on the 'utopian conception of nation building':

> O PAIGC … foi a expressão da sua 'liderança', que é pequeno-burguesa e de cultura crioula. Estes crioulos, e por extensão esta liderança, apelavam para uma historicidade que se limitava a utilizar as referências coloniais. … A nação, tal como é concebida pelo movimento nacionalista, aceita implicitamente o território de 1886, como necessário para implantar as estruturas do Estado pós-colonial. (1999: 239-240).

In his economic and social analysis of the rural regions of Guinea-Bissau Cabral shared the developmentalist ideology of the most progressive writers of his time.

According to the leader of the PAIGC, for the foreseeable future Guinea would remain an agricultural country: he did not therefore view industrial development as the priority for his socialist policies. Only the development of agricultural production could bring progress in Guinea, and 'only a revolutionary socialist state would provide the technical as well as political and economic guidance to rural producers' (Galli and Jones 1987: 4).

In most of his studies of agronomy devoted to Guinea, he claimed in fact that low productivity was also connected to 'the rudimentary nature of indigenous techniques' (quoted in Galli and Jones 1987: 47). Substantially sharing the view of colonial economists, Cabral's analysis and economic project was based on the assumption that the development problem of Guinea lay in the backward nature of indigenous agriculture, and that investment and proper guidance could integrate peasants into modern society (Galli and Jones 1987: 49). The leader of the PAIGC was convinced that 'an improvement of techniques could solve this problem along with improvement in living conditions and the introduction of collectives wherever appropriate' (*ibidem*: 47). Cabral believed in the possibility of a peaceful modernisation of agriculture because he assumed that once the villagers realised that social policies were of benefit to them, they would gradually accept them (Chabal 1983: 155). His perspective was that of the modernist, the technical mind. Change was possible and modernisation would take place if the proper factors of production and technological support were available (Chabal 1986: 107).

If on the one hand Cabral saw the preservation of African cultural values as one of the strengths of a nationalist movement, he fundamentally thought that his social and economic project was possible only if drastic changes were brought about in rural society: the African rural community was basically incompatible with the structures and values of a modern national state. The armed struggle itself, he argued, 'implies a 'forced march' on the path towards cultural progress' (quoted in Chabal 1983: 186). However, as Patrick Chabal reminds us, 'Cabral's desire to instil in his countryman modern values was tempered by the realisation that, however essential, progress could not be achieved either speedily or through coercion. He was therefore totally opposed to the *tabula rasa* employed by so many revolutionary regimes' (Chabal 1983: 186). Nevertheless, even though the respect for difference was undoubtedly an important aspect of Cabral's thought (Lopes 1982: 105), there was, already in the early stage of

the liberation struggle, the idea of the incompatibility of social progress and economic development with the economic, social and political structures of the rural communities. Cabral's idea of development would have necessarily brought local communities to profound transformation. As Carlos Lopes underlines, 'Amilcar Cabral's teachings were unhesitatingly directed towards the dismantling of socially retrograde structures' (1987: 31). In this respect, Cabral said that the Party had to:

> Educate ourselves, educate others and the population in general to combat fear and ignorance, to eliminate little by little submissiveness in the face of nature and natural forces that our economy has not yet dominated. Struggle without unnecessary violence against all the negative and humanly degrading aspects that figure in our beliefs and traditions (In Lopes 1987: 56).

The process of involvement of the rural communities in the nationalist struggle and the early creation of the structures of the Party in the villages were readily recognised by Cabral as crucial elements for the success of the enterprise. Mobilisation for the goals of the nationalist cause was not only indispensable for military reasons, but also the first phase in the building of national unity. In the liberated areas, the PAIGC started creating the local administrative and political structures of the future society, the village committees (*comités de tabanca*).

The *comité de tabanca* was the structure of the PAIGC at the level of the village and was supposed to be the main factor of political mobilisation as well as the place from which the new nation was gradually to be built (Lopes 1987: 52-3). Overcoming 'ethnic' divisions, the PAIGC structure at the level of the village was intended to create a new sense of unity around the idea of independence (Lopes 1982: 49). The village committee was composed of five persons, members of the Party, elected by the population (Andreini and Lambert 1978: 38). Each member had his own specific duty: the president co-ordinated the activities of the village, organising agricultural production; the vice-president was responsible for the security and defence of the village; the third member was concerned with education, health and social issues; the fourth with distribution of food and goods; the fifth with civil registration (Andreini and Lambert 1978: 38-39; Chabal 1983: 108-9; Lopes 1982: 47-51, 1987: 35-36; Dhada 1993: 55 and following).

The *comité de tabanca* was the translation into practice of the ideology of development of the PAIGC. In a revised and egalitarian version, with different agendas, the PAIGC was, from the early constitution of the state, replacing the colonial state in the project of *developing* the rural communities. The village committees intended to re-organise the village community around the necessity of the liberation struggle first and the new-born state later, involving organisation of work, civil registry of birth, deaths and emigrations, education, health, and defence. According to Andreini and Lambert, the policy of the Party was directed at 'improving the level of life of the disfavoured rural masses' (1978: 51), with agriculture receiving maximum efforts, but there was also great concern about health and education, which were widely decentralised. Emblematically, the motto of the Party in the years following independence was 'peace and progress for the people' (Andreini and Lambert 1978: 60) and Cabral was always keen to point out that 'with hospitals and schools we can win the war' (in Chabal 1983: 114). The purpose of the *comité de tabanca* was to reformulate the social organisation of the village, promoting locally those elements which were considered proper to a 'modern' socialist nation state (defence, civil registry, communal organisation of labour, distribution of food and goods), and supporting the local development of the rural population in the direction of a higher standard of living: education and health were implemented and imposed upon local cultural patterns, also with the idea of creating a unitary nation despite evident ethnic and cultural divisions. Education and health were thought as external modern means contributing to the progress of the rural population of the state.

As Patrick Chabal has underlined, the *comités de tabanca* 'were in charge of the establishment of new social institutions such as schools and hospitals. They also sometimes acted as agents of social change. Villagers were forced to adapt to institutions that had no roots in the traditional socio-political structure of their ethnic groups' (1983: 108). In some cases, the inhabitants of the villages elected members of the *comité* who had little to do with traditional authorities, such as elders' councils. In many communities, young people were often elected, contributing to the emergence of a new generation of authorities in plain contrast with the old ones, and contributing to the growing independence of the young and to intergenerational conflicts.

Even if the articulation between the local communities and the nationalist ideology of the PAIGC in the organisation of the independence war is still largely to be explored, it is quite evident that the PAIGC was often and at least initially perceived as an 'external' power, competing with local authority and social organisation, and it would be of great historical importance to explore the local logics which brought village communities, or some segments of them, to join the nationalist war (see Chabal 1983: 69-71, 79; Forrest 2003: 186 and following).

The intense mobilization and the institution of the village committees in fact did not completely prevent the emergence of local logics, which, at times, contrasted with the goals and projects of the Party. The conflict between certain cultural traits of the rural communities and the development of an efficient nationalist struggle emerged in all its complexity during the Cassanca PAIGC congress in 1964, when the Party created the administrative structures of the new state. During this congress it was pointed out how the belief in the protection of sorcerers, or the idea that the *irán* forbade entrance to some part of the forest, were in fact causing serious problems to the guerrilla. 'Cabral's repeated attempts to overcome these cultural constraints – writes Patrick Chabal (1983: 81) – are an indication of the influence of such factors upon the development of a people's war. Much of his effort was devoted to understanding cultural influences and to reducing their sways over the party leaders and fighters'. 'The party though – wrote Cabral (quoted in Chabal 1983: 81) – has not forbidden what did not prejudice our struggle. It has attempted to create a new spirit, new ideas, and a new way of looking at reality'.

Since the PAIGC started operating in the country the Archipelago and its inhabitants remained substantially excluded from mobilisation as well as from the war, which was conducted on land, rather than on sea (Silva 1997: 57). Only a few young men decided to escape from the islands and join the PAIGC guerrillas (Gallois Duquette 1983: 24). Actually, the situation of the islands during the war was considered so tranquil that soldiers and Portuguese administrators went to spend their holidays in Bubaque (Guerra 1994: 384). When the special mission of UN visited the liberated areas, in April 1972, the Portuguese control over the territory was actually limited to urban centres, some villages and the islands, where, writes Lopes (1982: 28), the difficult conditions did not

allow the development of the struggle. A Portuguese concentration camp was set up on the island of Galinha (Castanheira 1995: 130).

The influence that the PAIGC had on mainland Guiné in the liberated areas since the 60s, through the institution of the *comité di tabanca*, was null on the islands until the final withdrawal of the Portuguese troops in 1974 (Dhada 1993: 53), at a time however when the policy of the party towards the rural areas had already changed, as we shall see. While the PAIGC was organising a real autonomous state in the already liberated rural zones of the mainland through the village committee, the Archipelago was still firmly under Portuguese rule, and only later did the inhabitants of the islands experience the penetration of the structure of the new state (Gallois Duquette 1983: 24). This is an extremely important element to acknowledge when we consider the relationship between the Archipelago and the structures of the state, and, conversely, the perception of the Archipelago by the central government in Bissau. Marginal in the preparation of the war, excluded from the fight and from mobilisation, late in getting in touch with the structures of the PAIGC and, consequently, underrepresented at the political level, the inhabitants of the islands were ready to preserve their image of remote, savage and marginal people in the intricacies of post-independence history of Guinea-Bissau.

After the war: a brief political history[85]

On the 24th of September 1973, when the PAIGC unilaterally declared the independence of Guinea-Bissau, the Archipelago was still firmly in the hands of the Portuguese army (Guerra 1994: 238). Only when the 25th of April 1974 and the end of regime in Portugal brought an end to hostilities in the colonies did Portuguese troops finally withdraw from the territory of Guinea-Bissau, leaving the Archipelago in the hands of the government of the new-born republic. Amílcar Cabral had been assassinated in Conakry in 1973, and party leadership fell to Aristides Pereira, who later became the first president of the Republic of Cape Verde. Luís Cabral, Amílcar Cabral's half-brother, became president of Guinea-Bissau.

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[85] The post-independence political history of Guinea-Bissau has been explored by numerous authors. My aim here is merely to highlight the prevailing official ideology of development and the policies inspired by such vision of progress.

The main instrument and local organ of the Party on the territory was still the *comité de tabanca*, but the PAIGC had to face the fact that before independence less than half of the population had lived in the liberated zones. Most people had not been affected by the efforts of the Party to build a new society. In many areas of the country, political mobilisation had still to begin, while the newborn government had to face a quantity of practical issues, in the difficult position of having no cadres and financial means (Rudebeck 1982: 9; Forrest 2003: 207 and following). The regions of the country that had not been liberated before the declaration of independence of 1974, like the entire Archipelago[86], had to be rapidly integrated in the organisation of the newborn state, to grant legitimacy to the government. The presidents of the sectors and of the regions had to introduce the structure of the *comité de tabanca* where it did not yet exist. 'First of all, meetings were called in the villages and towns of the sector to inform the people of the PAIGC's principles and objectives and to win their trust. Then committees were set up' (Galli and Jones 1987: 81). Obviously, everything was very different from the slow and patient mobilisation of the village communities during the war: few meetings, sometimes only one, and the candidates choice was often guided by the sector official. As Chabal has underlined:

> The political unification of the whole country at independence did not follow the expected course. Although on paper the PAIGC was extended to those areas which had remained under Portuguese control on the principles and organization which had obtained in the liberated areas, the reality was different. Because the aim of the party leaders was now to minimize opposition and because the ideology of the party was shifting, the new PAIGC became an instrument of legitimation rather than mobilization (1986: 98)

Moreover, a dramatic change occurred in the politics of the PAIGC in the years following independence. If during the war the Party had gained great support and confidence in the rural zones, after independence the situation changed. 'In the aftermath of the war', maintain Galli and Jones (1987: 2), 'the PAIGC leaders became so absorbed in taking over power from those involved in colonial institutions, dismantling the colonial army and generally consolidating their rule, that they allowed

[86] After independence the Archipelago was included in the Bolama-Bijagós region, subdivided into three sectors (Bolama, Bubaque and Caravela). Later, the sector of Caravela was split into two smaller

the party organisation in the liberated zones to disintegrate. The emphasis fell on establishing state institutions and the majority of party cadres were diverted to urban areas to take charge' (see also Silva 1997: 78; Lopes 1987: 111). The centralisation of power implied that the *comité de tabanca* 'found themselves at the bottom of a pyramidal state structure in which their main function was to transmit directives from above' (Galli and Jones 1987: 2-3). Moreover, as Joshua Forrest underlines, 'although the now-ruling PAIGC had entered into power with a high degree of post-war popularity, rural civil society remained structurally positioned "against" central state institution' (2003: 205).

The PAIGC became increasingly centralised and hierarchical, and failed to develop adequate democratic procedures to safeguard the interests of either its militants or its rural supporters (Rudebeck 1982: 9; Galli and Jones 1987: 53). In fact, the rural population did not have any means of control or influence over the Party or the state. Settled in the urban centres, the PAIGC leaders had little knowledge of the rural areas, due to their physical and social distance from rural people. As Galli and Jones underlined, (1987: 53):

> rather than create the democratic and decentralized 'people's state' of 1973 Constitution, the PAIGC took over and adapted the structures left behind by the New State. The most prominent party cadres took over the top levels of the state apparatus, while many of the former colonial officials and employees were absorbed into public service in order to fill positions at all other levels.

The transition to state power was thus defined in terms of taking over the state apparatus from those who had held control rather than in terms of turning it over to popular control (Galli and Jones 1987: 74; Lopes 1982: 73; Lopes 1987: 81). Moreover, the structures of the Party overlapped with the structures of the State, with officials of the party at all levels also occupying positions in the state bureaucracy (on this point see Galli and Jones 1987, Chabal 1983). The people living in the rural areas started to understand that the new administration was not much different from the former (Lopes 1982: 91). As António Duarte Silva rightly observed, political independence and the State were, in the end, an 'urban phenomenon' (1997: 78).

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sectors, Caravela and Uno.

Political and economic changes

At the level of economic policies, while the formal economy was nationalised and run through the *armazéns do povo* and the SOCOMIN (a government import-export agency) (Forrest 2002: 239), Luís Cabral's government devoted most resources to urban industrial development, accentuating the phenomenon of urbanisation. In the first six years of independence, the government of Guinea-Bissau engaged in a number of development projects that did not contribute much to the development of agriculture. Luís Cabral promoted from 1977 policies oriented not at improving the country's agriculture, but at implementing a form of urban-based semi-industrial strategy of dubious utility and which Guinea could ill afford. The neglecting of agricultural production and the consequent food shortage, made the country increasingly dependent on food imports and foreign help (Chabal 1983: 166; Lopes 1982: 78; Lopes 1987: 104; Rudebeck 1982: 17; Imbali 1989; Forrest 1992, 2002, 2003. For an accurate analysis of the agricultural policies of the State after independence, see also Temudo 1998)[87].

On 14-15 November 1980, João Bernardo Vieira (Nino), prime minister and a historic member of the Party, overthrew Luís Cabral with a military coup, accusing him of having abandoned the original policies of the PAIGC and of pursuing a centralising and autocratic policy which ignored the interests and necessities of the people. Until the end of 1981, when he was allowed to leave the country and to fly to Cuba, Luís Cabral was under house arrest in his villa in Bubaque. The end of Luís Cabral's regime did not change much: the structure of the state apparatus and even most of the ministers remained the same under the presidency of Nino Vieira (Rudebeck 1982: 25; Lopes 1988: 42 and following), as well as the political programme. However, the coup destroyed the relationship and the supra-national organisation that unified Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

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[87] 'Paralelamente, à criação de um sector industrial foi lançado um programa de modernização agrícola sob o controlo do Estado, através de grandes projectos de desenvolvimento rural integrado (PDRI), implementados com financiamentos e, em larga medida também, com técnicos internacionais (nomeadamente, NU, CEE, Suécia, Holanda, França, RFA e EUA) […] muitos destes projectos foram concebidos e implementados sem a execução prévia de uma pesquisa empírica adequada e as avaliações de que foram alvo basearam-se essencialmente em análise documental de fiabilidade duvidosa' (Temudo 1998 II: 61).

Vieira's presidency was characterised by a growing internal deficit and consequent reliance on external financial help. In the early 1980s in fact, the International Monetary Fund promoted a new form of intervention with the so-called developing countries: the structural adjustment plans (SAPs), which subordinated the concession of loans to a series of political and economical reforms to be realized in a certain span of time. Among these, the IMF promoted reforms in the public sector, trade and price liberalisation, democratisation, the definition of specific development strategies for all the sectors of economy, and the relative institutional framework (see Stiglitz 2002).

The SAP was launched in Guinea-Bissau in May 1987, approved by the government, the IMF and the World Bank, with a time span of three years (1987-1990). For reaching of the objectives of the plan (economic growth, payment of the external debt, devaluation of the currency…), the IMF 'suggested' a complete liberalisation of economy and the improvement of the public sector. Needless to say, given the dependence of the country on foreign aid, the government had to accept the program without any possible negotiation (Pinto *et al.* 1999: 122-123; Galli and Funk1992: 239). According to the strategy of the IMF, the country had as well to open completely to the forces of the international market economy. Despite the evident difficulties of the government of Guinea-Bissau in reaching the objectives imposed, the IMF continued fuelling Guinea-Bissau's economy until 1991, when, faced with the absence of positive indications in the economy of the country, it decided to stop the loaning. However, the policy of external dependence continued, as the government pursued others external sources. The IMF restored credit to the government in 1995 (Pinto *et al.* 1999: 139. For a detailed description of the social consequences of the liberalising policies and the SAP see Galli and Funk 1992; Imbali 1993; Havik 1995; Monteiro 1996; Forrest 2002, 2003).

Galli (1989: 90) claims that despite some important innovations, like the liberalisation of trade promoted by Nino Vieira's government after 1986, nothing indicated a true political will to maintain the peasants' agriculture, which continued to be the first economic sector of the country (see also Temudo 1998 II: 67). In fact, maintains Forrest, 'the economic free trade opening of the late eighties and early nineties was managed in a way that largely benefited state-connected big traders. Overall, these policy choices ended up widening the growing rift between the majority

of Guineans and the government, thus adding to the growing level of popular discontent with the PAIGC leadership' (2002: 237). As to the relationship between the State and the local communities, as Rudebeck has rightly underlined, relying almost completely on foreign help the cadres of the Party had no necessity of the rural population either for economic or for political support (1982: 18).

As popular support decreased, in the 1990s Vieira's regime became more authoritarian. According to the conditions imposed by the IMF/World Bank, the monopartitism of PAIGC ended in 1991. In 1994, elections were held, and the PAIGC and Nino Vieira were elected. In December 1997 and January 1998, the government arrested approximately 20 people (civilians and soldiers) for alleged arms trafficking. Among those accused was Brig. Gen. Ansumane Mané, who was subsequently suspended from active duty. Five months later, on June 6, 1998, President Vieira dismissed Mané. Mané's dismissal precipitated an uprising the next day, as approximately 90 percent of the armed forces rallied behind Mané in an attempt to oust Vieira. These forces, the self-defined *Junta Militar*, were engaged by the remaining 10 percent of troops loyal to Vieira, supported by troops called in from neighbouring Republic of Guinea (Conakry) and Senegal. Some 300,000 residents of the capital city, Bissau, were forced to flee from the conflict centred there, and intensive artillery battles ensued within the urban centre[88]. Approximately 3.000 refugees also reached Bubaque.

In a communiqué of the *Junta Militar* of September 1998, explaining the reasons for the uprising, the country was described as 'atrasado, retardado e empobrecido pelo despotismo corrupto do Senhor João Bernardo Vieira' (in Induta 2001: 142), while the main goal of the revolt was declared to be the extirpation of social and economic delay and the creation of a condition of freedom and justice triggering development (in Induta 2001: 145).

A peace agreement was signed on Nov. 1, 1998, calling for the withdrawal of Senegalese and Guinean troops, for the end of Vieira's regime and for new elections the following year. Malam Bacai Sanhá was nominated interim president, pending elections. Elections were held in November 1999 and in January 2000, giving the PRS

[88] For detailed descriptions of the situation that led to the conflict and of the civil war, see Induta 2001, Rudebeck 2001, Forrest 2002.

(*Partido da Renovação Social*) the relative majority of seats in the Parliament. Koumba Yalá, head of the PRS was elected president of the republic.

After the war, the already precarious situation of Guinea-Bissau became critical. The state treasury was empty. The economy was almost paralysed and the donors were scepticals (Rudebeck 2001: 34). The Yalá presidency has been characterized by great political instability, with frequent changes in the ministries and an aggressive opposition, and a lack of any economically relevant measure, despite some consistent external loans. The State, the principal employer in the country, several times failed to pay its employees, causing enormous economic hardship and social tensions. Several strikes were organized in Bissau. The overall perception was that of a general state decay and of its withdrawal from the public life in all sectors. Hospitals were lacking in funds and personnel, schools were closed several times due to the strikes of the teachers, and the administrative cadres, highly demotivated and underpaid, were ignoring their duties. Moreover, the already frail structures of the PAIGC at the local level were devoid of any legitimacy after the change at the head of the country. In the rural regions, though spared by the cruelty of the war, the state was present only formally, with few demotivated representatives with a low salary (when paid) and without any guidance from the central administration in Bissau[89]. With the weakening of the central State, the localization of the rural communities increased even further, and the distance from Bissau was at times so great that, from the local point of view, there was no State at all (Forrest 2002: 263). This was the situation the young in Bubaque had to cope with during my fieldwork. Since then, the political situation has undergone further evolution.

In 2002, Ialá dismissed the government of Prime Minister Alamara Nhasse and dissolved the parliament. He appointed Mario Pires to lead a caretaker government controlled by presidential decree, while the elections of 2002 were postponed. In 2002, the army, led by Verrisimo Correia Seabra, intervened. Ialá resigned, the government was dissolved and a Committee for Restoration of Democracy and Constitutional Order was established. Later that year the non-partisan Henrique Pereira Rosa was sworn in as president and António Artur Sanhá of the PRS became prime minister. After the 2004 parliamentary elections, won by the PAIGC, Carlos Gomes Júnior became prime

minister. Presidencial elections, hold in 2005, paradoxically brought Nino Vieira once more to the office of president of the republic of Guinea-Bissau.

State modernism and rural communities

The declaration of independence of Guinea-Bissau of 1973 declared that the PAIGC was building a 'strong country marching towards progress'. And further: 'The State of Guinea-Bissau takes responsibility for promoting the economic progress of the country, creating in this way the material basis for the development of culture, science and technology, aiming at the constant improvement of the social and economic life standard of our people and at the final realization of a life of peace, well-being and progress for all the children of our land' (quoted in Silva 1997: 399). The constitution of Boé of 1973 claimed that 'Guinea-Bissau is a republic [...] fighting [...] for the social progress of its people' (Art. 1). In article 8, it claims that 'the State has a decisive role in the planning and in the harmonious development of national economy'.

For a few years after independence, in effect, the PAIGC continued its efforts to bring development, education and health to the rural areas. Even though services were expanded, the prevailing strategy, although well intentioned, was essentially paternalistic. 'Development' had to be brought to the peasants (Galli and Jones 1987: 133). The PAIGC accepted the model of the 'modern state' and imported models of development and modernisation. However, both Luís Cabral and in Nino Vieira's governments tended to concentrate in urban areas (and mainly in Bissau) the great majority of investments and the structures of the State, to the point that Lars Rudebeck could say in 2001 that most rural areas were, in practice, untouched by government development policies (2001: 75). The application of the SAPs did not change much in this respect (Galli and Funk 1992; Cardoso and Imbali 1993: 52; Monteiro 1996). Quite on the contrary, the reduction of salaries in the public sector, and the lack of other forms of incentive from the central state, discouraged most administrative cadres and public workers, who abandoned their positions or developed parallel activities (Galli and Funk 1992: 243; Cardoso and Imbali 1993: 54; Havik 1995: 33), lessening even more the presence of the state outside the urban centres. This also led to a growing disparity in

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[89] For the impact of this decadence of the state on the little urban centre of Bubaque, see chapter 8.

the access to education for many young people, with strong rural/urban asymmetries (Monteiro and Martins 1996).

All authors who have analysed the political and economic history of Guinea-Bissau after independence agree that the main cause of the failure of the state is the political breakdown between state and countryside (Chabal 1986: 96; Imbali 1993; Forrest 2002, 2003). According to Joshua Forrest, this failure was also due to the legacy of weak colonial penetration and consolidation the in rural areas: ‘post-independence Guinea-Bissau inherited a state infrastructure that hardly extended outside Bissau and was unable to execute its policies effectively’ (Forrest 2002: 237; 2003).

As the peasants were gradually marginalized in the political field, the economic policies supported urban elites and tried to promote semi-industrial activities based in Bissau (Lopes 1987: 111 and following). The fostering of policies that supported and encouraged an urban vision of the future had important social consequences, producing a neat distinction between urban dwellers and villagers. As Patrick Chabal has underlined, ‘at an individual level, to move forward was to move to Bissau. For the country as a whole, the future was the promise held by Bissau’ (1986: 98). The urbanities, and Bissau in particular, came to be associated with the ideas of progress and development, as places of economic opportunity, while the rural areas, on the contrary, were the realm of tradition, immobility and poverty[90].

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[90] This vision and its social and economic consequences are not obviously limited to Guinea-Bissau, but are one of the destabilising factors of African post-independence economies in general (see for e.g. Davidson 1992). The tendency of the state to consider the towns as its main political and economic objectives (Lopes 1987: 113) obviously triggered an internal migration towards the urban centres. In 1979, reports Lopes (1982: 84), Bissau had a population of 110.000. With only 16% of the population, 50% of the investments and 80% of the budget were concentrated in the capital city, which enjoyed a kind of socio-economic autonomy (Lopes 1982: 91). Lopes critically comments:

> Imbuídos do seu papel histórico no sentido do progresso, fascinados pelos mitos do modernismo, alguns habitantes citadinos parecem ter esquecido que o campo existe (…). Os orçamentos atribuídos às administrações regionais são tão ridículos que mal permitem a manutenção das sedes, o arquivo dos registos de nascimento e…a cobrança de impostos! (Lopes 1982: 91)

The economic policies issued by the state following the indications of the IMF, pushed many people to search for alternative and informal survival strategies in town (Padovani 1993: 159). According to the 1991 general population and housing census, Guinea-Bissau had 979,203 inhabitants and an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent between 1979 and 1991. During the same period, the urban population increased from 14.2 per cent to 20 per cent. The population of the capital city Bissau passed from 80.000 in 1975 to 400.000 (esteemed) in 1998 (before the war) (reported in Scantamburlo 1999: 16).

Not only the village mode of production but also its cultural and social elements were stigmatised as backward. Modernisation was assumed to be an unstoppable bulldozer that would inevitably crush the last vestiges of tradition[91]. As Galli and Jones have brilliantly demonstrated, though (1987. See also Galli 1989), and as the economic history of the region reveals, the dichotomy between progressive urban dwellers and backward rural people is false, resting on the adoption of the modernisation political project and of its dualistic paradigm.

Government policies and attitudes paralleled on this issue the analysis put forwards by scholars and international organisations. In the World Bank *Basic Economic Report* of 1982 for example, it is claimed that:

> It is perhaps simplistic but nonetheless useful to think of Guinea-Bissau at present in terms of two societies: a traditional society consisting of 85% of the population forming part of the rural economy, and a modern one comprising the 15% who live in towns (quoted in Galli and Jones 1987: 118).

Several scholars employed this model to explain the lack of development of Guinean agriculture. Lars Rudebeck for example, after underlining political and economical responsibilities for this situation, claims:

> Il est certain que le problème de l'augmentation de la productivité dans l'agriculture traditionnelle de la Guinée-Bissau est loin d'être un simple problème financier. Il s'agit au fond d'un problème social et politique. *Il faut que les gens voient la nécessité de rompre avec des coutumes séculaires*. Comment, par exemple, amener les vieux dans les villages à partager leur pouvoir politique local avec les femmes et les jeunes ? Ou comment harmoniser l'utilisation des surplus agricoles avec les besoins nationaux ? (1982 : 18 ; my emphasis).

Carlos Lopes (1982) sees the causes of the crisis of Guinea-Bissau after independence in the clash between 'ethnic rationality and state rationality'. Lopes uncritically accepted the definition of ethnic group as a 'traditional' homogeneous community bounded to a specific territory (1982: 33), a notion that is evidently a legacy of colonial and European perception of a much more fluid African reality. In his view, the 'traditional' ethnic group had a distinct rationality that could not fit with the

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[91] Ahlberg underlined that in development discourse, African culture is often considered the major

structures and exigencies of the modern state the PAIGC was trying to implant in Guinea-Bissau. Lopes' perspective, while on the one hand revealing the difficulties that the urban-based government had in coping with the rural areas of the country, on the other hand reveals the persistence of the dualistic paradigm in the analysis of Guinean political economy. The vision of rural communities as bounded to traditional and autonomous logics, and therefore incompatible with the 'modern' logic of the state, is clearly another effect of the traditional/modern dualism we are arguing here to be a heavy legacy of colonial gaze and policy.

The modern/traditional duality emerges in all its clarity in an article of the same year by Faustino Imbali (1989). Putting forward an argument similar to Lopes (1982) and analysing critically the political and economic trends of the post-independence years, Imbali argues that the adoption of a urban and industrial idea of development after independence strongly contributed to the bipolarisation of African society according to the rural/urban divide. This is mainly attributed to the peasants' logic being profoundly different and irreducible to the logic of the market economy which the State adopted. Socio-economic life in the rural areas is portrayed as static, fragile, linked to ancestral logic and unfit for modernisation. Expressions like 'in traditional conception' (1989: 68) or 'in the conception of traditional man…' (*Ibidem*) appear in the text, which in an emblematic passage notes the difference between 'us' (urban Guineans? Educated people? City dwellers?) and the peasants (1989: 69). Building on this incompatibility, Imbali expresses his preoccupation for the consequences of the impact of modern development on the peasants' life, an impact that he sees as inevitable:

> Esta invasão brutal da parte do exterior terá como consequência … a transformação das relações sociais e, a longo prazo, a desaparição pura e simples das comunidades tradicionais como tais (1989: 65-66)

Finally, and emblematically, Imbali asserts: '*in order to develop themselves, rural societies have to change deeply*' (1989: 83. My emphasis).

National development ideology leaves little room for local cultures. In fact, one of the main points in the discourse of development, as proposed by international

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barrier to African development (1994: 228).

institutions and accepted by state modernism, is the fact that less developed countries are underdeveloped due to their 'traditional' character (see for e.g. Escobar 1988, Karp 2002). People's attitudes and values are not yet in harmony with modern economic and social life (Ferguson 1994: 58). This brings us back to the discourse of modernity, which lies at the origin of the idea of development, echoing in a sinister way the opposition between civilization and primitiveness. According to this view, the village and 'traditional values and social structure' have been pictured as an obstacle to development, something to be abandoned in order to consent an easy entry into the 'modern' world.

The 'underdevelopment' of the Archipelago

Without any previous experience of the PAIGC and of the war of liberation, without having been mobilised for the nationalist struggle, the inhabitants of the Archipelago perceived independence as a mere passage of power, and the Party simply became the instrument of the leadership (Chabal 1986: 99). Emblematically, the functionaries of the *sector* occupied the colonial buildings in the Praça which hosted Portuguese administrators, giving to the inhabitants a sense of a mere change of the guard of an authority which continued to be perceived as external and foreign[92]. In fact, as Imbali has underlined, the political and administrative structures of the state were and are generally perceived by the people as something external to their universe, something they are often in conflict with (Imbali 1989: 75). Moreover, the high functionaries of the state placed in Bubaque came (and still come today), from other regions of Guinea-Bissau, claiming different ethnic affiliations and 'education'. They are not, as the people of the islands use to say, 'sons of the land of the Bijagó' (*fidju di tchon di Bijugó*). In addition to this, immediately after independence, the PAIGC, suffering from a constant lack of administrative cadres, used to re-integrate the lower functionaries that worked for the colonial administration in its local structures (Rudebeck 1982: 9).

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[92] The Praça still today conserves several examples of colonial architecture, under the distinctive form of whitewashed buildings with a wide veranda. Peter Mark (2002) has rightly drawn attention to the importance of this architectural style, called *à la Portugaise* in the history of the Senegambian region, for the definition of local identities.

Danielle Gallois Duquette, who visited the Archipelago a few years after independence (in 1976 and 1978) gives us some important indications for understanding the impact of the new structures imposed by the PAIGC on the communities of the islands (1983: 24-25). In some aspects, the changes that were imposed were dramatic, and obviously not every village followed the new rules literally. The exploitation of the fields, which depended on individual initiative, started to be considered a collective duty (Gallois Duquette 1983: 25). Other projects concerning the cultivation of rice and tobacco, the creation of a fishing co-operative on the island of Canhabaque, the implementation of palm-tree exploitation and the planting of fruit trees, were also promoted by the new government. The Party was also responsible for the transformation of social and religious activities, and some villages decided to protect some aspects of their culture with secrecy. For example, it was officially forbidden to beat the young men during initiation, because the nurses had to treat them for several weeks afterwards; the initiation ceremony had to coincide with school summer holidays; the interdiction to marry (officially) before the end of the *manras* could not have any legal effect; the dead could not be buried in the house; houses had to have many windows, etc. (Gallois Duquette 1983: 25). In 1978, Gallois Duquette reports, the chief of the *comité de sector* of Bubaque decided to punish the villages that exceeded the allowed duration for the *manras* (two months). Every supplementary day was, according to him, a loss of work and money for the nation, and was therefore taxed (Gallois Duquette 1983: 22). Some situations, underlined Gallois Duquette, were highly ambiguous. For example, in the Praça of Bubaque, the young girls of the villages were forbidden to wear skirts made of vegetable fibre, which were considered unhealthy; but the same girls, when asked to dance in front of the authorities or the tourists, had to wear those same skirts many times a week (1983: 25).

Regarding 'traditional' cultures, the post-independence governments in fact always showed a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, they were important elements to be counterpoised to the Euro-Imperialistic-Colonial culture, as basic factors for the constitution of an African identity, a form of cultural resistance to the process of colonial civilisation. On the other, though, the preservation of 'tradition' was incompatible with the new social model the newborn state was trying to impose on its subjects. Several aspects of the culture and of the social organisation of the rural

communities could not fit with the ideals of equity, education, gender equity and freedom the PAIGC was proclaiming.

With slight differences, we have already observed, the State replaced the colonialists in the project of transforming the communities of the islands, making them fit for progress. As Nederveen Pietersen and Parekh underlined, the opposition between nationalism and nativism is a distinctive feature of postcolonial decolonization agenda, actually 'reproducing the underlying logic of the colonial project and imaginary' (1995: 9).

However, despite the enthusiasm of the first years, as we have already pointed out, the structures of the PAIGC at the local level became gradually detached from the central authority and therefore weaker. The recent history of the Archipelago is similar in this respect to that of many other rural areas of Guinea-Bissau. While the acknowledged centre of economic and political life was Bissau, the rural regions were targeted by short and medium term state managed development projects.

Under Luís Cabral's presidency, several projects were implemented in Bubaque as well. Following the idea that there could not be any development without electric power, electricity was brought to the main villages of the island. Luís Cabral, in what seems a sound metaphor for progress and modernity, remembers proudly that day in Bubaque:

> com a iluminação das *tabancas* principais, foi um encanto ver, na noite da inauguração, os patos e as galinhas sem poderem dormir, pois o escuro que trazia o sono nunca mais chegava (in Induta 2001: 7).

With generous foreign help, some public works were implemented. The Marcelino Banca regional hospital was built between 1975 and 1977. Betting on the possible development of the Archipelago as tourist resort, a hotel was built near the Praça, the Hotel Bijagós (1975). Finally, the President built a villa for his own stays in Bubaque (1977) (Lopes 1988: 333, 336, 338).

In the following years, the development projects carried out in the Bolama/Bijagó region had two main goals: to develop fishing activity and to 'improve' the living conditions of the islanders. As for the first objective, the project created in the Praça the *Pescarte* (*Projecto de Pesca Artesanal*) in 1979, but the investments to implement the 'traditional' fishing activity of the islanders had little success due to several social and

economic factors (Mendes Fernandes 1987; Henry 1989a, 1989b; Silva and Fernandes 1993; Scantamburlo 1994; Gomes 1996).

Christine Henry, a French anthropologist who worked on the island of Canhabaque in the late 1980s (Henry 1994), considers the failure of this fishing co-operative constituted in Bubaque with the help of Swedish NGOs. The co-operative offered, as a loan, boat, engine and fuel to encourage fishing activity among the Bijagó, who had to slowly pay back the debt. Pointing out that the redistribution logic proper of the village, especially for young men who had the moral and ritual obligation to 'pay' the elders, frustrated all attempts of the young fishermen to capitalise their efforts and pay back the co-operative, Henry claims that this situation will not change '*until the young make a real break with their environment of origin*, something that the great majority of them, *tightly linked to traditions*, is not willing to do' (Henry 1989a: 43. My emphasis). Again, 'modern' development is opposed and contrasted with the supposedly traditional socio-cultural traits and mentality of the rural communities of the islands.

To improve the living conditions of the islanders, the state promoted after 1982, among other smaller initiatives, the *Projecto Integrado das Ilhas Bijagós* (Integrated Project of the Bijagó Islands) (Lopes 1988: 354; Gomes 1996: 62), intended basically to facilitate the access of population to health and education; to promote the integration of the population into the social and economic national network; to install a radio VHF system to allow the islands to communicate; to create a maritime transportation system in the zone (Gomes 1996: 62). The project had evidently the main purpose of breaking the isolation of the Archipelago, helping the 'natives' to get in touch with modern amenities. Paulo Gomes however, claimed in 1996 that the results of the project could not be considered satisfactory, lacking adequate managing and a previous study of socio-economic characteristics of the region (*Ibid.*).

Besides state-managed interventions, however, it is important to underline that, since the 1980s, with the progressive liberalisation of the economy and the implementation of the first SAP, the so-called development industry also arrived in the country. In the Archipelago, dozens of Western and, since the 1990s, local NGOs started undertaking projects for the development of the islands[93].

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[93] As Marina Temudo has underlined, 'Em 1982, intervinham na Guiné-Bissau cerca de vinte ONG oriundas principalmente da Europa e dos EUA -, nos sectores da agro-pecuária, educação informal, saúde,

Moreover, the opening to foreign investments attracted to the Archipelago some entrepreneurs who built new tourist structures, mainly in the Praça, but also on other islands. After the 1998 civil war, in fact, most of these actors had left the country due to continuing political instability.

In the Archipelago, however, the presence of the state has always been, and continues to be to our days, limited to the island of Bubaque and mainly to the urban centre of the Praça, with practically no influence on the villages. Even before the 1998/1999 war, the structures of the state were so weak and deteriorating outside the limited extent of the Praça, that, working in the villages, one could easily ignore their presence. This phenomenon, which Joshua Forrest defines as 'localization of rural politics', characterises the entire rural area of the country, but it is even more evident and acute in the Archipelago, both because of its geographical position, which makes communication and transportation towards Bissau difficult, and because, not having participated in the liberation war, the local structures of the Party were already weaker. As Forrest underlines, while the *comités* became increasingly detached from central state power, these structures were 'either marginalized from rural politics or staffed by traditional village leaders who had no link with the government' (Forrest 2002: 245. See also Forrest 2003). The decay of the state became even more evident during the troubled years that followed the 1998/99 war, when the local structures the PAIGC had created after independence were suddenly de-legitimized, while the new administration could not in any way replace this void of authority. After the war, there was no visible representation of public administration anywhere in the countryside (Forrest 2002: 263).

The marginalization of rural areas in the post-independence period and the urban-based developmentist vision of the State contributed to the permanence of colonial representations. The Bijagó continued to be considered as the 'traditional culture' *par excellence*. Building also on the history of resistance to Portuguese pacification, the

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promoção social da mulher e da criança -, número que subiu para cerca de cinquenta em 1985. […] A partir do início dos anos noventa, o efeito conjugado da adopção do programa de ajustamento estrutural e da abertura política ao multipartidarismo criou as condições para o surgimento em "metástase" de ONG nacionais, algumas das quais assumindo-se claramente como opositoras ao regime de partido único […] Grande parte dos dirigentes das ONG guineenses pertencem à sociedade crioula urbana, não se identificando nem social nem culturalmente com a população rural que alegam servir. Nas zonas rurais, são frequentemente apelidados de "cabo-verdianos" em situações de conflito, sendo este um dos piores insultos existentes na população rural, dado o facto da maioria dos cipaios dos chefes de posto, no tempo colonial, ser originário de Cabo Verde' (Temudo 1998 II: 80-81).

communities of the islands were portrayed in the nationalist rhetoric as the 'original' African societies, left largely unspoiled by the contacts with the Europeans. Significantly enough, the already quoted text of Lopes on the contrast between ethnic and state rationality (Lopes 1982), shows on the front cover a drawing of a *n'aro* dancer, one of the most representative aspects of the expressive culture of some of the islands. On the other hand though, from the point of view of the urban-based elite, the people of the islands were still considered as backward primitives, stubbornly sticking to 'tradition'. An underdeveloped region in an underdeveloped country.

During my stays in the Archipelago, I could observe that the attitude of the local representatives of the government working on the islands replicated almost to perfection the colonial gaze upon the people of the islands: mysterious, uncivilised, and backward, they had to be aligned with the rest of the country. These officials, all of them coming from other regions of the country, usually looked down on the villagers, treating them with contempt. Referring to the Bijagó, they usually employed expression like 'they', 'the people here', or 'these people' with an utter detachment from the local reality. It seems that time has not passed since the attitude of the Portuguese: it is impossible not to acknowledge how the image of the primitive has easily crossed the permeable and fictional boundary between the colonial and the 'postcolonial'.

What Dorothy Hodgson wrote about the Maasai, might fit perfectly for Guinea-Bissau and the Bijagó:

> In the wane of colonial period, development became increasingly central to colonial assertions about the legitimacy of the colonial project. With independence, development was appropriated and recast as the legitimate project of the postcolonial nation-state in Tanzania; the African elites who took power embraced the modern narrative with its agenda of progress. For them, Maasai represented all they have tried to leave behind, and persisted as icons of the primitive, the savage, and the past (Hodgson 1999: 133).

Conclusion

Even if the modernisation project largely failed in Guinea-Bissau and we have witnessed in recent years a gradual withdrawal of the state from almost all sectors in the rural regions, the impact of the ideology of development upon the social imagination

has been enormous, and has contributed to the persistence of the trope of the Bijagó as ultimate primitive and backward savage. This is the attributed identity the young Bijagó living in or moving into town have to cope with today.

Despite the evident weakness of the colonial government and of the post-independence state in local administration, both these powers had mighty ideologies that created an image of the rural communities as antithetic to their ideas of social change. The wars of pacification and the 'civilising mission', with its definition of primitiveness, are scars that people in Guinea-Bissau will conserve in their identities for ages. After independence, state modernism and the international development industry continued in this respect the project of colonialism, and today, despite the weak impact of state policies and interventions, 'development' (and 'underdevelopment') has been left as a key construct to interpret local reality, a powerful discourse to build an identity and support personal strategies.

The issue of continuity with colonial representations is particularly important when we address the question of the identity of the young. Identity has been defined as the dynamic product of a dialectical interaction between self-definition and ascribed or imposed definitions (Mark 2002: 2). If, as I have shown, the islanders were and still are labelled as 'backward', 'primitive', recalcitrant to 'civilisation', the young men of Bubaque have to cope somehow with this heavy representational burden, even more so if they want to assert a 'modern' identity. As Dorothy Hodgdson asked, in relation to the young Maasai of Tanzania:

> What it is like to live in a world where a certain configuration of attributes persist for more than a hundred years in defining who you are to other people? (1999: 123)

Contemporary identities in Africa stem from confrontation, inclusion, and appropriation of aspects and categories of colonialism that become part of the individual self. However, modernity and tradition, development and progress are 'more than simple afterimages of colonialism, for the meaning of such terms are invariably reconfigured by the complexities of postcolonial contexts, their semantic field and valences shifting in response to newly emergent differences, hierarchies, and exclusion' (Thomas 2002: 368).

Despite the heavy burden of history on local identities, it is important not to overlook local specificities and individual agency. Colonial legacies and postcolonial ideologies always acquire a specific form: the disjunctures and differences produced by the discourse of modernity always overlap with specific logics and politics. We have to retain the idea that we are not facing a simple process of colonization of consciousness: the young men are not mere puppets directed by ideologies and historical legacies. They are highly conscious social actors, in open and dramatic competition with the elders, criticising the members of the government, creating individual migration strategies – bodies and minds escaping the limitation of national boundaries. It is crucial therefore to underline also how young men strategically *use* the categories I have described at such length, to overcome the marginal and subaltern position in which the village social structure and the national and international economy constrain them.

5. Appropriation and resistance

> Throughout the world indigenous populations have had to reckon with the forces of 'progress' and 'national' unification. The results have been both destructive and inventive. Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive (Clifford 1988: 16)

> For the anthropologist to give others back their selfhood is to contribute modestly to the decolonization of the human subject (Cohen 1994: 192).

Appropriating modernity

Pondering on the bitter and contemptuous descriptions young men gave me of life in the village and of their aspirations to 'development', it could be even too easy at first to regard them as *tristes tropiques*, just another symptom of the advance of a global cultural imperialism that is destroying local orders. However, while acknowledging the historical legacies and the permanence of contemporary national and international discourses of development and modernity, as well as the all too real marginal spaces global economy produces, we should reject the idea of overwhelming hegemonic forces as well as any kind of social and historical determinism, paying rather closer attention to the evidence of local interpretations, individual strategies and personal motivations hidden under the apparently familiar modernist project. While acknowledging the structural violence young men suffered daily on their skin (the endogenous and

exogenous economic, political and cultural forms of domination which draw the geographies of contemporaneity in Africa), effectively limiting their agency, we should also recognise an in-between space, a space of partial self-determination and creative reformulation, revealing the resilience of individuality and a less rigid articulation between structures and subjects.

The goal of my research in this sense is to provide an insight into how young people adopt, interpret, and express the idea of modernity, 'shifting attention from the *content* of social representations to their *use* in historically specific contexts' (Pigg 1996: 164). The importance of my ethnography lies therefore in the ability to highlight how - at the local and individual level - a web of meaning can be reformulated, adapted and used (Mills 1999: 98-99). As Lisa Rofel has underlined:

> For us to counter textualist readings of modernity that inadvertently privileges Western voices requires tracing how subjects absorb representations and what they do with them. Or in de Certeau's (1984) terms, we must pay attention not just to the production of discourses, but to their consumption and to how consumption, unexpectedly and in small ways, subverts the dominant order (1992: 107).

Though I am less optimistic than Lisa Rofel about the actual possibility of subverting dominant orders through creative consumption of discourses, I do agree that local social forces might have expressed and might express themselves *through* the idea of modernity – sometimes even *in spite of it*. Despite the powerful presence of the discourse of modernity and development in the local context of Bubaque, young people's individual agency always emerged clearly during my fieldwork, but not *against* the discourse, rather *through* it. In this sense, their agency must be thought less in terms of 'resistance to' than in terms of 'use of' discourses for individual or class purposes. There is no simple colonization of consciousness, but rather variations, appropriations of values/power for individual motivations. Rather than seeing local appetites for Western things – a distinctive feature of urban 'modern style' - as a form of colonization, I prefer, therefore, to interpret them as creative appropriations – as 'cannibalizations' of the cultural inventory of the West (Piot 1999: 174). In this vein, it is worth recalling the notion of *mimesis* employed by Michael Taussig (1993) in the analysis of the interactions across the colonial divide. According to this interpretation (see also Piot 1999: 174-6), the appropriation of 'modern-European' goods and

symbolic capitals (clothes, narratives, education, Catholicism etc…) is not aiming at becoming like Europeans, but rather to discover and appropriate a form of power.

It would therefore be inappropriate to regard this kind of cultural phenomenon as a colonization of passive subjects, or as a lack of resistance. We should rather, in the tradition that developed into cultural studies and was influenced by figures like Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, adopt a notion of resistance as appropriation, as proposed, for example, by de Certeau (1984) and by recent works on consumption (Miller 1995b: 146-7). In quite the same vein, Wim Van Binsbergen, drawing on Appadurai, claims that we have to 'study the process of the appropriation of globally available objects, images and ideas in local contexts, which more often than not constitutes itself in the very process of such appropriation' (1999: 279. See also in this perspective Van Binsbergen and Van Dijk 2004). What should be stressed, however, in the analysis of our specific case, is that appropriation does not necessarily entail a total shift of meaning operated by 'indigenous' logics, transforming external influences into vernacular and local elements. Cultural material is not only alien, but is recognised by social actors as such, and it is *as such* that it is incorporated and circulates, becoming a form of cultural expression (Van Binsbergen 1999: 280).

The appropriation of the discourse of modernity is not a new phenomenon in any case, and its apparently homogeneous global mask hides a multiplicity of powers, forces, and conflicts. Even if the origin of the value of this social narrative can be ascribed to European expansion, international institutions, post-independence states, strata of local population, and government elites nowadays express their aspirations through the idiom of modernity, appropriating and domesticating the power of the ideological spell, using it as a global currency on the international market. A deeper look at recent history and at the uses of the idea of modernity in many contexts reveals a battlefield where contrasting forces re-draw lines of power according to their specific agenda and interests. If modernity retains a marginalizing and discriminating aspect, it also has an empowering aspect for those who seize its power in local dynamics, as the young men are attempting to do in Bubaque.

The discriminating language of colonialism and modernisation seems here to open up discursive spaces of freedom and autonomy for the young men, giving them a 'voice' and becoming a critical locution inside local dynamics. The reinterpretation of some

elements of the discourse of modernity by certain strata of the population and their use as weapons of social demands against traditional and postcolonial authorities is a phenomenon that has been described also in other contexts (Mills 1997; Kelsky 1999). Louisa Schein (1999), addressing the question of the 'particular location the modernizing project within a transnationally purveyed modernity' in post-Mao China, observes that 'people not only position themselves vis-à-vis modernity through multifarious practices but also struggle to *reposition* themselves, sometimes through deploying the very codes of the modern that have framed them as its others' (1999: 363). Others authors as well have discussed the way in which subalterns may effectively, and for their own benefit, draw on some of the latent oppositional categories and ideologies of Western culture (Nandy 1983; Comaroff 1985). Traits of colonial and modern ideology – originally discriminating whole cultural worlds – can be taken up, reconsidered and reinterpreted by specific social groups pertaining to those very cultural words, and used as anti-authoritarian tools and for individual social promotion.

In a seminal article, Sherry Ortner has pointed out that

> [T]he politics of external domination and the politics within a subordinate group may link up with, as well as repel, one another; the cultures of dominant groups and of subalterns may speak to, even while speaking against, one another; and - as Nandy (1983) so eloquently argues – subordinated selves may retain oppositional authenticity and agency by drawing on aspects of the dominant culture to criticize their *own* world as well as the situation of domination […] Resistance can be more than opposition (1996: 299).

Mary Beth Mills (1997) – writing on migrating Thai women – has rightly drawn attention to the use of dominant categories (like 'modern' and 'traditional') to counter local discrimination (on gender or age basis). Drawing attention to the same phenomenon, Karen Kelsky noted:

> The traditional/modern binary that was once a central mobilizing trope of anthropology, in which modernity is viewed as a 'robust and noxious weed whose spread chokes the delicate life' out of 'authentic' local and traditional meanings, has been revealed as inadequate to explain ways that discourses of the modern may be deployed oppositionally, for example, by those who seek access to modernity's language of rights against an oppressive state (1999: 229)

In a similar way, the idea of modernity has been appropriated in Bubaque by the young as an emerging social force, reworked and used as a discourse of criticism (of the elders as well as of the state). The social changes which have been introduced and imposed under the name of 'development' (school, mission, money and wage labour, mass media…) by various agents (colonial and post-independence state, investors, NGOs, international institutions) have offered to some sectors of village communities – mainly young men, but not only - opportunities to contest (and subvert) power relations and status distribution, not only at the village level, but also at the national one. In this sense, I claim that the dualities of modernity must *also* be considered as a strategic resource in the hands of young men striving to attain new status and positions of power. According to this perspective, young men are not *made* modern by the 'discourse' of modernity: there is no total passivity or utter colonization of consciousness. Rather young men adopt some traits of local modernity because – given their subordinate social position – this is a powerful social strategy, a symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms. Young men's modernist choices (local and specific as they are) are not therefore the direct – and unconscious - outcome of a hegemony: they are, locally, a strategy and a way of competing for power, an alternative chance of life.

It is from this perspective that we should think about the re-emergence of colonial social categories in the former colonies, and the frequent historical rehabilitation of the colonial past. This implies considering the colonial and the postcolonial in terms of continuity, however problematic, rather than rupture and neat separation (Werbner 1996). The colonial heritage is not the mere legacy of a heavy and violent past which local consciousness and politics cannot get rid of despite their efforts. Rather the relationship between the 'colonial' (as ideology, state structure, policies) and the 'postcolonial' is a highly problematic issue of contemporary identity strategies especially for new generations in Africa.

We should however avoid thinking of modernity as a mere tool, as an easily handled and external instrument to achieve status promotion. However strategic, the commitment to modernity of most men was more intense than the superficial attachment of the goffmanian social actor to a 'role' that might bring some advantages. Young men cannot be reduced to simple social actors tending to their interest in a 'rational' way. Modernist categories were also employed to give a meaning to, to make

sense – as well as to give shape and to act in - of a complex, changing and blurred social environment. Modernity was not only a set of options and categories young men adopted strategically to attain power. Rather, modernist categories were also a social and historical narrative young men used to think about socio-economic transformations, transnational relationships, and about themselves and their identity. They were instruments *through* which they could think about their present and their future, reducing – even if always partially and never definitely - the complex, diverse and fluid reality of postcolonial Africa. As Fredrik Barth observed, 'people are not merely playing out a structure, they are *each* a locus of reason and construction, using complex embodied imagery that they are trying to fit to what they perceive and experience' (2000: 33). However, this process of social ordering through the categories of modernity – as I guess any process of social classification - was never complete. The contradictions and fluidity of social life were always emerging, blurring the lines, and making the distinction between modern and non-modern more imprecise and unstable. This imposed a continual reformulation of the local contents of modernity, in order to make the social narrative still useful and valid. The line continually shifted, the boundaries were never clear-cut, the identities formulated in the name of the categories of modernity always potentially unstable and fluid.

The relationship between young men and modernity appears highly problematic: it cannot be easily reduced either to a simple and opportunistic strategic relationship, or to the ideological reproduction of a hegemonic discourse. Modernity has been appropriated both as a tactic and as a map. I will try to explore the features of this relationship in the next section, considering the question of subjectivity and identity in postcolonial contexts.

I am not overlooking with this the fact that the appropriation of dominant discourses is also likely to catch the actors up in new forms of subordination. This aspect of the question – how modern local identities place young men in a new relationship of domination (that of the global economy) - will be considered in the conclusion. What should be stressed is that if, as we claimed, modernity is appropriated as a local strategy (and as such might even work locally, in part), this process cannot in any way subvert or alter the wider power relations; it can't in other terms affect the global 'structural violence' that has determined the very marginality and exclusion of youth in Guinea-

Bissau. And this, as I have already argued in the introduction, is because ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ are not the solution to the structural marginality and to the social problems young men complained about, but rather their ultimate and deeper causes. I have shown elsewhere how even the realisation of the collective dream of migration to Europe – the ultimate self-realisation - did not substantially alter the situation: the spaces of marginality reappear in transnational contexts, in the peripheries of European towns, in the social marginality most African migrants are doomed to live and work (Bordonaro 2003a; Bordonaro and Pussetti 2006).

Resistance

Brian Larkin has recently argued that recent work in African Studies and media studies ‘has been dominated by the focus on local “resistance” to various forms of “dominant culture”’, adopting a ‘reductive binary distinction between oppression and resistance’ and ‘reaffirming cultural imperialism at the same moment as critiquing it. It is as if the periphery could not have an experience independent of its relation to metropolitan centers’ (Larkin 1997: 408). The main trouble I see with the notion of resistance is that there is no *resistance* outside *modernity* itself. The dynamic of resistance/passivity is *internal* to the values of modernity: resistance in the name of what? Tradition? Authenticity? The past? Aren’t these elements poles in the dialectic of modernity itself? Resisting modernity means enacting a nostalgic formula that belongs to the narrative of modernity itself. James Clifford (1988) has written compelling pages against the modernist trope of spoiled authenticity, claiming a different vision of identity and culture, less concerned with notions of tradition than with the creativity and inventiveness of hybrids (see also Meyer and Geschiere 1999: 4). There is no resistance to modernity because there is no resistance *outside* modernity: to claim a prior and auroral identity opposing the homogenising march of modernity is a strategy of cultural identity operating from within the discourse of modernity.

The postcolonial subject is often pictured as displaying plural identities (which seems to be a characteristic of most postcolonial African working subjectivities (see for e.g. Werbner and Ranger 1996, Werbner 2002)), irony, critical awareness, hybridity and ambiguity, individual strategy – with but little concern for questions of authenticity,

opposition, auroral and founding identities to be rescued (Clifford 1988, Bhabha 1994). Both theoretical works and ethnographic data from postcolonial contexts actually tend to yield a vision of the postcolonial space as a hybrid, and of postcolonial subjectivity as an ambiguous, ambivalent and plural phenomenon. On the African self, Achille Mbembe wrote compellingly that:

> Because the time we live in is fundamentally fractured, the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed. Only the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans *stylize* their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made (2002: 272-3).

Homi Bhabha (1994) – a key theorist of postcolonial studies - offered a compelling perspective from which to reflect upon the production of subjectivity in colonial and postcolonial situations. Bhabha interprets postcolonial subjectivity as a never totally complete or definitive phenomenon. Focusing on the processes through which colonial discourses and subjectivities are hybridized, and therefore displaced, transformed, fragmented and altered, Bhabha shifts our attention from colonial and neo-colonial form of domination to the subjectivity of the colonized, on how a discourse can be appropriated and, eventually, contested. Among the many terms Bhabha deals with in his seminal *The Location of Culture* (1994), we find in fact the key term 'hybridity'. Bhabha understands hybridity as a movement at least in two directions: on the one hand, hybridity portrays forms of power imposed on the colonized that are accepted by force or consent; but on the other hand, hybridity reworks colonial identity as it take the shape of a strategy of subversion that looks not at the subaltern but at the forms of power. Bhabha shows how this hybrid space is an ambivalent space, and therefore a place of contestation, because it is difficult to represent and understand: there is a fundamental ambiguity, a division into two, that allows the hybrid subject to move along the lines of two cultures.

Coming back to our context, the local mimesis of 'western' modernity cannot be interpreted as an absence of resistance, an utmost episode in the colonization of consciousness. Rather it is a true and effective form of local agency, the symptom of a marginal power competing for status, *using* the performance of modernity but *fundamentally outside its static ideological characters*. As Sherry Ortner wrote in a

lapidary style: ‘Resistance can be more than opposition’ (1996: 299). If the global institutions (colonial or not) ‘write/wrote’ the discourse of development and modernity, the local and individual *performances* are enacted with individual idiosyncrasies and for individual purposes. There is an ever wider hiatus between the original and the copies, revealing not resistance as opposition[94], but resistance as appropriation and recombination. No peasant, no victims, no tradition to be rescued. No poor savage to be saved. If we formulate identity *outside* the spell of modernity (but using it), there is no need ‘to replay the nostalgia of difference, and to set up a presumed ‘authenticity’ to be held against the corruption of modernity. [This] merely reproduces the power of existing positions: I, the nostalgic observer: you, the native, victim of my modernity’ (Chambers 1994: 12). Deciding if the others are or not resisting to ‘our’ modernity is still writing *from inside*. No escape: no change outside modernity, no agency but resistance as preservation of authentic identities. We have, on the contrary, to understand processes of social change acknowledging that individuals act according to patterns which are little concerned with notions of authenticity and tradition, caring little about the preservation of cultural integrity and identity.

The oppositional dynamic between modernity and tradition, between the pride of authentic identities and their betrayal, is far too simplistic, reductive and – in the end – static. This interpretation still responds to the binary logic of modernism, limiting the movement of individuals from tradition to modernity. Two categories for ‘them’ and ‘us’. Nevertheless, local contexts are better understood and portrayed by avoiding bipolar views with mutually exclusive options (modern *or* tradition; city *or* village; ritual *or* money); we should rather focus on the fluidity and hybrid character of identities and on multiplicities. The masks of modernity young men were wearing (for me, for the elders, for themselves, for the girls, for the missionaries) appear as an inconsistent unity revealing a multiplicity of layers and variations, combined despite contradictions and conflicts and used in different contexts without a standing point to be preserved. What I am foreseeing here is not a simple social structure, based upon dichotomies: in Bubaque modernity could be better interpreted as a set of signifying practices displayed oppositionally to produce a social distinction on a messy terrain.

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[94] See Sherry Ortner (1996) for a brilliant consideration of the problem of resistance in current anthropology.

We need a different paradigm, allowing us to consider modernity as a narrative strategy, an attempt to reduce the complexity of lived experience, rather than a fixed category of identity or an ideology, which can be used to give a cosmopolitan voice to individual or class imagination.

I will now proceed to the analysis of the emotional category *amor* among the young men of Bubaque - an important trait of local modernism – considering, as I proposed, modernity as a set of social practices rather than as a closed and clear-cut hegemonic pattern of identity. These practices – I repeat - rather than symptoms of the serial production of subjectivities by some powerful ideology, reveal how discriminating categories are displayed oppositionally by individuals to solidify efficaciously fluid identities in an unstable and not-ordered social context.

Emotion, discourse and complexity

The anthropology of emotions[95] is mainly linked to ethnographic contexts that are portrayed as 'pure fields' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Most anthropologists working on this issue, underlined William Reddy (1999: 256), use in their ethnographies the ethnographic present and propose generalizations resting implicitly on a conception of cultural contexts as fields of meanings logically articulated in a system and with precise borders. Even when a multiplicity of discourses on emotions is acknowledged (for instance in Abu-Lughod's analysis of emotional performances among the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins (1986)), there is always a higher cultural order orchestrating these discursive collisions. These remarks make us wonder whether the discursive approach to the analysis of emotions (see the seminal Abu-Lughod 1986 and Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990) would still be valid in less pure, or maybe less purified contexts. What happens in fact when we have to cope with fields that are unstable contact zones, where the idea of a coherent cultural order melts away and individuals look for their paths in a labyrinth of contrasting references and indications? In these contexts, the notion of 'discourse'

[95] The anthropology of the emotions is a vast sub field of the discipline (see Lutz and White 1986 for review), inaugurated by the works of Hildred Geertz (1959), Jane Briggs (1970), Michelle Rosaldo (1980). My critical stance however is here directed primarily towards discursive approaches to the study of the emotion (basically Abu-Lughod 1986 and Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990).

seems rather inappropriate[96]. I propose here an alternative vision, which allows individuals to reformulate, re-use and attribute new meanings to cultural categories, claiming the precedence of experience over abstract coherent notions – like 'discourse'.

Reintroducing the individual among the concerns of the anthropology of the emotions does not mean de-socializing the emotions themselves. Rather I propose to reconsider social constructionism, in its more rigid and automatic versions, proposing a less systemic image of social life and a complex, polyphonic and fluid picture of the self. Opening up a new space for the autonomy of the individual I intend to shift attention from discourse (with its implicit authoritarian an hegemonic character; see for instance Sangren 1995) to the performative (Austin 1975) feature of emotional expression. In other terms, from the emotions as discourse to the emotional categories as instruments, as linguistic acts of a special kind, through which individual agency can manifest itself as a social phenomenon beyond them[97]. In this perspective, the discourse about the self and the emotions produced in a context, with its inconsistencies and

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[96] The notion of 'discourse' was proposed by Michael Foucault to account for the relationship between the individual and society. This notion had a huge impact upon social science in general, and - through Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995 [1978]) - upon cultural anthropology and postcolonial studies. In Foucault's terms, *discourse* refers – as it is well known - not simply to a linguistic form, but to all the modalities through which a knowledge is constituted, including social practices, specific forms of subjectivity and the power relationships implied in this very knowledge, as well as their reciprocal connections. The 'order of the discourse' includes not only what is thought and said, but the very rules dictating what *can* be said and what cannot, what can be thought and how, and what cannot. The discourse is not therefore simply a structure or a system, but a practice producing both the objects about which to speak and the subjects speaking in it. Discursive practices therefore make it difficult for individuals to think outside themselves and are instruments of power and control: this does not mean, however, that the discourse – as a field of enunciations – cannot admit contradictions (Foucault 2001 [1976]; 2002 [1984]). Highly influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, where language has a prevailing role upon subjectivity, this theoretical perspective tends to elide the individual as autonomous singularity from the field of study of the social disciplines, strongly limiting the possibility of developing contra-hegemonic instances and antagonistic ideas. Foucauldian approaches have been criticised for the distance they keep from the subtleties and details of social interaction, from the point of view of the individual (Sahlins 1996; Rapport and Overing 2000: 123). The notion of 'discourse' moreover, with its peculiar conception of power, leaves in fact little or no space at all to individual agency: it is so pervasive that there is no room for any individual singularity outside it or for any form of resistance.

[97] Hollan and Wellenkamp, claiming the importance of *person-centred* ethnographies, observed that: 'a focus on particular individuals not only allows one to examine how people *use* public beliefs and symbols to make sense of their everyday experience […] but it also allows one to explore aspects of personal experience that do not neatly conform to public, ideal conceptions' (1994: 7).

contradictions, is no longer imagined as a hegemonic *dispositif* creating 'its' subjects, but rather to a certain extent also as a resource for social actors[98].

The idea that the discourse(s) on emotion is embodied by the individuals (as Lutz and Abu-Lughod [1990] maintain), tends paradoxically to re-biologize the emotions, leading to a kind of sociocultural determinism which portrays individual emotions as homogeneous and automatic. In this way, the emotions (and discourses in general) - protected from the criticisms and reformulations of the conscious subject – become absolute guardians of the reproduction of the hegemonic moral values of socio-cultural systems. However, as Claudia Strauss has observed (1992: 1), it is important, in order to understand why people do what they do, to reject not only psychobiological, but also sociocultural determinism. The idea of the incorporation of discourse 'biologizes' culture, keeping it safe from any intervention of its 'subjects'. This approach, eliding the individual (as body possessed by the discourse) and erasing the distance between ideology and subjectivity, does not do justice to the experiential complexity of individuals, and make it difficult to explain historical transformations of emotions (see Reddy 2001a). Moreover, ascribing emotional construction to autonomous and separate cultural discourses leads to an absolute relativism (Reddy 1997: 329) that does not consent a 'trans-discursive' ethic judgement (on this point and on the question of 'sufferance' see Kleinman, Das, Lock 1997, Farmer 2003).

Following the approach proposed recently by William Reddy (1997, 1999, 2001a), it seems more useful to consider 'emotions' (an 'emic' concept, see *infra*) as the outcome of the interplay and negotiation between individual experience and local linguistic categories. These categories, which do not constitute a coherent system, are an aspect of that social map of the self subjects use to reduce the complexity of what they feel, think, perceive in any instant, circumscribing in the polymorphic, overflowing and contradictory lived experience, the polyphonic flow of experience - Reddy (2001: 103) writes about *multivocal activations* – separate and univocal elements socially expressible and meaningful[99]. This recourse to the model to identify/express portions of

[98] This instrumental and creative approach to the relationship between cultural symbols and the individuals has been developed by symbolic interactionism, for example in the works of James Boon and James Fernandez. See also Cohen 1994.

[99] A similar conception was proposed already in 1963 by Tomkins, even if his notion of 'emotional continuum' and his idea of the capacity of emotions to combine together presupposed the existence of

lived experience never completely reduces the continuous flow to stable separate entities: introspectively, individuals are - at times - aware of the complexity of their lived experience beneath the ordering categories that draw the borders between thought, motivations and emotions. The public expression of *an* emotion then, can also be the outcome of a choice, a strategy. The model does not create the emotional experience, but allows the individual to express in a socially 'correct' manner what he feels, giving instructions to manage a lived experience (creating what Reddy calls an emotional style or regime) which is in itself ambiguous, contradictory and manifold.

Talking about choice, strategy, management might seem inappropriate when investigating emotions[100]. However the interpretation I propose make us reconsider the issue of sincerity and the analytic distinction between conscious thought and automatic emotions. I oppose here the common idea that recognizes an element of authenticity in the emotional experience[101], as behavioural automatism uncontrollable by the subject, sharply distinct from evaluations, cognition and conscious and rational thought. As anthropologists working on emotions have frequently underlined, this dualism pertains to the Cartesian/platonic and Romantic ethnopsychology, and it is not therefore universal: this view moreover has been also criticized by cognitive psychology, whose recent findings confirm the impossibility of separating experimentally emotion and cognition (Reddy 2001a, p. 32; Galati 2002). The concept of 'emotion' itself, moreover, observed Anna Wierzbicka, is not a universal semantic category, but rather an emic product: overlooking its 'ethnic' character implies a reification of 'inherently fluid phenomena which could be conceptualized and categorized in many different ways' (Wierzbicka 1994: 21). In the same vein Unni Wikan, questioning the universal validity of the analytic distinction between thoughts and sentiments, has maintained that this separation does not do justice to 'a *flow of experience* which is neither embedded "in" the heart nor "in" the mind. It flows' (Wikan 1990: 138. Emphasis in the original).

'primary affects', a concept largely contested in the following years (see for e.g. Ortony and Turner 1990; Epstein 1992: 15-16).

[100] Solomon (1980) already suggested that emotions have an aspect of choice. My position here is largely inspired by the notions of *managing* of emotions, proposed by Wikan (1990), the idea of *navigation of feeling* of Reddy (2001a) and of *emotion work* (Hochschild 1979, 1983; Hollan and Wellenkamp 1994: 199, 220).

[101] On the authenticity of emotions and for a critique of this idea, see Despret 2001.

Overcoming the dialectic between language as mere expression and/or repression of a biological and universal content, and discourse as producer of 'reality', this interpretation presupposes aspects and elements of human experience irreducible to the map offered by language. With this, I am not proposing a distinction between a natural and biological flow of experience and a process of socialization by language: the constitution of the self is already a social and relational process (even if always uncompleted). I am simply stating that the fluid and manifold character of experience is not completely reducible to or easily described as a 'discourse'. As Rapport and Overing pointed out:

> Two basis of the anti-Foucauldian argument […] are that discourse is not the same as consciousness: that the form and the content of discursive expression must always be analytically distinguished, and that communication between people is, thus, never simply a matter of an exchange of conventional verbal or behavioural forms. Secondly, socialization within a set of discursive forms of expression and exchange is never 'completed', in the sense of those discourses being learned alike by different people, or those people becoming alike through an unconscious identification with the discourses (2000: 123).

This vision is different from a discourse-centred perspective like that proposed by Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990) where individuals are *produced* as emotional subjects by the local discourse on emotions. Even if I admit the existence of models of the self implying 'emotional regimes' (Reddy 2001a) (that it to say norms and explicit rules – even if not always systemic and coherent), and that this models define, circumscribe what is emotional in the experience of the self and how it has to be expressed, they do not *exhaust* the experience of the individual. Through a series of cultural models, the contexts can offer the individual some instruments to face the hermeneutic of the self necessary to be able to say one is feeling an emotion rather than another, giving useful– but not always efficacious – tools for domesticating the complexity of life. As Vinciane Despret wrote, 'as we construct the myths to invent ourselves through them, in the same way we build our emotion to let them build ourselves' (2001: 20). Cultural contexts provide individuals with models through which they explore and recognise (identify, interpret, say) as sentiments, thoughts or whatever, certain aspects of their experience of themselves-living, which is prior to this linguistic/hermeneutic act and not reducible to it. They supply the individuals with tools to build themselves (but don't build the

individual), but never in a definitive and irrevocable manner, without shutting them up inside the system they propose[102]. The individual is always potentially overflowing, not-systemic, because of his own experience: a self thought this way is considered as perpetually becoming, without being essentialized and blocked in a stable and constant formation. Emotional models then orientate (or force) the individual, providing (or imposing) a simplified map of intrapsychic life (by separating for instance in some contexts thoughts and feelings, love and hate, rage and shame etc.). But this mapping, even though inevitably affecting individual perception of the self (Reddy [2001a: 32] writes about emotional expressions as specific linguistic acts [*emotives*] both *self-exploring* and *self-altering*), does not reduce completely the complexity of individual lived experience, leaving always the individuals with a margin of indeterminacy, of choice, of decision and disorder. With the hard, painful and uncertain task to build themselves as social beings. As William Reddy underlined:

> Thus, there is good reason to attribute extensive power to the conventional emotives authorized in a given community to shape members' sense of identity and self-awareness, members' manner of confronting contingencies and routine. But power to shape is a very different matter from the capacity to create from nothing. The nature of the residuum that is not satisfactorily shaped is an all-important question for understanding what is universally human and for understanding the politics of that shaping power. In any given field one would expect to find a wide range of deviations, resistances, and alternative idioms that point to possibilities for change through crisis, dissolution, or adaptation and that offer grounds for drawing conclusions about who has power and who does not (Reddy 1997: 333).

This approach in fact does not exclude from its field of investigation the power and the authority that is constantly exerted upon the individual. The formulation of the categories of the self and its imposition is already an act of authority (more or less compulsive) and the use of linguistic categories to 'say socially' the emotion significantly alters the experience the subject has of himself. The linguistic models orientate subject's attention[103], attempting – only attempting – a reduction of

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[102]Hollan and Wellenkamp have underlined the importance of considering 'anthropological subjects as actors, actively and creatively engaged in the construction of meaning, rather than as passive recipients of a cultural tradition' (1994: 215).

[103] I intend this term in the meaning attributed to it by cognitive psychology in the description of mental processes, overcoming the old dialectic between conscious and unconscious process (see Erdelyi 1992).

experiential complexity (the thought material which is activated in every instant, see Reddy 1999: 269) without eliminating it or making it possible. The substantial indeterminacy determined by the simplification of the linguistic categories, opens the field to the possibility of historical change, to individual freedom, to the possibility to criticise and reformulate models, to deviancy. The indeterminacy and the freedom of our life derive from the fact that the being-in-the-world of the subject is not reducible to a monophonic discursive linearity, which is on the contrary the main characteristic of the regulating language of power. Confusing one thing with the other, life with biography, plays down in unacceptable manner the tragic dimension of human life.

Starting from these theoretical propositions, I will show here how the 'emotional' category *amor* is chosen, used and manipulated by young men in Bubaque, illustrating its relevance for the construction of a 'modern' identity. *Amor*, proposed by a multiplicity of actors (pop music, Indian movies, catholic mission, urban elite) as a modern emotion and form of morality, far from being a coherent and hegemonic discourse, has the features of a trait of style consciously cultivated and contextually defined. In order to show how an emotion can be practised, chosen, managed – sometimes negated - to describe, contest, built consciously identities, relations and distinctions, I will claim that *amor* among the young of Bubaque is a signifying practice, efficacious in creating a social distinction between the town and the village, developing an emotional geography that materialises, in the space of gender relationship, the conflict between local notions of tradition and modernity.

Amor*, discourse and cultural style*

When I started investigating the topic of *amor* among the young men of Bubaque, I was at first amazed. Everyone gave me his own interpretation – and not always the same -, a different meaning, a different prototypical situation of *amor*. The use contexts of such a term were multiple, and the conclusions appeared discordant. If I read my notes now, I realize that for a long time I had been looking for the discourse. My will for system was looking for the right interpretation to get from these scattered fragments - the essence, the *quid*. Nevertheless, something was not working. However wide the definition, the fragments stubbornly kept their character of fragments. They did not

combine into a sole, clear and definite picture. The 'discourse of love' was escaping me, the system was not emerging, and disorder was still reigning.

A statement and its contrary seemed both to aspire to the legitimating force of *amor*. Domingo might for instance claim that *amor* could not have any economic return, stigmatising the girls that expected money and presents from their partners. But on another occasion Domingo could say that for the moment he did not want any *amor* in his life, nor any interference with his education: *amor* in fact necessarily implied the economic care of the woman, making her presents, and supporting her. The evident misogyny of Delito[104], according to whom women were just vampires attracted to money rather than *amor* (with the necessity for a man to carefully control his sentiments so as not to be exploited by his partner), was at odds with the sweet tones the same Delito used in singing romantic songs and giving voice to his sentiments. Analysing the contexts and the situations where *amor* was evoked, I had to face intractable contradictions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities.

What was evident and univocal, on the contrary, was the role of social distinction *amor* played among young men. Delito, one of my interlocutors, explicitly proposed the idea that *amor* could be interpreted in the first place as a sign underlining differences. 'It is only the people of the Praça – he told me – those who have started to develop, who go to school, that can have *amor* (*tene kil amor*). *Amor* is a thing of the Praça. The boys at the village don't know any *amor*'. Employing the moral geography opposing the city to the village and reproducing the spatial display of colonial ideology of civilisation (analysed in chapter 3), Delito like the other young men, used to identify *amor*, the capacity to feel *amor*, as an element of distinction, of development, in contrast with the rural context. As I have underlined, this dialectic between the town and the village is a crucial element for the young men of the Praça to define of their identity. In this dynamic, *amor* attains a specific relevance, a strong sense of demarcation and of identity: feeling *amor* means participating in a progressive vision of society and history, claiming a cosmopolite identity[105]. On this basis, the young men in the Praça openly criticised the life led by the boys in the village. As for many other aspects of his life, the *karo* was particularly stigmatised for his incapacity to manage his relationships with the

[104] On Delito, see chapter 7.

girls with style and care (see chapter 1), generating a multitude of children without affectively separating intimacy and sexual relations from social and biological reproduction.

The passage the young men made from the village to the city, from a localist to a cosmopolitan style (Ferguson 1999) emerged in the words of the young men as an effort, a tension, a decision, a wary adoption of practices and customs constituting the local modernity. Among these elements, there was *amor*, an emotive/stylistic content offered to the 'modern young man' to define and shape his relationships, in contrast with the *karo*. This idea of choice is powerfully evident in the words of Xarife (already quoted partially in chapter 2 but worth recalling here):

> I was a great *kanhokam* dancer. I used to dance, I danced in the street as far as the village of Bruce, and women followed. However, I have come to see that that life is not a good life. I've realized it is not a good life because I came to the Praça. I saw other people, boys of my age; I saw how they were dressed…sometimes in the village people stay naked in the street. I have come to see that this is bad. I came to the Praça, I saw how the other boys were dressed (*é ta bisti*), and then I went to the village and I realized that it wasn't possible to live like that for a human being. I tried to move to the Praça, I used to sell mangoes at that time. I bought my clothes, I went back to the village, I wore my clothes in front of my friends, and they stared at me in admiration. Then I saw that boys like me went to school in the Praça, and I realized that was very good. I matriculated here in the Praça, selling mangoes to make some money. I put some money together and I enrolled. It was not my father who paid; it was not my mother. They did not help me; I made that effort all by myself. If I had not made that effort, I would still be in that sealed-off life (*vida empatada*) in the village. I have come to see that it isn't possible, I just had to move to the Praça, together with my colleagues. Then I saw my friends in the Praça as they 'fell in love' (*namoraba*), had one girl, and had *amor*. And I understood that it was right. When I passed to the 4th class, I moved here in the Praça, to stay together with my school-mates. In my opinion I think I have to make all the efforts to study and get out (*sai fora*) to free the people from those things. I will free my brothers to make them live in a truly transparent environment.

Various elements contributed to the spread of *amor* among young people and, even without investigating here the origins of this category, it is important to highlight the multiplicity of references: the local notion of *amor* rests on Indian movies, on catholic/Christian doctrine, but mainly on the wide pop-music production in Portuguese

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[105] For similar conclusions, see Daniel Jordan Smith (2000) in Nigeria and Jo Ellen Fair (2004) in Accra, Ghana.

(African artists from lusophone countries) and Spanish (including phenomena of global success like Laura Pausini and Eros Ramazzotti)[106]. However, as for the other traits of local modernity, even if it is possible to locate a set of cultural and mediatic phenomena proposing an interpretation of the relationship between men and women in the terms of *amor*, these elements do not constitute a *discourse* (see *supra*), they don't have a hegemonic and structured influence, and are therefore locally and individually re-elaborated and interpreted.

The interpretation I am proposing here, according with the theoretical points put forward earlier in this chapter, is that among the young men of Bubaque, *amor* is better understood not as an emotional normative discourse (or part of a discourse), but rather as a trait of 'style' defining partially local modernity[107]. Rather than the notion of discourse, it could be more productive to use then the idea of 'cultural style'. This notion, proposed at first by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) – the so-called Birmingham school at the origin of the 'cultural studies' tradition (see for instance Hebdige 1979) – like the similar one of *lifestyle*, has recently been widely employed in the fields of media and gender studies (for instance Butler 1990, Morris 1995) and more generally in the investigations on identity in contemporary societies (Giddens 1991b; Turner 1993; Chaney 1996 and 2001). This conception has been also employed with success by James Ferguson (1999) in an African urban context, namely the mining cities of the Zambia, to describe less rigid forms of cultural identity leaving to the individuals the capacity to creatively produce themselves. Ferguson has used the concept of 'cultural style' to refer to '*practices that signify differences* between social categories' (1999: 95, emphasis in the original), claiming to use the term 'style' 'specifically to emphasize the accomplished, performative nature of such practices' (*Ibid.*). Even though it is true that a style is not the exclusive result of individual choices

[106] Luso-Afro pop artists singing in Portuguese and Kriol have in Bubaque some of their most devoted fans, and love is undoubtedly one of the most important topics of pop-songs. In 2000 Justino Delgado, one of the most loved pop singers in Bubaque, where he was born, published the CD Farol, dedicating it to 'those who have *amor* in their heart'. In most songs love is celebrated as a powerful emotion, usually ambivalent, regulating the relationships between men and women: monogamous, heterosexual relations are generally sung, with particular insistence on situations of dismal, longing, unattainable love, separation, and frustration.

[107] The question of the supposed universality of romantic love has drawn the attention of many scholars and anthropologists. For an exhaustive review and bibliography, see Jankowiak 1995 and Smith 2001.

and that people are also in part limited by economical and social conditioning, Ferguson maintains that a style 'is clearly at least in part an activity, a motivated process of self-making': it is in this sense that we might employ the idea of 'cultivation of style' (1999: 101)[108]. It is in this 'cultivation' that a style becomes personal and individual[109], an active and conscious process of *auto-poiesis* [110].

In this vein, I think *amor* might adequately be understood in Bubaque as a trait of a cosmopolitan style young men cultivate as a practice signifying differences. Defining an emotion as a consciously cultivated trait of style might seem at odds with a European tradition associating emotion and authenticity (see *supra*). However, as I have already underlined, several works have been concerned with the question of the manipulation and transformation of emotional contents, of the individual effort to shape one's own emotions (Hochschild 1979, 1983; Solomon 1980; Wikan 1990; Hollan and Wellenkamp 1994; Reddy 2001a). Being modern and cosmopolitan is in the end an effort, a tension towards a model, the constant and conscious adoption of signifying practices. Clothes, language, school, attending church, the disco, music and *amor*. *Amor* is therefore an element of distinction, whose presence or absence supports the dichotomies locally produced under the name of 'modernity'.

This does not imply that *amor* is a field of meanings that can be easily circumscribed or univocally defined, either by social actor or by the anthropologist. In accordance with the vision of modernity proposed earlier, we should not consider *amor* as a model of emotional behaviour that influences gender relationships and identities in a univocal and causal way. Rather we might see *amor* as a plastic moral/emotional trait of style, though endowed with great cultural strength, which is *used* by individuals[111]. As in the case of modernity, if we consider *amor* as a practice signifying difference, the question we have

[108] The notion of 'cultural style' will be considered again at length in chapter 7.

[109] The pre-eminence of the individual does not exclude obviously the relevance of group identities, even if somewhat looser and more flexible and self-conscious (see Turner 1993).

[110] The use I propose here of this notion, does not refer to the autopoietic theory of Maturana and Varela (1980) concerning the organization of the living systems. *Auto-poiesis* rather might be linked to the notion of *antropo-poiesi*s elaborated by Francesco Remotti (1996, 2000), proposing however to shift the focus from the processes through which societies build the individuals, to the means by which individuals build themselves in society. In a similar meaning, the term has been employed by Félix Guattari (1992: 16).

[111] While interpreting *amor* as a trait of style, consciously adopted and cultivated by young men in the urban context, I am not ignoring either the socio-economic context in which individuals make their

to answer is not that of its precise origin and definition: rather we should investigate the local modalities through which this force is appropriated by different social actors legitimating their actions and choices. In the Praça, in fact, *amor*, what it is, how it manifests itself, how it must be managed, is the topic of continuous debates, mockeries, anecdotes that do not make up a coherent *corpus*, a 'local discourse', but preserve their feature of fragments, reflecting the contradictions deriving from the complexities of daily life and from incoherent moralities and instructions. *Amor* is a field of discussion, an arena, a locus of conflict. Debating about what *amor* is, who really feels it and who does not, whether it has to be controlled or not etc., means negotiating the reciprocal positions of men and women in the urban context, reaffirming the distinction from the world of the village, claiming once more to be modern and cosmopolitan.

The multiplicity of meanings attributed to *amor* and the variety of different contexts where it is used, show that the 'elements of cultural style mean different things as they are *used* to mean different things by skilled performers' (Ferguson 1999: 105). The use of this term in the denomination of emotional experiences or in the evaluation of gender relationships could well be claimed to be strategic and political. Several social actors claimed *amor* for themselves and denied it to others, creating a social distinction of value with a moral basis in the complex and conflicting relation between genders and between the urban context and the villages[112]. *Amor* in this sense, does not produce a norm. Quite the opposite, it is the linguistic/moral dimension in which a community fragments itself, through which lines of tension emerge, an arena where the debate between different sectors of society can come into view, revealing how 'modern' elements can be appropriated, deterritorialized and reterritorialized, and used in local dynamics.

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choices in often difficult situations, or the issue of the origin of the stylistic forms which are adopted, yielding and unreal visions of free floating symbolic forms (Larkin 2002: 741).

[112] For a similar case in Nigeria, Smith 2000 and in Ghana, Fair 2004.

6. Education and modernity

Gudrun Dahl has observed that 'in "modern" society the two most important ways to link oneself with progressive change are by signs of education and by acquiring "modern" consumer goods (however these are locally defined at any moment)' (1999: 20). This latter symbolic access to 'modernity' will be examined in the next chapter. Here I will rather consider education, further illustrating how modernist traits are locally appropriated, interpreted and used as signifying and distinctive practices for identitarian strategies (Werbner 1996). The school, I will claim, far from being an ideological institution responsible for the spread of 'modernity' among the 'traditional' villagers of the islands, is appropriated both as a social strategy to attain a form of prestige and as a symbolic tool for the formulation of a modern and urban identity.

Education in Guinea-Bissau

Late colonial policies

Actually, education was always one of the least concerns of the colonial Portuguese government. In the whole *provincia* of Guiné – a colony of little interest for Portugal - there were at the end of the XIX century only three primary schools, and only one regularly working in Cacheu (Marques Geraldes 1887: 514). The first secondary school was only created in 1949[113]. Moreover, only the children of the Portuguese and of the *civilizados* could gain access to state schooling. The *não-civilizados* had to attend missionary schools, which had a monopoly over indigenous education - except during

[113] On colonial education, see also Ferreira 1974, Trajano Filho 2004: 43-45.

the first Republic in Portugal (1910-1926)[114]. In 1958, 98.85 percent of the population of Guiné was illiterate[115].

Nevertheless, despite this general lack of interest of colonial administration in developing the educational sector, schooling was considered one of the primary means by which the so-called *indígena* could achieve *civilizado* status. Both state and missionary schools proclaimed a racist and colonial ideology, with the aim of christianising and civilising the *indígenas*. Notably, the *Estatuto Missionário* (April 1941), that delegated the education of the natives to the missions, declared that programs had to adhere to the orientations of the Political Constitution and to aim at the

> perfeita nacionalização e moralização dos indígenas e a aquisição de hábitos e aptidões de trabalho, de harmonia com os sexos, condições e conveniências das economias regionais.

In this vein, cardinal D. Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, declared in 1960: 'Of course schools are necessary, as long as the natives are taught the greatness of the Nation that protects them'[116].

Late colonial education policies reveal the ambivalence of the ideology of civilisation: while on the one hand promoting assimilation to transform uncivilised Africans into Portuguese citizens, it reasserted the essential and insurmountable diversity between the races. As Rui Gomes has rightly observed, referring to colonial education during the *Estado Novo*:

> Definindo uma relação de poder, de violência simbólica, o estado de 'indígena' ou de 'tribalizado', como estádio inferior da humanidade, deve encontrar no espaço da escola uma vontade de civilização e paixões constantes e ortodoxas. Uma ortopedia onde se estabeleça o poder de aculturação e de adestramento. Projecto duplamente virado para o interior: é-o espacialmente, é-o também no ataque à moral desajustada dos 'não-civilizados'. Do mesmo lance, projecto ambivalente: o discurso que salva é o mesmo que condena; o gesto que cura confunde-se com o que pune (1996: 161).

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[114] See Ferreira 1974: 70 and following and chapter 3 note 62. Even catholic missions however did not improve much the situation: according to the 1950 census, only 1.979 African pupils were attending missionary school (Chabal 1983: 22).

[115] In Ferreira 1974: 79.

[116] Quoted in Valverde 1997. On the catholic missions in Guiné and in the Portuguese Empire, see Valverde 1997, Schouten 2001, Guerra 1994: 345-346

Colonial policies however showed until the 60s a lack of interest in creating a functioning educational system. It was only with the beginning of the anti-colonial wars that the Portuguese administration began to implement the system, promoting in 1963 a reform of primary education in the 'ultramarine provinces' (Ferreira 1974: 83) that extended state education also to the rural areas. However, the introduction of 'adapted programs' suited to the racial deficiencies of Africans pupils revealed once again the ambiguities of these policies that promoted assimilation, while at the same time stating the irreducible otherness of the Africans (Gomes 1996: 154; Ferreira 1974: 87). This reform erased the distinction between state primary education and the missionary one, bringing the entire elementary education under the control of the state (Ferreira 1974: 158). Secondary and technical schools were also created (Ferreira 1974: 89). As Ferreira underlined, however, the reforms of the Sixties did not alter the fact that the main goal of the new policy continued to be that of inculcating Portuguese values and of developing in the pupils a conscious identification with Portugal, in order to strengthen national unity (1974: 99). Despite the implementation of the last years however, the education system in the colonies continued largely deficient, with a wide percentage of rural population excluded from the new emphasis on education. Moreover, the introduction of the school had in many cases to face a strong resistance due to its dubious utility and its evident interference with the local social organisations and with the seasonal activities of the communities.

According to Pinto Rema (1982: 634), the first school among the Bijagó was a missionary school, inaugurated in the village of Inorei (Canhabaque) on the 12th of August 1945, a few years after the end of the 'pacification' of the island. Father Arturo Biasutti of the PIME, who was the first resident missionary in Bubaque (since 1955), gave in his 1955 report a description of the situation in the Archipelago and of the difficulties of missionary activity. Biasutti pointed out the difficulty with transportation and communication between the islands and the absence of any previous contact with the Portuguese and with Christian civilisation as the major obstacles to his activity. Besides these elements, he stigmatised the 'fetishist morality, leading easily to suicide, to homicide, to sexual freedom' (quoted in Pinto Rema 1982: 654). 'Even if extremely poor, Biasutti continued, they always find something to get drunk with and a good reason not to work' (*ibid.*). Interestingly enough, Biasutti proposed, in order to

overcome these obstacles, the opening of several schools, at least one in every island, even if, he alerted, it will not be easy to attract pupils to the schools or to convince their parents to let them enrol.

The mission of Bubaque had, in addition to the headquarters in Bubaque (the 'Imaculada Conceição'), two other churches: S. Pedro de Eticoga, in the village of Eticoga, Orango Grande, and Beata Mafalda de Abu, in the village of Abu, island of Formosa. In the first months of the academic year 1954/55, three schools were created: one in Bubaque, settled in a little room provided to the Mission by the Administration, that was also the temporary seat of the Mission whose buildings were built only in 1957; one in Eticoga, island of Orango Grande, in a hut, provided by the *Administrador*; the third opened at the end of December in Abu, island of Formosa, in a poor house, without windows, also the property of the Administration (Pinto Rema 1982: 654).

The three missionary schools of the region had but few pupils: a total of 67 in 1953/54, and 103 in 1954/55 (Pinto Rema 1982: 561); they never increased much in the following years. The buildings of the missionary school of Imaculada Conceição de Bubaque were built in 1966 with financial contributions from the Gulbenkian Foundation and from the Government: it had three classrooms, two verandas and toilets. Before this date lessons were given in the open air or in a small room lent by the local administration. The school of Bijante (created in 1955/56) always had a difficult existence, and it was closed in the 70s. In the school year 1962/3 for example, the school had to close because all the pupils moved with their parents to the island of Rubane, to take care of their rice fields.

Independence and after: the breakdown

With these antecedents, the importance of education was even more stressed in post-independence nationalist rhetoric[117]. According to Amílcar Cabral, literacy was one of the first goals to achieve after liberation. It is impossible to overestimate the hope in education and the investment in this sector during the war (in the liberated zones of the south) and in the first years after independence (see for e.g. Darcy de Oliveira and

[117] For an analysis of the importance of literacy in the nationalist modernist discourse in West Africa, see also Rathbone 2002.

Darcy de Oliveira 1978). Schools were created in the villages and in towns, while great efforts were made by the members of the *comités* to persuade people of the importance of sending their children to school (Andreini and Lambert 1978: 42). During the anti-colonial war, education was presented as the moving force of development. According to Andreini and Lambert (1978: 133), 'the analysis of the economic, social, and cultural situation of the populations showed that development implied the fight against some traditional beliefs, and that education was a fundamental element to overturn these values' (1978: 134). Statistics about education promoted by the PAIGC in the liberated zones were proudly exhibited as evidence of the interest of the Party in improving the life of the population. Between 1964 and 1973, the PAIGC created 164 primary schools in the liberated zones with an enrolment of 14.531 students (Galli and Jones 1987: 162). Education was also considered an important element in the process of 'decolonisation of consciousness' and in the formation of the new cadres of the PAIGC[118].

During the anti-colonial war, one of the members of the *Comité di Tabanka* was responsible for education (as well as for health and social affairs in general). In an interview reported by Andreini and Lambert (1978: 40)[119], one of these officers described her duties as follows:

> I am responsible for the school and health. The Portuguese never built any school before. It is only now that they have started, because they are losing the war. In the beginning parents did not send their children to school. We have to convince them. It is not always easy, but I explain to the parents that they have to send their children to school because it is important for their country.

However, nobody sent his children to school gladly (see also Chabal 1983: 115).

After independence, the PAIGC chose – as I have shown - to work within the framework of the colonial system, using the existing schools and incorporating the teachers from the old system. The more patent colonial elements were eliminated from the syllabus; PAIGC texts developed during the armed struggle were employed while all textbooks were completely revised (Galli and Jones 1987: 163). The basic education system in 1977 consisted in four years of EBE (Elementary Basic Education) plus two years of EBC (Complementary Basic Education). The demand for primary education

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[118] See for e.g. the textbook of history of Guinea-Bissau edited in 1974 by the PAIGC (PAIGC 1974).

increased in the first year of independence up to 20.000 pupils, rising to 85.000 in the second year. However, by the 1980s, enrolments had fallen to around 65.000 at the primary level, and the literacy rate was falling. Concomitant with the falling-off of enrolment at the primary level and with very high dropout rate (only 20% finished the fourth year), the demand for secondary education increased. There has been a growing demand for secondary education in Guinea since independence, from 4.612 in 1977/78 to 13.783 in 1983/84. By 1980, there were six *liceus* in Guinea-Bissau, but only the one in Bissau offered the tenth and eleventh years[120].

In fact there is evidence of a general crisis in the educational system since the 1980s due to a multiplicity of factors (see Guterres *et alii*, 1986: 22-23; Scantamburlo 2003). The school system was becoming more elitist each year, with a general decline in quality (Galli and Jones 1987: 164; Guterres *et alii* 1986: 21). One explanation of this phenomenon, proposed by Galli and Jones (1987: 164), is that the education system still had great similarities with the colonial one, with the six years of basic education for the majority of people, and the *liceu*, modelled after the Portuguese one and staffed by many Portuguese teachers, as secondary education. Few institutions offered technical education, and, basically, the school failed to relate to the realities of rural areas. Another important discouraging element was the language of instruction, Portuguese, that was for all rural and for most urban children a foreign language, and with whom many teachers had difficulties (see Scantamburlo 2003). The first years of EBE were therefore devoted to learning Portuguese (Galli and Jones 1987: 169).

As Galli and Jones underlined:

> Parents perceived that what was being taught was highly abstract and in a language with which few rural people were familiar and which was little understood by their children. The parents themselves felt threatened by their children's participation in an unknown ad incomprehensible world. Their hostility and anxiety were increased if their children came home unwilling to share work on the farm, considering themselves superior to such menial labour, scorning the wisdom and authority of their elders and yet unable to offer any knowledge which could help improve life at home or on the farm. To make matters even worse, schooling often conflicted with the families' need for labour in the field (1987: 169).

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[119] These interviews were recorded by Lars Rudebeck in 1970 and published in 1974.

A general and unstoppable decline in the quality of education took place as well, largely due to the lack of preparation of teachers and professors (Guterres *et alii* 1986: 22). The failure of the educational system was also linked to the implementation of the SAP that, as we have seen (chapter 4), imposed drastic cuts on social expenditure[121]. Most good teachers, due to continual lowering of their salary and insolvency of the state, without any means and lacking motivation, gave up their profession, looking for a more profitable job. Many schools, mainly in rural and peripheral regions like the Archipelago, were shut down. In Bissau, teachers held month-long strikes to obtain the payment of their salary, making any curricular continuity impossible for the students. According to 1991 data, the illiteracy rate is about 70 per cent, and more than 80 per cent for women. The enrolment rate in primary school is about 40 per cent and decreasing. The schooling rate from grade 4 remains low, about 12.1 per cent, and the enrolment rate decreases as the grade increases. Secondary-level enrolment is about 4.2 per cent of the age group, and 3 per cent are girls. Only 2 per cent of children attending secondary school are able to complete this level. In 1997 (according to UNESCO *2000 World Report on Education*), the illiteracy rate was basically the same: 64,5 (83,4 of women). According to the *2005 World Development Indicators* of the World Bank, the primary education completion rate is 28%, while the literacy rate is unknown[122].

Importance of education, difficulties, and contrast with the elders

As we have already seen, school had a crucial importance for the young men of the Praça. Education was, according to them, *the* path to personal and regional development. In this vein, Domingo (see chapter 2) told me:

> if we cling to culture we cannot cling to school. We have to focus our attention on school. Like this, we get a chance for our future

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[120] On the failures of the education system in Guinea-Bissau see also Guterres *at alii* 1986, Monteiro and da Silva 1993, Monteiro and Martins 1996, Scantamburlo 2003

[121] See Adepoju 1993 for an analysis of structural adjustment on population in Africa.

[122] The crisis of education is not limited obviously to the context of Guinea-Bissau, being actually spread throughout all sub-Saharan Africa (see, among others, Belloncle 1984, Mbembe 1985, Tedga 1988, Kasongo-Ngoy 1989, Marah 1989, Lange 1998).

> […]
>
> Only education might change our situation. Only the school. A young man sits at his desk, goes to school, gets some lessons. He tries to develop his mentality. But he does not develop thanks to culture!
>
> […]
>
> There is no other solution, we have to study in order to change Guinea-Bissau.

The lack of education was, according to the young men, the main reason underlying the underdevelopment of the islands, while the school was opposed to the 'things of culture', as two contrasting choices. 'Here we are held back just because here there are villages, there are things, we are held back because people at that time refused to go to school. That's why things are held back. People refused to go to school and followed the things of culture', lamented Xarife. In just the same tone, it is worth recalling the opinion of Beto, according to whom Bubaque and Guinea-Bissau had a delay of centuries in comparison with Europe, because people did not go to school.

The school was considered at odds with the 'things of culture', with tradition and with the world of the village. *Kultura* and the school were therefore impossible to conciliate: as *kultura* kept young people and the Archipelago in a situation of backwardness (*atraso*), the school allowed personal and regional development (*desenvolvimento*). In our conversation young men seemed to trust blindly in the power of education to enhance their standard of living, allowing them to find a job and to earn money, maybe in Europe.

This trust was not, however, without critical awareness. Young men were aware of the inefficiency of the educational system, and of the disastrous conditions of the state. Donald O'Brien observed, referring to the general situation of students in the African postcolonial context:

> Educational provision responds to a real popular demand […] But besides being of low quality, mass education creates problems for the future, as the partially educated young people have new expectations in terms of jobs, of income, of lifestyle. […] So what happens to all these partially educated young people, an increasing proportion of them in towns? Very few of them can hope to find employment in the 'modern' sector (1996: 58-59).

Young men in Bubaque were conscious of this situation. Pragmatically, education was in fact considered a basic step to individual development not because it might

provide a job in Guinea-Bissau, but because – besides the evident symbolic value it had in the urban context (see *infra*) - it could become – in the long run - one of the only viable ways to get out (*sai fora*), to emigrate, to go abroad. If they all agreed that education was a means to that 'development of mentality' they all were aspiring to, it was also a – and probably in their position the only one – strategy to get out, to migrate (which was their ultimate and easily confessed goal. See chapter 8).

For most young men, the issue of education was the occasion to mope about the condition of underdevelopment of the Archipelago and about the lack of opportunities, also explicitly criticising the state. The deficiencies of education were lucidly acknowledged. 'Professors accepting to work in Bubaque are the worst of the country: most did not finish the *liceu* themselves and are not trained to teach!' claimed Chico, a 23 years old 7th grader. 'At the *liceu* in Bubaque some students speak in Kriol, others even in Bijagó! They cannot speak Portuguese correctly!' When they moved to Bissau, the students of Bubaque had difficulty in keeping the pace, and even more so when they went to Portugal to complete their secondary education, Chico claimed. 'Moreover, he continued, not only does the government delay the payment of the teachers, but it does not increase the salary of those accepting to work in Bubaque, as an incentive and compensation for the isolation and the separation from the family and the capital city'. Beside the situation of the teachers however, the *liceu* of Bubaque in 2002 did not have a place of its own, and students attended their classes in the buildings of a former private *liceu* (shut down by then) and in the classrooms of the elementary school.

Agostinho, a boy of the Praça we already met in chapter 2, was attending the 8th grade and in the following year he should have enrolled in the 9th, which was the highest grade at the *liceu* of Bubaque. This was for Agostinho, as for many other students, a cause of great distress, as in order to continue their formation and complete their secondary education pupils had to move to Bissau, the capital city, where lodging was far more difficult and expensive, family support often lacking, and living conditions precarious. 'Bissau is very expensive – confirmed Beto - If you don't have your family to support you, if you don't have a job, the situation is very difficult, and you are stuck. Many young men go there and cannot finish the *liceu* due to the difficulties. If you don't have money, to pay the rent, to eat…many go and come back. They go back to the village and work in the fields'.

Agostinho's decision to study was taken in open conflict with his family, and he could not therefore expect any help from that side. Without any support from their community, stressed Agostinho, students from Canhabaque or other islands had to face the situation with their own resources, hunting, or gathering fruit and palm fruit and selling them in the market, as he himself was doing. Annual fees for the *liceu* were 9250 CFA francs in 2002[123]. To this, we should add school material (notebooks, pencils etc…). However, what made students' life most difficult was supporting themselves in the Praça: basically, food, clothing, and rent. Most tried to earn a living with informal commerce (like Agostinho). A few others worked in a local cooperative of carvers and sculptors that sold artefacts in Bissau or to the few tourists. Nevertheless, their situation was hardly bearable, maintained Agostinho: 'I have to study in the weekend, trying to keep pace with the other students, because during the week I really don't have time. This wears me out (*ami n'na cansa mal*)'. The lack of support was a cause of distress for most young Bijagó men living in the Praça. Xarife, for example, declared: 'I matriculated here in the Praça, selling mangoes to make some money. I put some money together and I enrolled. It was not my father who paid; it was not my mother. They did not help me; I made that effort all by myself. If I had not made that effort, I would still be in that sealed-off life in the village'.

Agostinho's dream, similarly to many other young men in the Praça, was that of finishing his *liceu*, and then enrolling at university, studying medicine. Obviously 'outside' (*fora*). Because the desire to educate themselves was not easy to separate from the will to migrate, to *sai fora*, to get out. Xarifo admitted as well that, after the *liceu*: 'if I have the opportunity to get out, I'd like go abroad to study law, to free the people'. Domingo maintained that education, but especially education *abroad*, was the 'only solution to overcome the underdevelopment of the islands'. The ultimate goal of young men's strategies seemed always to be emigration (this topic, so important, will be considered at length in chapter 8).

Let us consider now the educational system in the Archipelago and in Bubaque. This was the distribution of schools in the Archipelago in 2002:

[123] 1 kg of rice was between 270 and 300 CFA.

<table>
<tr><th>Regions</th><th>EBE (1-4)</th><th>EBC (5-6)</th><th>Liceu (7-9)</th><th>Liceu (10-11)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Bubaque</td><td>13</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td rowspan="3">In Bissau only</td></tr>
<tr><td>Uno</td><td>10</td><td>1</td><td>-</td></tr>
<tr><td>Caravela</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr>
</table>

Pupils’ distribution per region for the EB (EBE + EBC)

Sectors	Bubaque	Uno	Caravela	Total
Male	1463	819	102	2393
Female	883	653	77	1613
Total	2346	1472	179	4006

On the island of Bubaque there were, in 2002, 4 EBE (one in the Praça, the *Solidaridade Unificada*, and the others in the villages of Bruce, Etimbato and Bijante), one EBC and one *Liceu*, both in the Praça. The EBC had about 400 pupils, while the *liceu* had 337. The two final years of *liceu* had necessarily to be attended in Bissau. Both for the EBC and for the *liceu*, students had to study by shifts, and at times there were up to three shifts a day. In 2002, there were in addition three private schools. Two of them are ‘legal’ (*Passo Passo*, EBE; Dom José Camnate, EBE + EBC); one is illegal, run by the Adventist mission. Up to 2001, there was also a private *liceu* that eventually shut down.

In February 2002, I had a long conversation with the school inspector of the Bolama/Bijagós region, Manuel António Insumbo, which lucidly highlighted the deficiencies of the educational system and the reasons for local resistance to schooling. Manuel was not a Bijagó, and had held his position since he finished his training in Bissau (where he was born) in 1993. He accepted this work as a necessary sacrifice for his country, fully aware of the disadvantaged conditions he was going to work in. ‘The

Archipelago, he stressed, is not a good place for state officers: who feel isolated due to the utmost lack of rapid and efficient transportation towards the continent. Here it is like being inside a closed vase. In Bissau, by contrast, you have more opportunities to advance in your career, to continue your formation, to learn foreign languages, and how to use a computer'.

According to Manuel, the lack of motivation and professionalism of the teachers was the main reason why several schools had closed down in the last years. In addition to the general problems of education in Guinea-Bissau in fact, we have to add the fact that the Archipelago is a marginal region, far from Bissau and where living conditions are difficult at times and isolation hard to bear: the islands are not, consequently, a preferred destination for teachers.

However, the fault was of the State as well, which was unable to create adequate working conditions for its employees. A teacher, for example, was in a disadvantaged economic situation, his salary being between 15.000 and 23.000 CFA per month[124]. Moreover, many teachers were not paid for months on end, due to the economic difficulties of the state. It was difficult for a teacher, maintained Manuel, with such a low income, to persuade people that school is a path towards development and wealth, when it was difficult for he himself to survive with dignity.

In previous years, several schools had been closed down due to the lack of teachers. Four in the region of Bubaque (one on the island of Meneque in 1999, and three on the island of Bubaque in 1998); two in Uno region, on the island of Uracane in 1996; nine in the Caravela region, since 1996. The lack of teachers willing to work in the Archipelago had become so worrying that the Government declared that any person who had completed the *Ensino Basico* could be a school teacher. This move should have encouraged people with a low level of education to go back to their villages, to work as teachers in their own birthplaces. The quality of teaching was obviously extremely low, complained Manuel, as teachers did not have any pedagogical training. Moreover, the school remained under the traditional authority and social organisation of the village, as the teachers belonged to the same ritual logic they should – according to Manuel - eradicate.

[124] 1 kg of rice was between 270 and 300 CFA.

Nevertheless, this was not the only problem. The buildings, the chairs and the desks were damaged or lacking and many had to attend their class standing. The teachers, Manuel claimed, were not professionally trained, and they went to Bissau whenever they wanted to. The syllabuses were old and detached from the daily reality of the pupils, making it hard for them to complete their education: every year, said Manuel, more than a half failed, and after several failures, many dropped out. During Portuguese rule, he declared, the school was far better.

According to Manuel and other teachers I talked to, the main reason for dropping out of school was the incompatibility between the school calendar and the seasonal productive activities of the island communities, mainly rice cultivation, which is carried out in fields far from the village, at times on other islands. The children obviously follow the adults, missing several months of school: when they come back, they fail or drop out. Another obstacle were, according to Manuel's analysis, the 'traditional ceremonies' – both male and female. 'Usually, when young people enter into the ritual logic, they drop out'.

Manuel agreed that school could give people a better life. 'It provides – he said – wider knowledge that allows you to find a good job and get some money, not only to eat, but to invest into the world and to do things. If you do not go to school – he went on – you keep living in darkness, because the school is like the light that makes you tell good from evil'. At times, however – admitted Manuel –school could have negative outcomes. Many young people had great expectations and risked being let down. Some parents paid schooling for their children during several years, and in the end they could not find a job. The state in fact, Manuel lucidly confirmed, cannot absorb these new 'intellectuals', while obtaining a scholarship was very difficult. Consequently, parents often refused to pay schooling for their other children.

According to Manuel, and in line with the state modernist ideology, the school was in total contrast with 'Bijagó traditional culture', as education creates a mentality at odds with traditional customs and values. Manuel (who proudly declared that he belonged to the Protestant confession) asserted that the abandonment of traditional customs - which he defined 'nefarious practices' – was a result of 'maturation', of the 'capacity to see the truth'. This obviously determined a contrast with the elders who worried they might be abandoned and tried to withstand young people's desire to go to

school. ‘For examples, Manuel continued, the teacher is worried because a boy did not go to school and goes to talk with his parents. The father pretends to be astonished and angry: “How is it he did not go to school! Tomorrow I’ll send him!” But in the morning they send him to work in the forest’.

School was one of the main issues elders and young people argued about. The choice to attend school actually subverted rural social organisation and encouraged young men to abandon the ritual cycle *n’ubir kusina*. Martina, the headmistress of the private catholic EBE Dom José Camnate, a friend of mine from my first stays in Bubaque, generally confirmed this view. She gave the example of her mother, living in Formosa. Several times Martina asked her to send her two children to school in Bubaque, but she always stubbornly refused: ‘Who will crop rice for me? Who will collect *tcheben*? The others at the village will not help me if I send my sons to be white (*pa sedu branco*)’.

School was generally considered, both by the young men and by the elders, as a big step towards the ‘white’ urban world. In fact state school was considered in opposition to, and therefore impossible to conciliate with, the initiation ceremony and with the entire ritual economy of *n’ubir kusina*. As I underlined, in their modernist rhetoric, the boys opposed the *manras* (useless, old, traditional) to the school (useful, modern, up-to-date), the *skola di mato* – the ‘school of the bush’ (as is familiarly defined in Kriol the *manras*) - to *bai sedu branco* – ‘go become white’. The *manras* was the symbol of adherence to tradition, just as the school was the symbol of modernity. As young men considered *kultura* and the school as mutually exclusive choices (both practically and ideologically), education was generally conceived by the elders as a deviation from the rural ritual economy that sustains them.

As Street noticed, it is essential not to forget that literacy practices always have a deep significance ‘for the distribution of power in societies and for authority relations’ (Street 1993a: 2). It is not surprising, then, that in addition to the other difficulties students had to face in the Praça, they also had to fight the resistance of the elders in the village who opposed not education in itself, but rather the interference of the school with the productive activities and the ritual economy of the village. Even if the elders’ opposition was far less common than a decade later, young men still considered it a problem, frequently complaining about the attitude of the elders. I was told by several of my informants that the elders could use their ‘magical’ knowledge, knotting a

koratakó[125] against a student: as a result, even if he was brilliant, he could not succeed anymore and he had to give up. More frequent, however, was the refusal of any support. As the young (men and women) went to school, they could not participate in the productive activities at the village: when they came back hungry, the elders roughly replied 'go and eat your notebook', or 'go and eat the machete'. In fact formal education implies a long period of dependence from the elders (the parents or the household), and this is exactly the opposite of what the Bijagó productive system prescribes.

A sign of modernity

The assumption that formal education is among the primary needs of the population in order to develop was, and continues to be, a crucial element in the nationalist rhetoric in Guinea-Bissau. Developmentist studies and interventions in the 60s and 70s, on their side, contributed to the spread of the value of education, linking the promises of modernity and socio-economical development to the diffusion of schooling (for an overview see McGinn and Cummings 1997). If it is evident that education was planned to be an instrument of civilisation (both in colonial and in post-independence times), can we easily assume that the school is merely a place of passive indoctrination, where ideologies are transmitted automatically? How is education perceived in Bubaque, how is it considered and what is its real effect? How is its value *used* in local identitarian politics?

Many scholars working on education in Africa share a pessimistic opinion about this issue. Philip Altbach (1971) underlined how education policy was an important concern for colonial governments (if and what to teach, how and in what language…): schools were created relying on metropolitan models and with the explicit purpose of creating administrative cadres faithful to colonial government. Today, in what Altbach defines educational neocolonialism, many features of the educational system in postcolonial states can be recognized as a legacy of colonial times: local elites are generally western-oriented and educated in the metropolitan countries, while advanced industrial nations continue to heavily influence educational policies, providing models, personnel,

[125] A *koratakó* is an act of sorcery that takes the material form of a complex object made of knotted palm leaves. On magic and the generational contrast, see also chapter 1 and 2.

textbooks and language for their former colonies. Bassey wrote recently that 'education in Africa is still designed after Western models and paradigms that are not connected to life as it is in Africa' (Bassey 1999: 47. See also Tedga 1988, Hagberg 2002). And later: 'postcolonial education in Black Africa is essentially a colonial legacy. After the overthrow of colonial regimes colonial educational systems in Africa were merely replaced by those that, although satisfying the aspirations of many for educational reforms, conformed, to a large extent, to the system in the colonial country' (Bassey 1999: 48). It is a matter of fact that most African countries have not been able to radically change the educational system that they inherited from their ex-colonial powers (Marah 1989: 13; see also Tedga 1988: 9; Ki-Zerbo 1990).

Most authors would agree that, though it is not the only element (and maybe not the most important) of what James Ferguson (1994) defined the 'development apparatus', the school is, at the local level, the locus of reproduction of state modernism, and, as such, one of the environments where rural young people establish contact with the ideology of development and with the trope of modernity. In many African contexts, in fact, the rhetoric of independence and progress of the postcolonial states – and I have shown how this was true in Guinea-Bissau as well - stressed the link between development and education, proclaiming mass education to be the corner stone of modern Africa. Achille Mbembe (1985:46) critically pointed out that the idea of development proposed through the school is that of African urban contexts, of market economy, and of commodity consumption. According to Mbembe, the school plays an important role in the creation of dreams and desires by replicating and conveying the idea of development. By proposing a notion of progress as necessarily in contrast with local cultures, educational institutions are one of the key elements in the production of imaginations directed towards the 'West', and are therefore the place where the ideology of development of the postcolonial States clashes with local contexts (1985: 45-46. On the same tone also Ki-Zerbo 1990: 76). Quite in the same vein, John Marah (1989) denounced the effects of 'Western education' in Africa. A highly critical view on education in Africa as essential means for reproducing the ideology of the state and

supporting existing elites, while keeping the poor at the margins, has been recently put forward also by Magnus Bassey (1999)[126].

I think, however, that the acknowledgement of these aspects of education in Africa and its responsibilities in the reproduction of state ideologies and social inequalities must not make us overlook the practical relationship people establish with the school, on the one hand, and the dynamic character of the bond between learner and learned knowledge, on the other. In a seminal book on the anthropology of learning, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) offered a compelling theory about the process of learning:

> Conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether 'discovered', 'transmitted' from others, or 'experienced in interaction' with others. […] learning as internalization is too easily construed as an unproblematic process of absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation. […] In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world. […] This focus […] promotes a view of knowing as activity by specific people in specific circumstances (1991: 47, 49, 52).

This theoretical approach discards a vision of the relationship with the school in terms of mere ideological reproduction, as internalisation and assimilation of contents, lending support, rather, to a point of view which highlights the active role of individuals as mediating elements among knowledges, social demands and identities (Lave and Wenger 1991: 52 and following). In the same vein, Brian Street, in the introduction to a text that set a new paradigm for anthropological studies of literacy (Street 1993), asserted that:

> Research in cultures that have newly acquired reading and writing draws our attention to the creative and original ways in which people transform literacy to their own cultural concern and interests. Research into the role of literacy in the construction of ethnicity, gender and religious identities makes us wary of accepting the uniform model of literacy that tends to be purveyed with the modern national state […] Research into 'vernacular' literacies within modern urban settings has begun to show the richness and

[126] A similar view on the role of education in the learning of modernity has also been formulated in non-African contexts. Stacy Pigg for instance, commenting about education in Nepal, claims that 'schools systematically instil the message that local knowledge needs to be replaced with modern ideas' (1996: 180), and continues: 'Schools expose people to images of modernity, modern places, and modern ideas.

diversity of literacy practices and meanings despite the pressures for uniformity exerted by the nation state and modern education system (Street 1993a: 1).

Street proposes to abandon the 'autonomous model of literacy', in which 'literacy is treated as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character' (1993a: 5), focusing rather on the 'understanding of the actual significance of literacy practices in people's lives' embedded in the cultural and power structure of society (1993a: 7). Most importantly for my analysis, this approach to literacy studies pays great attention to 'the role of literacy practices in reproducing or *challenging structures of power and domination*' (*ibid.* My emphasis).

Don Kulick and Christopher Stroud (1993), commenting on most literature on literacy, observed that 'in reading through this literature, it is often difficult to escape the conclusion that human beings are basically passive objects who become affected by literacy in ways they are neither fully aware of nor able to control' (1993: 31). In contrast, Kulick and Stroud proposed to focus on 'how individuals […] far from being passively transformed by literacy, instead actively and creatively apply literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs' (*Ibid.*). Writing specifically about the school in Africa, Lange noted that, even though the school in Africa has an exogenous and imposed character, 'the Africans did not simply receive it – or refuse it: in certain cases they *appropriate the school, the discourse on school*' (Lange 1998: 15. My emphasis).

In the specific case of Guinea-Bissau, state schooling and even more so the 'discourse on school', was intended to be - and still is, despite the dramatic situation of the institutions of the state - an important tool for the civilisation of the rural population, for the diffusion of progress and for the attainment of 'modernity'. Nevertheless, to understand local social dynamics, we need to focus on specific situations, underlining the concrete form that educational policies take locally –and its failures -, and investigating the meaning and use of education people make in particular contexts. The right question to ask, then, is not whether national education in Guinea-Bissau conveys a modernist discourse leading young people far from the 'traditional' way-of-life (as

[…] The overall message is clearly that local knowledge is insufficient, worthless, and so on' (Pigg 1996: 199 n. 35).

Mbembe seems to put it). Rather we have to investigate how literacy and education are perceived locally, what is the value given to them, and how it is employed and appropriated in local power dynamics.

When we consider literacy and the school in this perspective, the sense of passivity, of ideological control, pessimistically foreseen by Mbembe and others, is drastically attenuated. From the point of view of the young men in fact, education and the option of literacy – even if the breakdown of the education system and the lack of possibilities for the *diplomées* make school a failing economic strategy - still are a working social strategy, as they offer a standpoint to contest the authority of the elders and state inefficiency, and also confer a symbolic capital expendable in the urban context as a claim to a cosmopolitan identity.

If we consider the choice of literacy within the power dynamics opposing young men and elders, we immediately perceive how education - with everything it implies in terms of detachment from the ritual path of the village – must be conceived, in addition, as a challenge to the authority of the elders, as a potential means of subversion of village power dynamics *employed* by young men. Access to school, in this sense, has much to do with status (if not economic, at least symbolic), and it is a matter of fact that education remains in Africa a political issue, a matter of access to urban political power (or of closure from that power): as Brenner wrote in relation to Mali, 'it is in school that one acquires the tools of political domination, literacy in the French language, which in turn also determines the position one might occupy in the clientelist system which is rooted in the state' (quoted in O'Brien 1996: 68). Kasongo-Ngoy proposed a similar interpretation, analysing the social value of university in Zaire (1989). According to Kasongo-Ngoy, despite the evident crisis and the lack of opportunities for *diplomées*, schooling is still perceived as an important element in strategies of positioning and survival of social actors, as 'le système scolaire dans son ensemble fonctionne à la manière d'une instance d'attribution des places dans la hiérarchie social en cours d'édification' (1989: 14). It is at the same time remarkable – even if this topic will be considered in chapter 8 - that, as we have noticed while reporting, earlier on, the opinions of the young men, the value of education provides young people with a valid moral standpoint from which to criticize the state and its officers for their inefficiency and incapacity. In this sense, and significantly, the school and educational policies, far

from being a tool for the reproduction of state modernist projects, appear as discursive arenas in which students and young people in general can become active and contesting political actors.

Besides offering young people the chance to contest the authority of the elders and of the State, the school conserves also a symbolic value *in itself* – a value to be assessed in the path towards the formulation of a cosmopolitan identity. In this sense, Kasongo-Ngoy proposed, following Bourdieu (1979) and Passeron (1982), to consider education and diplomas as symbolic capital (1989: 55), an approach that seems to me appropriate to describe the relationship between young men and the school in Bubaque. In fact, even if, today, education is an economically failing strategy, in terms of identitarian capital, the school – as an other trait of local modernity – is still a working strategy of social promotion in the urban context. As in the case of *amor*, examined in the previous chapter, the school was extremely important for young men as a practice signifying difference. Attending school was probably the fulcrum of local modernism for young men, not much for the notions learned there, but as a *sign* of modernity. In this sense, as a signifying practice, education was only marginally a place where a young man could acquire 'modern notions', or where he could 'learn to be modern'. What is more, the few confused notions taught at public school in Bubaque, with its renowned deficiencies, could hardly be considered as an ideological instrument for controlling young 'traditional' minds, leading them away from their 'culture'. What I am claiming is that school in itself, the practice of schooling, the claim to be a student, was in itself a key element of that cosmopolitan and modern identity young men were building oppositionally, an element of distinction from the rural world. Offering a similar interpretation, Stacy Pigg, commenting on the value of school in Nepal observed that 'simply going to school marks you as a different kind of person, as someone destined to be more modern than others (1996: 180)[127].

In the end, the idea of young virgin minds corrupted to modernity by the school is too far from the experience of education I witnessed among the young in Bubaque. This pessimistic perspective – reproducing the dualities of modern versus traditional and placing youth once more in a passive position - is far from the active attitude, the

[127] This approach cannot but recall Thornstein Veblen's (1899) critical analysis of higher education in America as 'conspicuous consumption' (1998: 363 and following). On Veblen, see *infra* chapter 7.

critical claims, and the lucid gaze young men had towards school in Bubaque. Many young men I met started to attend school late in their life, and as a personal decision, usually against their parents' will. Their attitude towards school was highly critical, as if they perfectly realized the practical deficiencies of the educational system. If we cannot ignore that the idea of the school as opposed to local knowledge is a salient trait of colonial and postcolonial modernity in Guinea-Bissau (as elsewhere in Africa), and that its value as a sign of modernity is linked to the spread of state modernism, we should not necessarily infer that its local effects are the serial production of a standard modern individual. Rather the school is appropriated and used as a *sign of modernity*, not much for its (supposedly modern) contents, as for its *social value*. Finally, school in Bubaque is more a trait of modern identity to be appropriated than a *dispositif* of identity.

7. Dress, style and fascination

> Defined as perhaps the key value of the historical experience of the twentieth century, the desire to be modern became for much of the world an aspiration to achieve through emulation rather than the working out of an indigenous history (Rowlands 1995: 23)

Saturday night: a sketch

I was sitting on the porch of the hotel, writing my fieldnotes, when somebody called me from the dark street: the Praça, without any working public lighting, sank into darkness at sunset. It was Delito[128], the young artist, the singer and dreamer, wearing his red baseball hat. His personal situation was different from that of most young men living in the Praça. Delito was a seventeen-year-old 9th grader at the *liceu*: his mother was from the island of Uracane, his father from Uno. He was born in Uno, but his family moved to the Praça when he was five. He lived with his father, who was a mason, while his mother was seldom at home, as she traded fish between Uracane and Bissau. Among the 'whites' of the Praça he had a bad reputation: Dora, the owner of the hotel, had warned me, informing me that he had been charged of theft several times, but had always escaped arrest as he was a minor. He was my best friend on the island: one of the boys I spent most time with. He dreamed of becoming a singer, and he was a songwriter himself, writing romantic songs for his girlfriend who lived in Bissau. He was at the same time shy and boastful, vain and naïve, with a whispered and hesitant voice.

He did not enter into the hotel that night, as Dora, the Portuguese owner, had already rudely chased him off several times. 'Come on – he invited me – let's go and eat the

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[128] His complete name was Delito Mário Gomes.

world'. It was Saturday night, and 'eat the world' was the expression young people used to mean 'have fun'. I left the notebook in my room and went out. I followed Delito along the dark streets full of bumps of the Praça, towards the harbour, the electric lights powered by generators, the centre of nightlife in Bubaque. The streets around the harbour were full of life on Saturday evenings. Boys and girls walked and met their friends on the pier. All the shops and bars were open and crowded. Some boys sat and drunk on the porch of the bar Dalillan, just in from of the pier. Some of them came out staggering, drunk, while, by the light of a powerful beacon, a few women were loading a boat with fish to be transported to Bissau. Those who had some money to waste were waiting outside the entrance of the small cinema: that night Schwartzenegger's *Last Action Hero* was on the programme. A pink curtain covered the entrance to the disco (250 CFA) that opened only at 23.30, but some boys and girls were already gathering nearby.

By the light of the bars, Delito looked amazed and disappointed at my clothes. 'Look at you! How are you dressed! It's Saturday night and you wear your Senegalese trousers as usual…You have to have *charme*…no girl will like you like this!'

I looked at my worn out trousers, dirty with red dust, my faded T-shirt. He was right, I was really out of place. Delito, on the contrary, had prepared himself with great care for the evening. He was elegant, his red Nike baseball hat, the blonde-dyed sideburns. His walk was fluid, showing off self-assurance and cockiness. 'You see', he explained to me as I was in his eyes totally inexperienced, 'for a young man what is important is not being particularly handsome or well-built… you must have *charme*, you have to be *cool*. Here look at this friend of mine, he's really *cool*!' He pointed at a friend of his walking on the other side of the street. He wore a bandanna, sunglasses despite the thick darkness, a silk shirt open on his chest and a brand new pair of jeans. He walked with a stylish gait, his arms swinging. The two shook hands as two rappers might have done in a MTV video. 'You see', Delito told me as we kept walking, 'that's *cool*!'

Cool and *charme* were the terms young men actually used – equivalent but more modish than the Kriol '*fixi*' (from the Portuguese *fixe*, meaning exactly 'cool') – to indicate the proper way to dress for a young urban man. During my stays in Bubaque, I gradually realized that there was an 'aesthetic of coolness', made of clothes and attitudes, accomplished ways of looking and talking. At times, looking at young men

passing by the dusty streets of Bubaque, it seemed I was watching a *defilée*. Proper dress for young men required a hat (a baseball hat, a bandanna…); a pair of sunglasses the lucky owners always wore, even at night; long trousers, like jeans or with big side-pockets, baggy and with low crutch. Chinese shirts in fake silk were also much appreciated, as well as sneakers and all kind of sport-wear of famous brands, like Nike and Adidas.

'Listen Delito', I asked him, 'where do you buy all these fashionable clothes?'

'Well, I buy or ask somebody to buy mine in Bissau, when a friend goes to the capital city. I must buy them in Bissau because those that you find here in Bubaque are low quality, imitations, you see? They can be cheaper, 6000, 8000 CFA, but they are not the best brands. In Bissau you can find original, brand jeans for 12.000, 12.500 CFA, and pure Italian shirts. The clothes the Fula sell here in Bubaque are ugly… those large coloured clothes only the Bijagó of the villages like. We of the Praça, we cannot wear things like that, you see!'

'But where do you find the money for the clothes?' I ask.

'It is difficult. You have to save a lot…. Some people asks for money to the tourists or to the father of the Mission, claiming that they don't have anything to eat, or that they cannot pay the school fees, and with that money they buy their clothes' – Delito laughed – 'you see? We are crazy for clothes (*no gosta mal di ropa*)!'

When I explored this issue with the others boys of the Praça, I realized that most of them were prepared to travel to Bissau, and spend large amounts of money (10.000, 15.000 CFA or more) for a pair of bell-bottom trousers, a very fashionable article in Bubaque at the time. Once acquired, clothes were the object of a real cult: desired for a long time, they were treated with enormous care, washed, dried and preserved as precious goods even by young men living in difficult economic and lodging conditions. Everybody knew which was the best washing powder, and the best technique to hang clothes to the line to make them dry without wrinkles. I also realized that much of the money I 'lent' to some of my young interlocutors was spent to buy clothes. As for me, some of my pieces of clothing were attracting more attention than my presence: after a week, when I arrived in 2002, every young man in the Praça was talking not about me, but about my gym shoes.

The outfit was actually another sign of distinction from the rural world of the village young men wanted to display in the urban context. The Praça for most of them was the place where you had to dress properly, fashionably. Clothes were a sign, showing 'civilisation' and 'development', putting those who wore them at a distance from the values and customs of the village, and manifesting closeness to the modern milieu of the Praça. To quote again the key interview with Xarife:

> I have come to see that that life is not a good life. I've realized it is not a good life because I came to the Praça. I saw other people, boys of my age; I saw how they were dressed…sometimes in the village people stay naked in the street. I have come to see that this is bad. I came to the Praça, I saw how the other boys were dressed (*é ta bisti*), and then I went to the village and I realized that it wasn't possible to live like that for a human being. I tried to move to the Praça, I used to sell mangoes at that time. I bought my clothes, I went back to the village, I wore my clothes in front of my friends, and they stared at me in admiration.

The proper and 'modern' outfit was also associated with the frequentation of key 'modern' places in the Praça, like the school, or the church. Here adults and children showed off their best clothes. Those among the young men who spent their life between the village and the Praça (living at the village but attending school in the urban centre, for e.g.) wore different clothes according to the context, changing when they went back to the village.

Dressing, consumption, identity

> To clothe the self is to define the self (Friedman 1991: 157).

Most recent anthropological readings of clothing (see for reviews Schneider 1987 and Hansen 2004) interpret it as a social practice linked to the formulation and expression of identity and to the signifying of social differences (Barnes and Eicher 1993, Eicher 1995, Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson 1995, Hendrickson 1996). These approaches consider dress as both sign and commodity: a field for social representation where individual and social identities are created, as well as a site of social and political action (Hendrickson 1996a: 2,3). The connection between dress and

identity owes much to symbolic interactionism, that considered clothes as a form of social communication and a way through which individuals formulate and display their identity in social contexts (among others Stone 1962, Goffman 1958, 1971, Stryker 1980, Joseph 1986). Stone (1962) in particular, underlined how dress contributes to the acquisition of identities and to the development of a sense of self, focussing on how clothes help communicate identities.

In Africa, the topic of youth and clothing – in its connection to colonial and post-colonial situations - was primarily addressed by Gandoulou with his essays on the phenomenon of *la sape,* the search for elegance among young Congolese men (Gandoulou 1989a, 1989b). Gandoulou explained the phenomenon of the *sapeur* as 'comportement mimétique', as the partial appropriation of signs of social success (1989a: 24). The merit of his work lies mostly, from my point of view, in that, while acknowledging that the phenomenon of the *sapeurs* derives from a structurally marginal positioning of the young educated urban men, its features of agency, strategy and novelty are not overlooked:

> Il s'agit aussi de montrer que les gens – les Sapeurs – dans une certaine situation, tout en se conduisant de manière rationnelle, essaient d'atteindre certaines choses. En fonctions de leurs ressources, de leurs capacités propres, de leur attentes présentes, ils adoptent des comportements adéquats et développent une stratégie correspondente. Ils donnent des réponses, ils innovent (Gandoulou 1989b : 13).

And further :

> Les Sapeurs manipulent ces signes de l'Occident en les détournant de leur sens originel et en y substituant d'autres. […] Les Sapeurs ne peuvent être réduits au statut d'héritiers ou de victimes du choc des cultures occidentale et congolaise (1989b : 175).

La *sape* is therefore read by Gandoulou as a social practice – of unquestionable colonial origins as well as influenced by the asymmetric relationship between former colony and the metropole – but with distinctive local features and corresponding to the specific identity strategies of a group:

> La mode que suivent les Sapeurs se réclame de la logique sociale de la distinction; elle joue de la différence codée (1989b : 153)

Gondola's recent work (1999), also interprets as well *la Sape* as a strong identity strategy and as a practice of distinction from the rest of local society (Gondola 1999: 40)[129], though too easily reading it as a dreamlike refuge from a grim reality the young men cannot change (*ibid.*).

Some recent explorations of African urban cultures have specifically addressed the relevance of clothing for the construction of 'local modernity'. In the introduction to a collection of essays she edited (1996), Hildi Hendrickson wrote significantly:

> clothing and other treatments of the body surface are primarily symbols in the performances through which modernity – and therefore history – have been conceived, constructed, and challenged in Africa. […] both the "modern" and the "traditional" are powerfully and principally constituted in body treatments (1996a: 13)

More specifically, several works have attracted attention to youth clothing practices as distinctive features of modernity in Africa (Bastian 1996, Schoss 1996). Heike Behrend (2002, 2002a), commenting on young men's photography practice in Mombasa, Kenya, asserted that by dressing up and posing for photographs, people imagined and created 'an African modernity that strongly negated ethnicity and everything related to traditional culture. In this way they executed a radical rupture with the past, while opening up to a future that imagined the heaven of modern consumer culture' (2002: 104). According to Behrend photography, as an essentially modern practice, gives proof of the owner's modernity (2002: 104): the medium of photography is used as a technique of the self, as a mean to objectify and at the same time to subjectify the photographed person, in a wider process of '*local self-creation* by global interaction and global media' (Behrend 2002a: 44, my emphasis). Behrend rightly asserts that the 'creation of the self is a complex process of interaction of multiple practices of identification external or internal to a subject, an elaborate game of mirrors' (2002a: 47). In this creation, she acknowledges the crucial importance of the 'transnational cult of clothes': young men in Mombasa, she claims, 'positioned themselves in a global arena informed by the interaction between locally specific

[129] Deborah Heath (1992) similarly interprets the *sañse* (the practice of dressing well) in Senegal.

practices of self-creation and the dynamics of global processes' (2002a: 50), developing a 'transcultural, global subjectivity that strongly opposed ideas of local African ethnicity and traditions' (2002a: 53).

The relevance of dress and other commodities for self-definition is obviously not limited to African youth: Mark Liechty, for example, writing on young people in Kathmandu, Nepal, underlined that, 'often desperate to claim modern identities, middle-class youth themselves appropriate these commercial offerings; with "fashion", haircuts, fitness programmes, and modern food, young people can become modern to the extent that they purchase their own modern bodies' (Liechty 1995: 190).

In Bubaque, too, the 'outfit of modernity' young men proudly displayed was already a demonstration of power, as it showed one's opportunity to buy precious commodities, revealing that 'pouvoir de consommation' Gandoulou writes about referring to the *sapeurs* of Congo (1989a: 41). Nevertheless, what was foreign also had a distinctive character in itself: it was a sign drawing and manifesting new inequalities and hierarchies (see Gardner 1995; Hannerz 1992, and *infra* this chapter). As in the practice of *sañse* in Senegal, clothing in the Praça 'forges a link between having and being, displaying both wealth and social identity' (Heath 1992: 20).

The question of clothing and commodities in general, and its relevance for the constitution and as a mark of identity, has also been fruitfully considered by the anthropology of consumption (See Miller 1995b for a review)[130]. As Jonathan Friedman stated clearly in the introduction to a seminal text in this field (Friedman 1994), the interest of anthropology in consumption 'is not upon consumption as an autonomous social phenomenon, but precisely on the ways in which consumption can and must be understood in a wider contest of life strategies, of the constitution of meaningful existences' (Friedman 1994a: 1), exploring the 'relationship between consumption and broader cultural strategies' (*ibid.*). Following this theoretical approach, I think we can consider youth fashion in Bubaque as a form of consumption understood in its

[130] Without presumptuously and unnecessarily rehearsing here the multiplicity of anthropological and sociological approaches to consumption, key texts in this field are, even if with theoretical differences, Bourdieu 1979, Douglas and Isherwood 1979, Appadurai 1986, Friedman 1994, Miller 1995, 2001, Howes 1996b. Daniel Miller in particular (1995a: 1), proposed to consider consumption as a new paradigm, a kind of new grand narrative describing local-global interactions. Social theorists like Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck as well have proposed a vision of consumption as linked to social processes of self-identity.

relationship with processes of self-construction, articulating and combining local strategies of identity and social differentiation with 'global' products and images. It is in this sense that consumption has been identified as a key means of creating culture in the urbanized and industrialized societies (Miller 1995): Jonathan Friedman has accordingly interpreted the phenomenon of the *sapeurs* as consumption but understanding consumption as an 'aspect of a more general strategy or set of strategies for the establishment and maintenance of selfhood […] a particular means of creating an identity […] an instrument of self-construction' (Friedman 1994b: 169). According to Mica Nava (quoted in Wulff 1995b: 71), consumerism cannot be fully explained through economic structures, since this activity also has to do with dreams and consolation, communication and confrontation, image and identity. Consumption becomes then a kind of symbolic work (Willis 1990). Kathy Gardner wrote about Bangladesh that 'goods from abroad link their consumers with the economic and politic force of *bidesh* (the foreign), the object of desire' (Gardner 1995:122). A similar point has been made by Friedman, showing how consumption must be interpreted as a precise statement of identity, transmitting messages about the consumer's political and economic pace in the world-system (Friedman 1990: 311).

The creolization paradigm

One of the fundamental merits of the ethnography of consumption is that it firmly rejects the 'global homogenization paradigm', overcoming the modernist rhetoric that condemns the consumption of global or foreign products in local contexts as a loss of identity, of autonomy and of authenticity (Miller 1995b), and moving towards what David Howes defined a 'creolization paradigm' (Howes 1996a: 5). As Richard Wilk asserted:

> By condemning Third World consumption as emulation or imitation, we denigrate the creative and expressive capabilities of those people, to take and *use* foreign goods for their own purpose (1994:100).

In the same vein Hildi Hendrickson wrote:

> When we see Africans using *our* products to create *their* identities – and vice versa – we learn that the meaning of body or commodity is not inherent but is in fact symbolically created and contested by both producers and consumers. Clearly, the power of industrial systems to define those meanings – and of materialist analyses to account for them – is more limited than it may appear (1996a: 2).

What is clear however, in the case of the young men of Bubaque, is that – as I have underlined in the previous chapters - their 'modern' social practices cannot be easily reduced to mimicry of a supposed 'Western modernity'. Clearly, the 'West' is a powerful myth, the official producer of modernity itself, and cultural flows are evidently dominated by Western goods and representations. Nevertheless, what young men in Bubaque are displaying as modernity is *not* a replica of Western cultural traits, and could not too easily be described as 'Western', or 'Westernised' (Pigg 1996, Ferguson 1999). It is a local 'style' defined as *desenvolvido* (developed) and full, it is true, of citations of Western cultural traits, but they are rather bracketed citations, for they are assembled in a new context where they acquire slightly different meanings.

Marshall Sahlins (1993) underlined that grand European teleologies that hold 'Western hegemony as human destiny' seem strangely out of date. Even if markets, money, and mechanical media extend across the planet, highlighted the Comaroffs, '*pace* the predictions of modernization theory and historical materialism, not to mention the efforts of CNN and Sony, the world has not been reduced to sameness' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993a: xi).

Even though this argument seems to me a little too optimistic, we cannot overlook that, even if the 'West' is a mythical place of power and wealth, young men's urban culture have its specificities. Young men are creating, cultivating, building, their *own* interpretation of modernity out of their history and of a multiplicity of representations, images, commodities: they are 'inhabiting global fantasies' (Weiss 2002) their own way. As I have underlined, 'modernity', if it is a Western discourse, is not filled only with Western terms: it is something far more complex and difficult to grasp, for it is built upon a multitude of cultural elements, local or non-local, Western and non-Western. For instance, as elsewhere in West Africa (Larkin 1997, Weiss 2002), the aesthetic of coolness in Bubaque has much to do with icons of 'black' global success, both of the Lusophone world as well as of the African American musical scene: the *cool* outfit is

clearly inspired by hip-hop culture, enormously flourishing in the music culture of the Guinean Diaspora, as well as in Cape Verde and Senegal.

In other words, it is important to highlight here that we are facing a complex reality, where different cultural flows coming from many places (though not randomly or separate from wider political and economic factors) shape local imagination. We should both acknowledge Western influence (and acknowledge as well that 'Western' means very little outside the local products of imagination) and not limit our analysis to it.

I do not intend by this to underestimate the palpable political and cultural Euro-American influence. Richard Wilk has rightly underlined that:

> it is clear that people are not making completely free choices about goods. They are not merely absorbing foreign goods into their existing modes of consumption, and making free strategic choices in the global marketplace (1994: 100.)

'The enjoyment of such freedoms', underlined as well Hendrickson, 'is tinged with ambivalence for Africans wearied by the instability of their local economies and cognizant of their peripheralized position in a wider politico-economic world' (1996a: 14). The attention to the local consumption and creativity should not make us overlook, in other words, the 'hidden geographies of production that are embedded within the social relations of consumption' (Hansen 1999: 207). We have in this sense to discover, suggests Mary Mills, 'a middle ground between assumptions that commodities are "fetishistic vehicles of false consciousness", their presence evidence only of hegemonic domination, and overly "romanticized" views in which commodity consumption by subaltern groups is read as evidence of "everyday resistance"'(1997: 41).

Distinctions

The use of 'modern' clothes and commodities among the young men in Bubaque must be investigated within local identity and cultural dynamics. The interpretation I propose is that in these very dynamics, goods are used to formulate an identity and – jointly – to mark a difference, to state a distinction responding to the dialectics of modernity: the practice of dressing in the Praça among young men was mostly a way to signify a difference.

The idea that consumption might be considered for its semiotic value as a social practice, displayed by individuals both to mark and produce distinctions, was initially proposed and developed by Thornstein Veblen, in *The theory of the leisure class*, published in 1899, a text still compelling for the analysis of the symbolic and cultural aspects of consumption behaviour. Veblen maintains that the value of commodities is not inherent to goods, but depends on the fact that they are markers of class distinction. In particular, expensive and difficult to obtain commodities become distinctive of higher classes and thus symbols, signs, leaving behind any purely use-value and entering in the domain of the economy of signs. The tastes, good taste, rest ultimately on the cultivation of habits ('This cultivation of the aesthetic faculty requires time and application' [Veblen 1998: 74-5]) that initially originated as conspicuous consumption, as a display of *pouvoir de consommation*. In fact, as Ritzer comments, 'although we may all participate in conspicuous consumption, according to Veblen, only the leisure class has the power to determine which consumer goods are worthy of display for all social strata' (2001: 211). This triggers a general emulative attitude in the lower classes, with specific emulative consumer behaviour. As such, the appeal of certain goods (material or immaterial) depends on their being a distinctive sign of the higher classes, who, through cultivation and repetition transform consumption into taste and refinement, into a habit. The difference between classes, Veblen claims, is maintained also through the display of a set of symbolic elements – precious goods, knowledge, clothes.

Much of Veblen's theory was taken up and re-elaborated by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu – with his social critique of taste (1979) – who developed a concept of class-specific *habitus* as both system of schemes generating practices and system of patterns of perception and evaluation ('taste'). Taste and practices were therefore producing a harmonious lifestyle as the class *habitus* was shared among the members of the same group or sector of society. The *habitus*, in its turn, was the product of material circumstances shared by the members of the same class, and embodied through daily inculcation and repetition of practices and judgements of value. According to Bourdieu, then, people of the same social class shared the same judgment of taste (and consequently showed similar pattern of consumption) because they had embodied the same *habitus*, and taste was finally a practice of distinction, class- (or *habitus*-) specific,

reproducing the separation among social groups: '…la manière d'user des biens symboliques, et en particulier de ceux qui sont considérés comme les attributs de l'excellence, constitue un des marqueurs privilégiés de la « classe » en même temps que l'instruments par excellence des stratégies de distinction' (Bourdieu 1979 : 70).

Cultural style

A similar approach to the social meaning of dress and consumption, that highlights its relevance for the marking and the elaboration of distinct lifestyles and for the construction of difference and the production of identity, was proposed in the 1970s by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the analysis of youth subcultures in Britain[131]. What is more, as it was elaborated by the CCCS, the notion of style as signifying practice can also offer us alternative and non-essentialist explanations about how difference is not only signified and marked, but *produced* by those very practices in social contexts.

It is not worth here drawing a complete genealogy or bringing back on the scene the notion of sub-culture, which has been since then criticized from several standpoints[132]. What might prove useful instead, is considering the use of the notion of style[133]. With this concept, the scholars of the CCCB intended to focus their attention on the subversive and contra-cultural significance of certain distinctive behaviours among young people, as well as on the symbolic appropriation and semiotic displacement of commodities as a form of resistance to the dominant order. A key text is obviously Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: the meaning of style* published in 1979, where the notion of style as "signifying practice"[134] is proposed to explain how difference is actively produced

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[131] Though the term 'sub-culture' itself was proposed in the 40s, this kind of approach was pioneered in the first decades of the century by the 'Chicago school' – with Robert Park as a leading force -, focussing on the problems of youth deviance and urban gangs in urban contexts (See Gelder and Thornton 1997 for historical overview).

[132] The notion of subculture as developed in the CCCS has been heavily criticised also for the essentialist view it proposed of style, and for the lack of attention to the individual reception, appropriation and variation upon the general theme, as well as to the subjective viewpoint (Muggleton 2000: 3; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). This is certainly due to the peculiar Marxist framework of the CCCS, which privileged grand theory explanations rather than the 'subjective goals, values and motivations of social actors' (Muggleton 2000: 5).

[133] Key texts are Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979, Willis 1978, Mungham and Pearson 1978.

[134] The notion of signifying practice was initially elaborated in France by the *Tel Quel* group.

and used within a society. 'The communication of a social *difference* – writes Hebdige – , (and the parallel communication of a group *identity*), is the "point" behind the style of all spectacular subcultures' (1979: 102).

What make Hebdige's theory compelling - despite the recent criticism of the notion of sub-culture (Muggleton 2000, Muggelton and Weinzierl 2003) – is that the narrow notion of style (as dressing) can easily shift towards the broader concept of lifestyle, a weaker and more fluid concept to build a social theory upon (see chapter 5). Johanna Schoss, for example, recently employed the concept of style in this broader sense:

> style encompasses not only dress, but also bodily comportment and consumption practices. Thus *style*, as I use it here, refers not merely to a way of dressing, but more importantly to the way in which people present and represent themselves to others in a manner that implies an underlying ideological vision (see Hebdige 1979). Style, in effect, is a way of being in the world; one that demonstrates conscious choices and speaks to differentiated sociocultural systems of value and meaning (Schoss 1996: 168-9).

Thus, the notion of style might be a suitable construct to describe the articulation between youth and 'modernity' in Bubaque, allowing us to shift from essentialist social constructs, like 'youth culture' or 'modern culture', towards the enacted and accomplished nature of identity and sociability. The notion of cultural style in this sense has been adopted by James Ferguson in a seminal work (1999), trying to offer an original solution to the problem of the definition of local modernity. The conundrum James Ferguson had to face in analysing the cultural duality (that between cosmopolitanism and localism) in the urban context of the Zambia, was that of finding a way to describe cultural difference within one same context, without either adopting an evolutionary approach assuming modernity and tradition as two step in social evolution, or acknowledging the presence of two distinct cultures in the same milieu. Ferguson, drawing explicitly on Hebdige, points as a solution to the concept of 'cultural style' to refer to '*practices that signify differences* between social categories' (1999: 95, emphasis in the original), claiming to use the term 'style' 'specifically to emphasize the accomplished, performative nature of such practices' (*Ibid.*). As Ferguson puts it,

> […] the concept of style can serve as a quite general analytic tool by being extended to include all modes of action through which people place themselves and are placed into social categories. Specifically, I use the term *cultural style* to refer to *practices that signify differences* between social

categories. Cultural styles in this usage do not pick out total modes of behavior but rather poles of social signification, cross-cutting and cross-cut by other such poles (1999: 95)

The focus on cultural style allows Ferguson to discard essentialist notions of cultural identity, emphasising instead the practical and performed features of social life:

> The styles of which I speak are not expression of something "deeper" (habitus, worldview, ideology) – they are neither cultures nor residues of once-distinct cultures; nor are they manifestations of transition between distinct social types distinguished as traditional and modern. They are, instead, just what they seem to be: modes of practical action in contemporary urban social life. The ability to "do" a cultural style, and to "bring it off" successfully, is an achieved performative competence, an empowering capability acquired and cultivated over a lifetime. And such stylistic capabilities are acquired and developed in relation to the demands and exigencies of day-to-day life (Ferguson 1999: 221).

According to Ferguson, localism and cosmopolitanism, in their local significance, are not the outcome of the breakdown of tradition or to the emergence of an imitation of modernity, but socially situated symbolic practices, enacted in specific political-economic and social conjuncture within which people improvise motivated and durable strategies of self-construction and self-presentation (Ferguson 1999: 230).

Modern is who modern does

> There is no *ethnos* here, and no cultural whole; the analytic categories are not of membership (which culture does this person belong to?) but sliding categories of competence (can you bring it off, and how well?), interpretation (do you get it?), and audience (who is, or might be, watching?) (Ferguson 1999: 226).

The concept of cultural style allows us to adopt, in the description of the cultural dynamics in Bubaque, a notion of social life less based on core identities (Bijagó culture, youth culture, western culture…), but rather built upon the cultivation and enactment of signifying practices, 'moving away from the quest to locate underlying "real" identities and orientations that "lie behind" or are "expressed in" styles, and moving toward the enacted, performance surface of social life' (Ferguson 1999: 97).

While walking with the boys along the dusty streets of the Praça, dressed with utmost cure and wearing sunglasses by night, one had the immediate perception that they were *performing* their modernity[135], or, in other terms, that modernity was for them, at least in part, a performed identity. At times, the difference between the Praça and the village was expressed merely in terms of *style*: 'people at the village don't know how to dress properly, how to behave properly, do not know the modern way…'. The young men's modernity *was* their clothes, their coolness, their going to school, the fact of being (and feeling) cool. Daniel Miller wrote compelling pages on this subject about the ontological relevance of style and fashion for the definition of identity, contrasting a long lasting tradition that opposes the superficiality of style to the 'depth ontology' (Miller 1994). As Emma Tarlo also noticed, 'people manipulate objects such as clothes in defining themselves […] [But] our clothes define us as much as we define ourselves through our clothes, and differences in dress do not merely suggest that 'we' are different from them, but also naturalise these differences and thereby become the very basis and proof of difference itself' (1996: 318).

This of course does not mean that the young men were *acting* in the sense we generally give to this term, and that all the 'modern stuff' was just a theatre ending at the end of the day, leaving space for more authentic identities. The young men of the Praça were not actors who at the end of the show put off their baseball hats, sunglasses, and Nike shoes to wear a horned mask and become again 'true' Bijagó. Affirming that modernity is a question of fashion does not mean claiming that is a matter of owning a certain kind of clothes. Rather that it is, as the term style might suggest, a 'matter of embodied practices, successfully performed' (Ferguson 1999: 98).

Even though it is true that a style is not the exclusive result of individual choices and that people are also in part limited by economical and social conditioning, a style is clearly at least in part an activity, a motivated process of self-making: it is in this sense that we might employ the idea of 'cultivation of style' (Ferguson 1999: 101), a conscious as well as unconscious process involving 'both deliberate self making and structural determinations, as well as such things as unconscious motivations and desires, aesthetic preferences, and the accidents of personal history' (*ibid.*).

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[135] The notion of 'performance of modernity' has been proposed by Louisa Schein (1999). However, see *infra*.

The notion of ‘performance’ has a long genealogy in social theory, and has been employed in various sub-branches of social science. One of the most influential theories has been recently developed in gender and queer studies, especially by Judith Butler (1990). Butler’s hugely influential theory, proposes a non-essentialist approach to gender identity, focussing on the relevance of daily practices for the production and reproduction of social meanings and categories. In other terms, Butler sees the constitution of gender as performative, that is to say not ontologically (or biologically) determined, but produced by cultural processes, or as she writes: ‘having no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’ (1990: 139). Gender identity becomes a defined sex role through individual continuous performance: there is no essence, origin, or reality before or outside of the enactment of a multiplicity of performances. It is the recurring regularity in performances that makes certain social norms acquire their authority, their aura of inevitability (Schein 1999: 369). Individuals are made different through their performances. One of the most controversial aspects of Butler’s theory is the issue of the status of the individual in the face of the ‘social order’. In Butler’s formulation, the achievement of a gender identity through performance is depicted rather than a mechanical reproduction of social structure – the hegemonic sex roles – as a form of variably reflexive self-fashioning, opening space for criticism, variation and subversion (Butler’s ironic *gender trouble*), even though this does not imply a free self creation for the individual – who enacts his performance in a situation of ‘duress’, of economic and social limitations.

Louisa Schein (1999), largely drawing on Butler’s theory, proposed in her ethnography of the Miao of China, an interesting approach to local modernity, claiming that ‘the modern is usefully thought of not only as a context in which people make their lives, nor only as a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity, but also as powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance’ (1999: 361). The idea of the performance of modernity does not mean that people are producing ‘simple acts of conformity or assimilation to the dominant modernizing norm. Stated most boldly, by performing modernity *as Miao*, these actors refused their consignment to the role of impoverished, rural, tradition bearers and attempted to make membership in the prestigious category of modernity less exclusive, more negotiable’ (1999: 372). In another field of social analysis, also drawing on Butler’s theory, some theorists have

recently proposed a non-essentialist approach to subcultural theory (Thornton 1995, Muggleton 2000). Evans, for example, claimed that all subcultural 'identities are not ontologically distinct or pre-existent, but are brought into being, constructed and replayed through everyday actions, dress, adornment and other cultural practices' (quoted in Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003a: 11).

All these approaches emphasise the enacted, stylistic, aesthetic nature of social formations and individual identity. However, some limitations have to be made. Neither I nor the theorists I have quoted thus far maintain that individuals are free floating in an ocean of signs which they can appropriate at will and use to build an identity *ad hoc*. James Ferguson himself wrote:

> Cultural style is first of all a performative competence... thus it is not simply a matter of choosing a style to fit the occasion, for the availability of such choices depends on internalized capabilities of performative competence and ease that must be achieved, not simply adopted. Cultural style thus implies a capability to deploy signs in a way that positions the actor in relation to social categories (1999: 96)

Any social context, as well as the transnational market of culture, has its rules and constraints. What I am trying to do here is to develop a notion of partially shared cultural meanings that might fit the context I am describing, giving up a rigid and inappropriate notion of 'culture': but it is equally important to underline the limitations and constraints that push young people towards a specific style that is not entirely invented locally. It is relevant in this sense to keep in mind the 'area that lies between the micro-sociological logic of the social situation and the global and regional structures of the political economy' (Ferguson 1999: 99). Modernity in Bubaque is not just a style one can change or adopt at ease, rather it is a strategy of survival in a power-saturated environment with the elders at the village on one side, and the postcolonial government, Europe and the 'West' on the other.

Imagination and fascination on the global scene

The anthropology of consumption, as well as the social theories emphasising the performed nature of identity, offer a valuable insight into the modalities of appropriation, the local re-elaboration of meanings, highlighting the creativity of local

context facing the growing spread of specific commodities and lifestyles. What could be criticized in these approaches however, is their purely semiotic approach to culture, picturing consumption (of ideas, commodities etc..) as a purely conscious semiotic phenomenon, and in consequence depicting individuals as ‘rational actors’ strategically managing commodities and signs. There is an undeniable idealism in all this, splitting culture and power in a too abrupt manner, and making us overlook important aspects of contemporary transcultural flows of signs and commodities.

To counterpoint these approaches, we have to address the question of the value which is attributed to specific goods and lifestyles in the practices of cross-cultural consumption. A value, I underline, which cannot be ascribed only to their utility in local practices of distinction. We have to focus on the fascination with certain commodities and representations, something that has to do not only with the local economy of signs, but with the global one as well.

I came upon this specific issue when considering the materiality of youth modernity in Bubaque. In fact, besides local strategies of distinction, there was another important – and apparently banal - reason for wearing sunglasses at night. Something easily overlooked by intellectual and semiotic approaches. It was *cool*. Clothes and goods were enjoyed for their quality *in themselves*. This is an important issue, because it allows us to picture young men not only as conscious social actors – evaluating their practices and goods as symbols or signs -, but also as living persons, following dreams and fantasies. Seduced by the materiality of things, people with a taste and a sense of beauty, seduced by certain ideas. In fact, the issue of value must be equally investigated – as I proposed in chapter 2 – for the spread of ideas and concepts, like development, civilization, progress and modernity. What is their appeal besides their social utility, and where does their allure come from?

In terms of ethnographic representation, considering both aspects of the question (the signifying intent and the seduction) allows us to give a three-dimensional picture of the young men: conscious actors appropriating modernity, but also young men *seduced* by modernity. The appeal of the modern has to do with social strategy, indeed. Nevertheless, we cannot forget in our analysis that ‘modernity’ has also the shape of a dream, that it has to do with fascination, imagination, and coolness as well. On this subject Friedman wrote:

> […] surely, even the most fashion conscious of cultural elites get more out of their consumption than social recognition. They also enjoy their distinctive life spaces in themselves and find a sense of fulfillment in the realization of their fantasies of themselves. My Jaguar is more than a show for others, it is a world of pleasure in itself (Friedman 1991: 158).

This apparently banal insight opens up a mighty theoretical problem. The problem of taste: why do young men like what they like and chose what they chose? The issue is extremely relevant for the purpose of this work, for even if we acknowledge the creative local consumption and the shift of meanings, when young men die for a pair of Nike sneakers, the fact remains that they are craving for a pair of Nike sneakers, and not for a Japanese kimono or an Indian sari. Even if we can agree that the world is by no way homogenized (or McDonaldized [Ritzer 2000]), still we have to account for cultural phenomena like the huge lines of people at first McDonald's opening in Moscow (Ritzer 2000: 6), for the fascination with specific lifestyles or goods, and for their global diffusion. We have, in other terms, to acknowledge the presence of icons.

A criticism of Sperber

Anthropologist Dan Sperber has recently applied the notion of epidemiology and contagion of ideas to cultural transmission and transformation[136]. In his pathbreaking text of 1996, *La contagion des idées*, Sperber underlines the relevance of an epidemiological approach to culture:

> […] epidemiological models, whatever their differences, have in common the fact that they explain population-scale macro-phenomena, such as epidemics, as the cumulative effect of micro-processes that bring about individual events, such as catching a disease. In this, epidemiological models contrast starkly with 'holistic' explanations, in which macro-phenomena are explained in terms of other macro-phenomena – for instance, religion in terms of economic structure (or conversely) (Sperber 1996: 2).

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[136] Gabriel Tarde, a sociologist working at the end of the XIX century, was probably the first to offer a similar approach (see Tarde 1890), conceiving culture – and social life in general - as the cumulative effect of countless processes of inter-individual transmission through imitation (Sperber 1996: 3)

According to Sperber, the epidemiological metaphor might prove useful to understand the spread of ideas, but we have to recognize its limits. First, obviously, cultural representations are not pathological (Sperber 1996: 25). Secondly, while pathogenic agents (like viruses or bacteria) 'undergo a mutation only occasionally, representations are transformed almost every time they are transmitted and remain stable only in a certain limiting cases. A cultural representation, in particular, is made up of many versions, mental and public ones. Each mental version results from the interpretation of a public representation which is itself an expression of a mental representation' (*ibid.*). And further '…an epidemiology of representations is first and foremost a study of their transformations' (1996: 58).[137] An epidemiology of representations is not about representations, but about the process of their distribution (Sperber 1996: 29). The ultimate question however, observes Sperber, is: 'Why are these representations (Sperber refers generally to cultural representations as opposed to individual ones, but the issue is obviously wider in trans- and cross- cultural contexts) more successful than others in a given human population?' (Sperber 1996: 49). This is the field of the *epidemiology of representations*. The idea of Sperber at this point is that of a ecological and psychological adaptive efficacy of representations, which might make some of them more likely to spread, to be adopted, to become stabilized and to preserve themselves.

It would be tempting to apply this approach to the spread of 'modernity' among young men in Bubaque. Following this approach, the emergence of a local modernity in Bubaque could have to do with the diffusion of cultural representations, as well as with their appropriation, consumption and expression, producing other public representations. However, I think Sperber's approach is far too limited for our context. In fact, Sperber's appealing examples are taken from small-scale societies – too pure to be compared with the fluidity, the contacts and the heterogeneity of Bubaque. What, then, makes some representations more likely to travel and to impose themselves in the transnational context? Even if we might agree with Sperber on the fact that 'the explanation of a cultural fact – that is the distribution of a representations – is to be

[137] In this respect Sperber's approach differs from other epidemiological and Darwinian approaches to culture, proposing biological models of culture like those put forward for example by Cavalli Sforza and Feldman (1981) and Dawkins (1976), with his theories of the 'memes' as cultural replicators undergoing a process of cultural selection.

sought not in some global macro-mechanism, but in the combined effect of countless micro-mechanisms' (Speber 1996: 54), we cannot avoid thinking that the French anthropologist is probably overlooking the fact that the distribution of representations on the global scene (an issue, to tell the truth, Speber does not consider in his text) is not homogeneous, and therefore that their epidemiology does not depend solely on their psychological 'efficacy'. On this point Sperber argues that 'formal properties of representations (or at least some of them) can be considered as potential psychological properties. Potential psychological properties are relevant to an epidemiology of representations' (1996: 63); and further, more clearly:

> In most of the literature, intra- and inter-individual processes are assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, to ensure, on the whole, the simple and easy circulation of just any conceivable representation. The possibility that human cognitive and communicative abilities might work better on some representations than on others is generally ignored (1996: 65)

But if it might be true that some representations more than others find in individual psychology (moreover: has such a theoretical construct any transcultural validity?) a receptive habit so as to become adopted and stabilized, it is equally true that not all representations are broadcast globally, not all of them are marketed with the same efficacy, not all of them – also for these reasons - become fascinating and tempting fantasies. Sperber's theory seems to assume that the prevalence of one representation, its epidemic diffusion is linked only to its characteristic in relation to individual psychological properties and cognitive processes[138], apparently ignoring the enormous importance of the *modality through which a representation is diffused and the wider socio-historical context*. The efficacy of one representation has not to do – if not partially – with its *intrinsic* characteristics, but depends rather on its position in a hugely complex network of representations, which *is* the individual lived world. Not all representations circulate simply and easily, Sperber is right. However, this is not due to a qualitative difference among representations in relation to the specificities of human psychology (?), as much as to the different strategic position, the different relevance of some representations in a specific time and space and in a complex and discontinuous

[138] A similar perspective has been applied by Pascal Boyer to religious ideas (1994, 2000, 2001).

network of representations. Moreover, the social position of the enunciator is as – and maybe even more - important as the content of the enunciation to define its relevance, and its value. The *what* is perhaps less important then the *who* and the *how*. Authority and charisma are important features of communicative processes, as well of course as individual reception, which is always however a creative and synthetic process[139].

A similar criticism to Sperber's theory of counterintuitive representations, has been put forward by Carlo Severi, underlining that the salience of a representation is not linked merely to its *semantic* counterintuitivity, but also to its *pragmatic* counterintuitivity: 'a salience of the modes and of the conditions in which the memorable word has to be uttered and interpreted. The existence of these two levels, and the necessity to keep them separate, which might be overlooked in static and homogenous situations, becomes acute and of crucial importance to interpret cultural conflicts (Severi 2004: 242-3). The dualisms of modernity and its symbols and representations have found a fertile ground among young men in Bubaque: true. But this can be imputed to a multiplicity of factors, some linked to the local context (the susceptibility, to continue the epidemic metaphor: namely, the colonial legacy as re-enacted in postcolonial class distinctions; the efficacy as liberating tools in local generation dynamics, its relevance in defining status in urban context…), others to the *value* – and seductive power – of these representations as they are globally diffused (their association to the 'rich' world, its being linked to the media, its power). Both sides must be underlined in describing the 'epidemiology of modernity' – local uses but also its characteristic and the global vectors of its diffusion. If we want to talk of modernity as an epidemic, what we have to investigate is not whether 'modernity' has inherent features which make it easily adopted by human cultures: rather we should explore its spread under the sign of possible strategic use on the one hand, and fascination and imagination on the other. We cannot in any way understand young men in Bubaque without considering the appeal of 'the modern' (as locally defined, of

[139] It must be underlined that in the more recent essays included in his 1996 book (like chapter 5, for e.g.), Sperber introduces new theoretical elements in the description of the processes of cultural transmission and change, like his interesting theory of cultural attractors for instance, which move in the direction of a more contextual, historical and individual approach to the diffusion of representations. However, if on the one hand this improvement makes his original 1985 essay on the epidemiology of representation more complete and complex, it also causes Sperber's theoretical position to be less clearly distinguishable from other anthropological approaches to cultural dynamics.

course), and to do so we must include in our analysis the work of imagination, the fancying of possibilities, the dream, as salient social processes, as distinctive features and motivations of human action.

Fascination and adventure

Without claiming the existence of a 'western hegemonic culture', or of a 'global culture', we cannot overlook that the transnational circulation of meanings, representations and goods does not happen on a homogeneous ground, and not all cultural forms are equally represented or have the same capacity to impose themselves. This has to do both with local history as well as with the unequal distribution of power. In this sense, there are no free-floating cultural meanings, all equally appealing and represented. There are *some* of them – we might say that they are heterogeneous, of different origins, often unexpected (like kung-fu movies and hip-hop style in Bubaque), and that no idea – as well as meaning or good – travels without mutating, shifting, and transforming itself. Still the presence of *these specific* elements and not of others, has to be accounted for. Obviously, the idea of a single standard for consumption is unfit to describe the proliferation and mediatization of a multiplicity of lifestyles and the advertisement of goods associated to them (Ritzer 2001: 212-215). If standards are set globally (and they are), they are multiple, proposing different lifestyles for their consumers. The 'world system' is far from being coherent, but is 'constituted of global flows of various types, paralleling each other, intersecting, streaming in opposite directions, growing in strength, drying up at times' (Weyland 1993: 46). Appadurai powerfully caught this feature of the 'global' with his well known theory of the five 'scapes' (1990, 1996). Nevertheless, what we cannot ignore is that commodities, ideas, fashions *do not travel in the global space* randomly. This is not a 'global ecumene'. If Delito wears a baseball hat with the letters NY on it, and not a Scottish kilt, it is not by chance. Actually, he never even saw a Scottish kilt: and if he did, he would probably find it ridiculous. And this has to do with the non-homogeneous character of the global cultural scene, with its discontinuity.

Even though Ritzer claims that 'there are now many different status groups whose lifestyle is 'worthy' of emulation' (2001: 214), it should not be obscured that, in fact,

cosmopolitan styles in urban Africa *are* dominated by Western and Western-derived cultural forms; and that such cultural domination is hardly an accident (Ferguson 1999: 108). A matter, writes rightly Ferguson, that is not well captured in 'recent anthropological images of a "global cultural ecumene" or an "intercontinental traffic in meaning" (1999: 109). If there is a net connecting people and places all over the world it is a discontinuous one, with highly connected relevant hubs, dead end terminations, and one-way connections. If there is something like the 'global', it is a messy terrain, made of peaks and black holes, centres, satellites and far off peripheries, big stars and tiny asteroids. Most recent anthropological work on globalisation and transnational connections focuses on the appropriation of modernity as a core social process. This cannot be denied, but it is, I think, a partial truth.

When we move beyond purely strategic and semiotic perspectives (rational intent to communicate or distinguish oneself), we have to account for the *local value of modernity in itself*. A pair of jeans is jealously cared for and proudly displayed not only because it is a sign, but also because it is a value-sign. A pair of jeans would not be 'cool' otherwise. Certain commodities, attitudes, practices I found among young men in Bubaque, cannot then be thought *only* in terms of strategic appropriation. They are cultural representations whose local value comes from a specific feature of young men's social imagination. Particular elements have their value as signs and as elements of taste as they are embedded in the peculiar worldview I have described in chapters 3 and 4: urban oriented, Europe oriented, based on concepts of civilization and progress. As these elements, in the practical reality of the Praça, work as powerful attributions of status and social distinction (and as such are displayed by young men), they have another ultimate referent (Europe, the West) that makes these representations appealing. The attraction of the modern – points out Donald Donham – becomes clear only when such ideas are placed within the context of global capitalism – with all its gaping differences in power, wealth, and life chances (2002: 255). Western things are appealing and fascinating objects because they stand for something else, they are symbols. 'You do not buy a pair of jeans, you buy a lifestyle'. They are symbols of a fancied world of wealth, luxury and fame that is a product of imagination. The coolness of 'western things' comes from an act of imagination, from their being the solid and material traces of a dream, from their coming from an imaginative horizon. Commodities are fetishized

through an imaginative investment, they are the sensuous materialization of a dream, of a fantasy of pleasure and wealth.

In other terms, if modernity in Bubaque is for young men a ‘cultural style’, this does not mean that it is *merely* a signifying practice. Modernity is also a *fascinating identity*, an appeal, the product of a work of imagination. As such it is not only a set of traits to be displayed to claim a difference, but also a powerful model to perform an identity upon, something to aspire to. We cannot overlook the fact that youth style not only produces distinctions, but, through a deliberate self-fashioning, displays similarities. It is, in other terms, also a ‘practice signifying alliances’. Youth style reveals both a will for distinction and a will for integration: on the one hand it distinguishes urban young men from the village life of the elders; but on the other, it produces and proclaims an alliance with Euro-American modernity *as they configure it* and as it is mediated by a multiplicity of means, both historical and contemporary (the media, tourism, development agencies etc.). The cultural style performed by young men must be interpreted as both refusal and aspiration, negation and imagination. Youth modernity is not therefore merely a style performed *in loco*, but the product of imagination and aspiration to a ‘somewhere else’, a necessarily incomplete performance, or better, a performance characterised by the longing for something else which can only be fancied.

If on the one hand style is an intentional communication, it is also a model for the young men, though not in the sense of a hegemonic production of subjectivity, but as a seduction for their identities. In the end, the term to describe the relationship between the young and global modernity is probably *seduction* rather than *ideology*[140]. Seduction, Baudrillard maintains, is the ultimate power of the sign: the notion of Spectacle, characterising post-modern societies, defines a non-problematic relationship with the image, a relationship of non-critical adherence which can go as far as fascination (see for example Baudrillard 1981). However, what I am proposing here – partially disagreeing with Baudrillard’s pessimism - is an insight into the relationship between fascination – and seduction – and imagination. Fascination, as I intend it, describes the relationship between individuals and representations (read also objects, images…) in a less automatic and deterministic manner than the Marxist notion of

[140] As Ernst Gellner claimed several years ago, an ideology is a system of ideas with a powerful sex appeal (2005).

ideology. It is a transitory and not necessarily essential influence: a weak form of power. And it is so because fascination, I claim, needs a subjective imaginative investment, and the work of imagination – despite all its determinants and constrictions – is still a powerfully creative act, strongly individual and, what is more important, with unpredictable outcomes. The imaginary can be a vector of political analysis, a path to independence and transformation. This is why I cannot foresee future research on local realities in these times of transnational connections that does not focus on the faculty of imagination[141].

Several authors working on the production of locality in transnational contexts have in fact underlined the central importance of the 'work of imagination'. Brad Weiss recently wrote that 'one of the more compelling developments in contemporary sociocultural anthropology is its increasing attention to the imagination' (2002: 93). And further: 'From the most spectacular fantasies to the most mundane reveries, imagining the world as it is and as it might be seems to be a rapidly expanding form of activity' (*ibid.*). The role of fantasy and imaginative practices becomes 'essential to the very definition of reality as it is perceived and encountered' (Weiss 2002: 97). The position of the young men of Bubaque (both in relation to the world of the villages, to the urban elites, and to the 'West') depends on how, as Weiss claims, they inhabit global fantasies such as development, modernity, etc. In this process of appropriation of the ideas and categories of the modern, imagination, according to the path shown, among others, by Arjun Appadurai (1996), must be acknowledged as a social practice of great importance for understanding the local production of meaning and the shaping of global categories (See also Ivy 1995; Weiss 2002; Favero 2003). The concepts of 'imagined worlds' and 'possible lives' (Appadurai 1990, 1996) are here illuminating:

> I would like to call 'imagined worlds' … the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imagination of persons and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds … This offer a series of

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[141] Literature on imagination is extremely wide. Several outstanding scholars gave valuable contribution to the exploration and significance of this human faculty. Just to make a few names, we cannot forget Jacques Le Goff, Cornelius Castoriadis, Gilbert Durand, Michel Maffesoli, Slavoj Žižek. One of the most interesting definition and insight has been proposed to my judgement by historian Jacques Le Goff, in the preface to his memorable *L'imaginaire médiéval* (1985).

elements (characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places (Appadurai 1990: 299)

The modern is for young men a social practice, I insisted upon this in the last chapters. Nevertheless, it is also a dream, an act of imagination, and an aspiration. It is for its imaginative feature that it is not only socially and economically appealing, but also fascinating. Because it points to a 'utopia', to a product of fantasy. If we do not understand modernity *also* as such for the young men, as a myth, we will not be able to understand its appeal and the power of its – local – representations and symbols. We must in this sense pay attention to those aspects of individual life often overlooked in the social sciences: 'human creativity, transgressive possibility, and imaginative play' (Crapanzano 2004: 6): it is at this level that the appeal of the modern, the dream of the 'West', of emigration – however illusionary it may be – must be described and understood. In Crapanzano's terms, as an imaginative horizon (2004). 'My concern – writes compellingly Crapanzano – is with the role of what lies beyond the horizon, with the possibilities it offers us, with the licit and illicit desires it triggers, the plays of power it suggests, the dread it can cause – the uncertainty, the sense of contingency, of chance – the exaltation, the thrill of the unknown, it can provoke' (2004: 14). In a recent and inspiring text the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli makes some steps in this direction, acknowledging the 'will for escape' as a distinctive and productive feature of human beings (Maffesoli 1997). 'L'aventure – he writes - ainsi que les imaginaires, les rêves et autres fantasmes sociaux, est un filon caché parcourant l'ensemble du corps social' (Maffesoli 1997 : 39). In this sense, he proposes to develop a 'sociologie de l'aventure'[142].

The phantasm of the West[143], this product of the work of imagination, operates like what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) called a 'line of deterritorialization' inside the dynamics of local representations. It is of little importance in this sense if the spectres of colonialism or neocolonialism still partially haunt these fantasies and dreams. The

[142] The concept of *aventure* is a very meaningful one in describing the features of the *imagination migratoire* in African urban context. Key case is that portrayed in by Gandoulou, among young men in Congo (1989a).

[143] For the concept of phantasm, I am greatly indebted to the brilliant article of my friend and colleague Paolo Favero (2003).

horizon of imagination is by no means diminished in its strength, in its motivating and unsettling power.

Without considering here philosophical issues concerning human nature, I think we can formulate the working hypotheses that if youth style in Bubaque is undoubtedly also a signifying practice and a strategy to gain cultural capital, its ultimate value comes from the imaginative investment of young men into a 'somewhere else', a land of dream, an horizon of *aventure*, vague and, for this very reason, extremely appealing and attached to material objects. Objects to grasp at, to care after, to accumulate as possibly the only palpable trace. Dreams made of things. Things made of dreams. The idea that seduction might be the right way to describe the relationship between youth and 'modernity', allows us – I think – to highlight both aspects of the relationship: there is here a double movement of fascination on one side and semantic and social strategy on the other which has to be underlined so as not to picture young men either as utterly passive subjects or as hyper-rational social actors.

Modernity is without a doubt an important trait of 'global imaginary', and in Africa also a legacy of European colonial domination, as well as a reflection of actual unequal distribution of power and wealth at the global level: but to recognize its relevance for people living in specific places, we have to understand how, from their specific positions, people *imagine the global*, how – as Weiss claims (2002) – global fantasies are inhabited locally, and not only how global imaginary comes to them. This is a key feature of localization processes going on throughout the globe. As Brad Weiss claims in a remarkable passage:

> Fantasies are *real* and they are poised […] at precisely that intersection of global possibility and local limitation. […] marginality and exclusion are *necessary* features of the fantastic. This is not because imaginative practice 'functions' to compensate for the inadequacies of a deterritorialized existence, but because locality itself is situated – and thus reconfigured – through its relationship to what is recognized and treated as a more potent, forceful and *true* world. It is this reconfiguring that depends upon distance and enactment, exclusion and inclusion. It is only by inhabiting these imagined worlds in the intimacy and concreteness of specific social frameworks that locality is produced, global forms are constituted, and fantasy is brought to life (2002: 119-20).

8. Criticism of the state, marginality, and the desire to migrate

> An urban Africa that continues to be haunted by ideas of modernity that are harder and harder to make sense of in relation to the actually existing present (Ferguson 1999: 21).

> Le sens de la notion de globalisation, du moins en tant que concept analytique, est encore discuté dans certains cercles. Mais rares sont ceux qui pourraient nier que l'une des caractéristiques globales qui définissent le monde actuel de Chicago au Cap, en passant par Calcutta et Caracas, est le sentiment de crise qui entoure le malaise de la jeunesse (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000 : 92).

In the last chapters I focused on the local strategies young men were putting in place to appropriate and use to their own advantage the discourses, institutions, and symbols of modernity. In conclusion to the last chapter though, I pinpointed that, if appropriation and agency must be central, as cultural phenomena, to our analysis, this should not make us overlook those features of imagination that among young men continued to point at the 'West', at Europe. If young men supported their search for status in the context of the Archipelago with 'modern' discourses and practices, they had to assess, at a higher level, their value and their situation by comparison with what the idea of modernity primarily refers to: an Euro-American model of development and standard of life. Assuming this model as a reference triggered among young men feelings of defeat, marginality, and self-pity, as well as burning desires for mobility.

Guinea-Bissau in dire straits

What also encouraged this self-perception of the young men during my fieldwork, was also a particularly critical situation of Guinea-Bissau. As I have shown, after independence and for about a decade, in Guinea-Bissau 'progress' and 'development' seemed at hand in the euphoria which followed the struggle for political liberation. Structural adjustments and political instability, however, determined since the mid 80s a dual move in urban Guinea-Bissau, quite common in neo-liberal regimes (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 98). On the one hand, the country opened itself to commodities, ideologies and media, while simultaneously unemployment and general economic weakness started to emerge. The increasing availability of signs and goods was accompanied by the general difficulty or impossibility to have real access to them for most part of the population: the breach between the actual and the possible (in the words of Brad Weiss 2002: 100) was widening. This feeling of disenchantment brought about by the weakening of the initial élan of post-independence ideologies and the growing relevance of market economy, is powerfully caught in Flora Gomes' film *Udju azul di Yonta* (Yonta's blue eyes, 1992) portraying the city of Bissau in the early 90s.

My fieldwork in particular, took place in the years following 1998/1999 civil war, which impoverished the country and its inhabitants, almost completely destroying existing infrastructures. The 1998/9 conflict was propagandised to the people in Guinea-Bissau as a sort of liberation struggle from Nino's oppressive and authoritarian regime, as a step towards democracy and, hopefully, towards a glorious and fecund period of freedom, development and change. Nino Vieira – one of the original leaders of PAIGC who took the power in 1980 with a military coup deposing Luís Cabral – was accused of genocide, mass killing, torture and violence against his political opponents. Nino escaped arrest by fleeing to Portugal, but the charges were maintained, even though a real trial was never instituted and the former president was never put on trial despite the request of the judges in Guinea-Bissau[144].

The war obviously brought about destruction and death, but after the war, the transition to the new government was followed with great expectations and hope. *Guiné*

[144] In a paradoxical and grotesque way, Nino Vieira was eventually re-elected president of Guinea-Bissau in 2005.

i na lanta, Guinea will raise, people used to say. As is well known, the elections held in November 1999 and January 2000, gave the PRS (*Partido da Renovação Social*) the relative majority of seats in the Parliament, while Koumba Yalá, head of the PRS, was elected president of the republic in a climate of hope and enthusiasm that ended abruptly in a few months as people realised the incapacity of the government to cope with the crisis of the country. Disappointment followed immediately, bringing about a feeling of delusion and a sensation of unstoppable decay.

Actually, the state of Guinea-Bissau has been, during the years of my fieldwork, little more than a 'sociological fiction' (Silva 1997: 73-74). The perception of decay was probably even more acute as it followed a period of optimism: people did not hope anymore that the situation in Guinea-Bissau could improve in the future. It was not, in other terms, a simple political crisis. It was something deeper. As James Ferguson wrote of Zambia, it was a crisis of meaning for people themselves (1999: 14): much of the perception the young men had of their country and of their future must be understood within this wider national experience of "decline".

Juvenal Albino Mango, the secretary of the *Administrador* of the Sector of Bubaque - a functionary of the state in Bubaque since 1984 - gave me in February 2002 a remarkably vivid picture of decay of the state in Guinea-Bissau. The political overthrow of Nino Vieira and the defeat of the PAIGC at the elections, brought about dramatic changes in the administration of the country. As I have recalled, since the beginning of the independence war the PAIGC created a party-based administrative structure, from the wider regional administration to the *comité di tabanka* in the villages (see chapter 4); with the fall of the PAIGC and the rise of the PRS and its leader Yalá, maintained Juvenal, the main cadres were substituted within the regional organization. New men from the PRS were sent from Bissau to occupy the key positions, but at the lower level, neither the structure nor the functionaries changed. The government did not give any indication about how to cope with the men of the PAIGC still occupying their former positions. For this reason, there were frequent political disputes among the functionaries: Juvenal himself – belonging to the PAIGC – was several times accused of inefficiency by the new cadres of the PRS, for no other reason, he claimed, but his political affiliation.

As to the absence of the State, Juvenal gave me an impressive account. First, according to him, there was not any control on the Praça at the urbanistic and census level: there were no maps, nobody knew exactly how many people lived there, neither how many immigrants were there. The state seemed to have lost control of the territory and of its borders. Public security was kept by a police chief who was over 60 years old, with but little will to do something and only one man at his orders. In fact, feelings of insecurity were widely spread in the Praça: when talking about the police, people just shrug their shoulders, while every theft was an occasion to deplore bitterly the absence of the state. Juvenal and the people I talked to had the sensation of having been abandoned by their state. Juvenal himself, though a functionary, complained about his meagre stipend (15.000 CFA per month), and declared that if he could find a better job he would willingly leave his work.

Criminalidade aumenta no sector de Uno[145]

O Administrador do sector de Uno Mamadú Embaló revelou ontem que a criminalidade aumenta cada vez mais no sector de Uno, na região de Bolama e Bijagos na Província Sul da Guiné-Bissau.

O Administrador do sector de Uno Mamadú Embaló revelou ontem que a criminalidade aumenta cada vez mais no sector de Uno, na região de Bolama e Bijagos na Província Sul da Guiné-Bissau. Segundo Mamadú Embaló o aumento da criminalidade deve-se ao facto daquele sector insular do nosso país não dispor das autoridades policiais. Em declaração a imprensa o Administrador do sector de Uno revelou que na semana passada (segunda-feira) um grupo de três indivíduos não identificados, bem armados incendiaram as habitações dos pescadores estrangeiros residentes no sector e pediram-lhes para queixarem nas autoridades locais. Nos últimos tempos tem havido constantes confrontações no arquipélago de Bijagos entre a própria população e entre eles com os pescadores estrangeiros residentes. Mamadú Embaló considerou todos estes actos de confrontações de abusivos e um desafio as autoridades. O que lhe obrigou, depois de confronto entre o referido grupo não identificado com os pescadores estrangeiros residentes, a solicitar o Comando da Policial Ordem Pública (POP) de Bubaque para lhe enviar agentes para poder deter os malfeitores. Mas, mesmo assim não foi possível deter os malfeitores porquanto agentes da policia não conseguiram chegar atempadamente em virtude da distancia que separa a Ilha de Bubaque a de Uno. Aquele responsável asseverou que todo o sector de Uno só dispõe apenas de uma agente de policia idoso que não possui um poder físico para combater os malfeitores e padece

[145] www.guinea-bissau.com, December 17, 2004.

também de deficiência visual. A violência no sector de Uno tem ganhado proporção alarmante que o Administrador do sector disse precisar mais de 15 agentes de policia porquanto a Ilha de Oracan e de Orango grande são "autenticas Califórnia" onde reina recolher obrigatória. Mamadú Embaló garantiu que durante a noite, nas referidas Ilhas, ninguém sai da sua casa porque quem sair a rua será espancado e roubado tudo o que tiver a sua posse. Revelou ainda que a justiça no sector de Uno faz-se de acordo com o uso e costume da população local por "chicotadas".

Albino da Silva

As to health public service, continued Juvenal, there was not absolutely anything, except for the structure of the hospital itself: no doctor, no drugs, and no nurse. There was no resident judge at the court of Bubaque as well: after the conflict between Yalá and the judges, they all went to Bissau and did not come back. The President of the region himself, a few days after his nomination, left for the Mecca on a pilgrimage, and, after three months, he had not come back yet.

The lack of contact with the elite in Bissau – a typical feature of Guinea-Bissau postcolonial governments and one of the reasons for their perpetual crisis and inefficiency (see chapter 4) – had become even more acute after the war, commented Juvenal. There were no regular visits of the deputies elected to represent the region: after the campaign, they did not show up anymore in the Archipelago, with great delusion of the people, mainly in the Praça, where people followed more closely the political life of the country. Yalá visited Bubaque only once, during his campaign, promising to the people of the Archipelago a bridge connecting Bubaque to the close island of Rubane and from there to the mainland.

Quite on the same tone the second secretary of the *Administrador*, Bolì – a Mancanha man – complained about the government during a conversation we had in March 2002. According to his analysis, Guinea-Bissau was a rich country, with many resources, but the absence and inefficiency of the state prevented their exploitation. 'People – lamented - fish, cultivate rice, or collect the palm fruit, but it is just for their subsistence, not for exportation'. The main *j'accuse* was to the politicians in Bissau, who used public money for their own purposes, to enrich their families and not for the good of the people. State employees were underpaid, and the administration did not receive anything from the central government. 'Now and then –commented Bolì

ironically – they send us a ruler, a typing machine, and that's all, all the rest ends up in their pockets. This coffer you see is empty: we do not have anything to put inside!'.

As to my experience, in Bubaque one had the perception that in Guinea-Bissau there was merely the skeleton of a state: everything was there nominally (the ministries, the regional administration, the candidates, the parliament), but it was in a condition of complete paralysis and inefficiency. There was the seat of the administration, the functionaries etc, but – as a skeleton without muscles – they could not do anything. No control at all of the territory and the people.

Facing this situation, nostalgic sentiments towards the past emerged at times in the conversations, especially with older people. Some of them imputed to Nino Vieira the cause of the underdevelopment of Guinea-Bissau, reconsidering the presidency of Luís Cabral, who had contributed to the development of the Archipelago, building basic infrastructures. 'When Luís Cabral was president – Julio told me – there was electric power not only in the Praça but in every village of the island, 24 hours a day! Nowadays it seems a fairytale. The Hotel Bijagó, and the street, everything was built during Luís Cabral presidency. What now? With Nino everything stopped, everything was let fall in ruins. The new government didn't do anything. I voted for Yalá and the PRS at the last elections: things seemed to change. But things did not change, everything is always the same. I will not vote in the next elections'.

However, nostalgic feelings went even further. The complaints about the corruption and inefficiency of the political elites surprisingly brought about nostalgia for the Portuguese colonial government[146]. 'The Portuguese, I was often told especially by the cadres of the public administration, had a rigid legislation, but at least it worked: nowadays everybody does as he likes, and the authority of the state is null'.

Bolì for example, made a real apology of the colonial period:

> Everything worked better. Bissau was beautiful, light and water all day long, very clean, there was no rubbish in the streets. In the main avenues people walked along, looking at the shop-windows, and nobody stole. If the police found you with something new in your hands, and you couldn't show the proof of payment, they brought you back to the shop to ask the manager. Everybody had a job. Even here in

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[146] This phenomenon is not unique to Guinea-Bissau, as other authors have pinpointed similar attitudes towards the colonial past in other African countries (see for e.g. Werbner 1998: 1). See for a similar situation in Mozambique, Pimentel Texeira 2004: 325-329.

Bubaque, people were forced to work, that's true, but they were paid. For the palm oil factory the Portuguese went to the villages and forced the young to work, but then they paid them, they gave them money and rice. It was much better when there were the Portuguese.

The young men and the state

In fact, the war and the persistent political instability of the country heavily affected its economic performance, including the flow of aid. Widespread poverty in the urban classes was not only a factor of social instability, but was also generating scepticism about the new democracy and its capacity to cope with the future. As to young people, while the opportunities for young secondary school graduates to pursue higher studies decreased, the number of unemployed young people increased at an alarming rate as the state – the principal employer of the *diplomées* – was cutting off its expenditures. In urban areas throughout the country young people seemed constrained to remain young (dependent, deficient, single etc.) with no easy access to wages, marriage, and autonomous residence.

This is a typical situation in contemporary urban Africa (see for e.g. Antoine *et alii* 2001, Biaya 2000). As Donald O'Brien underlined, commenting on the situation of youth in Africa in the 80s and 90s, the common denominator is that 'the young people have finished schooling, are without employment in the formal sector, and are not in a position to set up an independent household' (1996: 57). And he continues:

> Economic independence, to have enough resources to marry and set up one's own family, is the fundamental aspiration of youth, in West Africa as elsewhere in the world. In contemporary West Africa, however, for most young people the realization of these aspirations seems to be a near impossibility (Ibid. 58)

Nicholas Argenti portrayed the young in Africa as 'liminal individuals caught between generations and between historical stages of their communities in an anarchic limbo pregnant with foreboding signs of entropy' (2002: 150). The same author maintains that:

> In more recent times, there was an expectation that modernity entailed a new trajectory: living at home as a child; attending school; leaving school and finding work. For many this was just a hope, but it

was at least, a norm. In the last decades, with the decline in the formal economy, we have a new trajectory: school-'youth'-uncertainty. Youths live with unemployment, some chances in the informal sector, with risk-taking, and with few expectations that they will achieve the same standard of living as their parents or grandparents (2002: 139)

As a potentially disruptive, anti-authoritarian and violent social force, youth in postcolonial Africa has attracted much attention from scholars[147]. Due to their marginal position in contemporary urban African societies, young people saw their social image transformed from that of *fer de lance de la nation* (Mbembe 1985: 11) in post-independence nationalist rhetoric, to that of mighty social problem, potentially breaking down the social order, *hantise de l'espace publique* (Collignon and Diouf 2001; Weiss 2005: 103). Argenti in this sense has rightly pointed out that:

Brought to prominence by the process of decolonisation and the advent of the nation-state, young people have become a political force in societies where they were previously by-passed in favour of adults and elders. However, the promise of participation in governance made by nascent democracies to their young people – underscored by schooling, meritocratic civil institutions and multi-party politics – is now being frustrated as economic crises worldwide restrict opportunities for employment and anxious national leaders throughout Africa turn against disaffected young people in local communities they now see as potential threats (2002: 150)

Um grito de alerta! [148]

[…]

Qual a herança deixada à juventude guineense dos anos 80 e 90? Que referências, que valores morais, éticos deixados e promovidos pelo partido que deu independência ao território guineense? Deu a independência do território e eterna dependência dos seus filhos à ajuda externa?

O que aprenderam as crianças e os jovens guineenses, hoje homens, políticos, intelectuais, empresários, muitos deles falhados? Que recompensa tiveram os antigos combatentes?

A juventude guineense, os jovens guineenses, aprenderam que para ter direito à formação, (direito consagrado na carta das Nações Unidas), têm que pagar a um funcionário também ele miserável devido ao magro e invisível salário, aprenderam que para usarem as roupas da moda têm que se aproximar de um

[147] See among others Bayart, Mbembe and Toulabor 1992; O'Brian 1996; Werbner and Ranger 1996; Mbembe 1985, Diouf 2003, De Boeck and Honwana 2000, Collignon et Diouf (eds) 2001, Honwana and De Boeck 2005, De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 10, Comaroff and Comaroff 2005.

[148] This letter, dated May 11, 2004, was published in an Internet forum on Guinea-Bissau, at http://didinho.no.sapo.pt/eseaguinebissauserecusaadesenvolverse.htm

dirigente ou de um governante que ostente um "alto caro", como se diz na Guiné. Os pais aprenderam a não ver e a se calar para poderem receber dos amantes das filhas, um mísero saco de arroz e alguns géneros alimentícios.

Os jovens aprenderam ainda que para prosseguirem os estudos têm que comprar a "bolsa de estudos", outrora concedida. Aprenderam que para serem conhecidos e poderem ter um carro e ter uma casa e uma vida condigna a única saída é fazer política, pois através da política, podem vir a ser ministros, directores..., na medida em que basta formar um partido ou ser-se líder de um partido para se ascender, e doravante ser-se considerado um possível, provável dirigente de qualquer coisa....

Os jovens guineenses aprenderam também e sobretudo que só se pode ascender economicamente, ser-se alguém respeitado, fazendo política ainda que de política nada percebam. Aprenderam isto e muito mais.

Os enfermeiros aprenderam a vender os medicamentos do hospital aos doentes que deles teriam direito, para sobreviverem. Os funcionários públicos aprenderam que só com "sucu di bás" , vulgo suborno, podem resolver e encaminhar um assunto do seu serviço para o qual são supostamente pagos.

Os taxistas aprenderam que não prestam nenhum serviço, mas sim fazem um favor a quem lhes paga para ser levado até a um destino qualquer, mas nunca o destino desejado.

Como ensinar os jovens guineenses que há outras vias para se tornar um cidadão digno e consequentemente um povo respeitado e ser respeitado pelos outros?

[…]

Maria Domingas Tavares Pinto (Zinda Pinto)

Young people in the Praça showed a critical and disenchanted attitude towards the government that they held responsible for the miserable condition of Guinea-Bissau: the boys of Bubaque accused the politicians of being incompetent in leading the country, of making their own interests with public money while leaving the people to themselves. 'They come here by plane, parade in the streets by car only when there is an election. Then they disappear, they abandon us' – people used to tell me.

Facing the inability of Yalá to restore a situation of political stability, young people were among the most ferocious critics of the State. They were all competent political commentators, informed about the parties and their candidates, as well as about the latest political news. They were also pessimistic about a real political change and disappointed by the general and continuing inefficiency of the state, and by the rumours of corruption. 'Things won't change, anyway' everybody kept telling me, '*Guiné I ka na lanta mas*'.

In this vein, Xarifo told me:

You always hear 'I will be president to free the people', 'I will be president to free the land of the Bijagó'. But when you get there you just eat money. You don't remember about the people you left behind. This is how the politicians do in Guiné. I think this is not a good thing. When you say that you are going to free the people, I think you have to keep your promise. You have to do what you told to the people, what you promised to the people. It is just during the campaign that they come. They say 'in front of you all, if I will be elected I will support you, I will put a water pump in the land of the Bijagó, I will do this, I will do that…' But until now, until now there is not even one water pump. 'I will give you electric light', they say, but there is not even one street lamp here in Bubaque.

Beto, as many other young men of the Praça, voted for Yalá, but he was totally disappointed, and claimed that he would not vote for him in the next elections: 'He had four years to change the things and he did not do anything!'. He frequently remarked bitterly during our conversations that besides the culture of the village, what truly prevented development in Guinea was the government: 'They all steal and nobody thinks about the development of Guiné'. According to several young men in the Praça in fact, there could be money for everybody, but the corruption of the men in charge created an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities: if on the one hand elders' authority and culture prevented local development, on the other the government, who could promote progress, did not do anything at all.

Ano lectivo na Guiné-Bissau com mês e meio de atraso[149]

Bissau, Guiné-Bissau - O novo ano lectivo, que deveria ter início em Outubro, vai arrancar esta segunda-feira em todas as escolas públicas da Guiné-Bissau depois de o Sindicato Nacional dos Professores (Sinaprof) ter chegado a um acordo com o governo. A decisão foi aprovada recentemente durante o VI Conselho Nacional extraordinário do Sinaprof, que decorreu em Bissau, e onde foram explicados, aos mais de 50 delegados, os acordos que o sindicato celebrou com o executivo do primeiro-ministro Aristides Gomes.

O presidente do Sinaprof, Vençã Mendes, explicou à imprensa que o governo aceitou cumprir com grande parte das reivindicações dos docentes, incluindo o pagamento imediato de três meses de salários em atraso. Segundo Vençã Mendes, o ministro da Educação e Ensino Superior, Tcherno Djaló, garantiu

[149] Panapress (Bissau), November 28, 2005.

que o governo irá desbloquear, dentro de duas semanas, o dinheiro restante, ficando assim "regularizadas todas as exigências" dos professores.

A 19 de Novembro, o secretário-geral do Ministério da Educação, Besna Na Fonta, disse que o montante devido aos professores ascende os 900 milhões de francos CFA (1,37 milhões de euros), adiantando que as divergências com o Sinaprof estavam ultrapassadas e que as aulas começariam ainda no decorrer deste semana. Oito dias antes, a 11 de Novembro, após assumir a pasta da Educação e Ensino Superior, Tcherno Djaló indicou que a "prioridade das prioridades" do seu Ministério era "salvar" o ano lectivo 2005/06, tendo iniciado, de imediato, conversações com o Sinaprof.

Desde Outubro último, quando o anterior governo de Carlos Gomes Júnior estava ainda em funções, que Vençã Mendes insistia no pagamento dos salários em atraso, condicionando a concretização da reivindicação à abertura das aulas. No entanto, o presidente do Sinaprof alertou que caso as reivindicações não sejam satisfeitas, os professores de mais de 160 mil alunos vão suspender imediatamente as aulas.

The young men in Bubaque found themselves in a difficult in-between situation: as they wanted to abandon 'tradition', they discovered that the structures of the state, which might give them a way-out, a chance, representing the 'modern form of power', were corrupted, inefficient, eventually antagonistic to their strategies. Nicholas Argenti (2002), describing the exclusion of the young men from the state in contemporary Africa, has rightly underlined the reproduction from the latter of those very logics of gerontocracy the young wanted to overcome through 'modernity'. Despite its nationalist rhetoric – with its keywords of progress and development – the state was unable to provide not only material help to young people, but also a different, 'national', Guinea-Bissauan identity alternative to the ethnic one they were trying to quit. The collapse of the state was in this sense the political evidence of the breakdown of the grand narrative of national progress and development, something young men had ceased believing in. The national alternative to the ethnic identities the postcolonial regimes tried to create *ex-nihilo*, seemed to have dramatically broke down: young men did not even *hope* in Guinea-Bissau. This should be acknowledged as an evidence of the failure of the postcolonial state in Guinea-Bissau not only to integrate young people in its project, but also to create a working national identity. The government of Guinea-Bissau, despite its recent transformation and hesitant democratisation, not only is still not representative of the people, but is merely a small elite with narrow and personal interests, usually antagonistic with the benefit of the 'governed'. As Nyamnjoh wrote, 'at the level of the

continent, the people's greatest enemy is their leadership' (2000: 12)[150], and this, as I pointed out, is perfectly clear to the young men of the Praça.

Feeling marginal

It is in this specific setting that we have to understand the feelings of most young men I talked to. While refusing village culture as 'non-modern', young men felt marginal and peripheral to the 'modern' centres that inspired their worldview. The idea they all shared was that Guinea-Bissau was an unfortunate place without hope, with a minor position on the global scene: a failure from the point of view of development and progress. They felt excluded from the prevailing international discourse of global integration. Young men in Bubaque experienced the breakdown of the national narrative of progress and development: their pursuit of modernity was completely independent from projects of national progress, bringing *de facto* most of them to imagine their personal development outside the country. From this point of view, young people in Guinea-Bissau were in a liminal position, lingering in a condition of 'non-modernity'. Despite their bold statements, most young men were confined in this wasteland – as Mark Liechty defines it (1995: 187) – between two worlds: the live local experience and the dream of modernity, in the incongruence between their expectations and their real life. Paradoxically, the main effect of 'globalization' on their lives has been a more acute perception of marginality, of the limitations to a local context that is difficult to quit.

This sense of isolation, of disconnectedness, was bitterly expressed by young men. One of the main complaints was emblematically the fact that the Archipelago lacked a safe and rapid means of transportation linking it to the mainland. This obviously contributed to the feeling of isolation, and was also, according to the young men, one of the main causes for the missed development of the islands. The sea, separating the island from the centres of modernity, from a future of progress, was cursed. Some boys spoke about 'our misfortune of being born and of having to live in this sea'. Delito himself, referring to the fate of being born in the Archipelago, used to talk about a

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[150] On the disintegration of the nation state in Africa and the perverse effects of democratisation, see Naerman 2000. See also for a general criticism of the state, Escobar 2004: 226

castigo – a punishment. For young men – always in a difficult economic condition – transport to Bissau could be expensive: the price of the one-way ticket to the capital city was in 2002, 2500 CFA (1 kg of rice was between 270 and 300 CFA).

The lack and expensiveness of the means of transportation also influenced the economic situation of the island, raising prices of imported goods, and reducing the variety of products available. This situation was particularly uneasy for the young men, whose identity depended largely on the display of 'modern' commodities such as brand clothes and accessories. As we have seen in chapter 7, my interlocutors often went to Bissau or asked somebody who went there to buy better and cheaper clothes for them.

The lack of means of transportation was commonly held as another evidence of the disinterest of the state for the people of the Archipelago. At the same time, improvement of means of communication with the mainland was always one of the main points during electoral campaign speeches. These promises were always forgotten after the elections, but were remembered by the people in Bubaque, who bitterly and ironically joked about the *grandeur* of the projects. Koumba Yalá, for example, promised during one of his speeches the construction of a bridge linking Bubaque to the close island of Rubane. To what purpose my interlocutors as myself could not figure out, but this gigantic undertaking always seemed to me as an amazing example of the grotesque-ness of the postcolonial power.

Falta de combustível paralisa centro de pesca artezanal[151]

O Ministro de transporte e telecomunicação Ruir Araújo considerou, por seu lado, que é necessário tirar, mais breve possível, o arquipélago de Bijagos do isolamento total em que se encontra, estabelecendo uma ligação permanente entre as ilhas e o resto do país.

Para isso Ministro Rui Araújo garantiu que o seu Ministério diligenciará junto do banco mundial (BN) e fundo monetária internacional (FMI) no sentido de sinalizar mares da Guiné-Bissau para facilitar a navegação e aquisição de um barco de carreira que ligará Bissau, Bolama e Bubaque.

Para Rui Araújo o navio que liga ilha de Bolama e Bijagos com a capital Guineense não oferece nenhuma segurança e que os seus tripulantes correm risco de vida.

[151] www.guinea-bissau.com, August 4, 2004.

Lamentou o facto de canoas que vão a Bolama e Bijagos transportar um numero elevado de pessoas e bens e transporta no mesmo a gasolina. Na sua opinião, se houver qualquer anomalia não haverá nenhum sobrevivente , porque os marinheiros não poderão comunicar.

A vista dos dois ao arquipélago de Bubaque, Oracan e Bolama visa constatar "IN LOCO" as dificuldades com que se depara a população daquela zona isolada do país.

The feeling of being disconnected from the rest of the world was acute in Bubaque because it was extremely difficult to even communicate with the 'outer world': the telephone worked sporadically and the mail was delivered without regularity. A network of VHF radio created by NGOs and hotel owners linked the islands among themselves and with the continent, but obviously very few people could really have access to it. The only way to receive news from the mainland was by radio[152] and TV[153] (even if there were only a few TV sets on the island, where there was no electric power), but – emblematically – these means allowed one to receive messages and programs, but not to send one's voice beyond the sea. With few possibilities to get out physically from the island, and even to establish a dialogue with the 'outer world', most young men felt absolutely cut off from a world they could grasp in fragments through radio and TV programs, commodities and tales of tourists and travellers, but in which they could not participate in any way.

As in several other postcolonial contexts in Africa, the opening of wider horizons and the multiplication of imagined life possibilities brought about feelings of exclusion and frustration for the young people of Bubaque. On one side we witnessed the widening of the horizons, new stimuli for the imagination; on the other the chronic lack of means. With a stunning similarity with the young Nepali in Kathmandu portrayed by Mark Liechty (1995), young men had the constant feeling that *there was nothing* in Bubaque. I was really struck one day by this self-perception during a casual conversation while I was writing a few notes at a bar. A boy came by and asked me what I was writing. I answered that I was describing the environment of the Praça. He

[152] These were the radio stations broadcast in the Archipelago: Radio Djan Djan (only from 8 to 10 pm, regional, from Bubaque); Radio Bombolon (national); Radio Nacional da Guiné Bissau (national – State owned); RFI Radio France Internationale (international - French); RDP Africa - Radio Difusão Portuguesa (international - Portuguese); Radio Sénégal Internationale (national - Senegal).

looked at me perplexed and stated, depressed: ‘there is nothing there. Nothing’. ‘Well - I replied trying to be supportive - I am writing about young people like you…what are you, nothing?’ ‘Yes – he said sadly – I am nothing’.

In fact, the complaint about their condition was expressed in these terms with regularity during our conversations: ‘there isn’t anything here, there is no way, there are no chances…’. Domingo for example told me once:

> People in Bubaque suffer. They don’t have any good drinking water. They don’t have good transportation. Here in Bubaque we need electric power. We need a bus connecting the villages. We need a market, boats, drinking water, a bus, electric power…we need almost everything.

Young men seemed to have a kind of negative identity: what they did not have constituted their imagined world, defining their local specificity. Most conversations about the condition of young people in Guinea-Bissau focussed on what they did not have, what they missed, what they needed.

Bubaque was assessed by comparison with another place of reference (namely the West as a product of imagination) and the perception of locality rested on an imaginative horizon, a somewhere else, an imagined centre. As I have already underlined, if on the one hand the myth of modernity allowed urban young men to call for their autonomy and independence, on the other it situated the Archipelago and Guinea-Bissau at the beginning or at the margins of a teleological narrative whose ultimate referent is the ‘West’. The perception young men had of Bubaque within the world-system rested on a unilinear evolutionary scale. As Beto often commented sadly, ‘Here in Bubaque, in Guinea, we have a delay of centuries by comparison with Europe’. Mark Liechty (1995) pointed out that the modernist national ideology of development and progress creates a national identity based on external referents: the situation of Guinea-Bissau was evaluated *vis-à-vis* other nations of Africa or Europe, and measured on a scale of development and modernity.

The cluster of sentiments triggered by this self-perception was forcefully expressed by the Kriol term *koitadesa*, denoting the perception of being wretched and hopeless, the surrender to facing the difficulties of life and to the adverse fate. As Wilson Trajano

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[153] Only two TV channels were broadcast in Bubaque: TGB, Televisão da Guiné Bissau, and RTP

Filho (2002, 2004) pointed out, the term is crucial for self-perception in Guinea-Bissau Creole world, just like other similar phrases such as *jitu ka ten* (that could be translated as 'accept things as they are because there is no way to change them), or *n'sufri* (literally 'I suffer', but meaning rather 'I stand, I stand the suffering'). According to Trajano Filho, the attitude denoted by these expressions could be considered as a legacy of the frailty of Portuguese colonial power (see Trajano Filho 2004).

This attitude of despair and victimization most young men manifested, cannot but recall Mbembe's insight into the 'African modes of self-writing' (2002). According to Mbembe, the 'cult of victimization' and the 'narratives of loss' are common features of African conceptions of African self and history. Especially Marxist narratives of the African self, claims Mbembe, privilege victimhood over subjecthood (2002: 245). 'At the heart of the postcolonial paradigm of victimization, – writes Mbembe (2002: 251) – we find a reading of the self and the world as a series of conspiracies […] We are told that African history is essentially governed by forces beyond Africans' control'.

Out of here: the desire to migrate

Arjun Appadurai insightfully remarked that for many societies, modernity is an elsewhere (1996:9). Facing a globalisation that triggers self-perceptions of exclusion and marginality, deluded by the inefficiency of the postcolonial state, all the boys of the Praça thought about migration to Europe as the only possible way out. The fancied migratory paths went towards Bissau, Dakar, Conakry, but everybody's dream was still Europe, centre by contrast with a multitude of peripheries, idealized spring of power and wealth[154].

Europe was for everybody *terra sabi*, a good and beautiful land, where dreams might come true, and one might go to 'form and develop': a chance to obtain a citizenship in modernity. Migration was also concretely pictured as the only real chance to improve one's economic condition. The common idea about Europe was that 'there' it is

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África (Portuguese).

[154] Gardner points to the existence of many centers or cores of capitalism, and of cultural cores others than the West (1995: 273). This might even be true (see also Van Binsbergen, Van Dijk and Gewald 2004: 18-19), but what I am describing are the features of *local* imagination in Bubaque, which actually keeps reproducing the binary distinction between 'the West and the rest'.

extremely easy to find a job and to earn well. Considering the economic difficulties of young people in the context of the Praça, migration also had the goal of economic emancipation. Money, reckoned to be the engine that moved the wheels, was hugely motivating for the young men who wanted to migrate. '*Dinhero i arma di luta aos*' (money is the weapon to fight with nowadays) says bitterly Vicente, the main character of Flora Gomes' film *Udju azul di Yonta* (1992). In this sense, as Katy Gardner has underlined, the migrants, rather than passive subjects facing the changes in international economy, should be pictured as creative consumers of new opportunities (1995: 51).

Migration however, was not considered merely an economic promotion. The experience of migration was also a social promotion, conferring an extraordinary status in the homeland. Those coming back from Europe, I was often told, *e na torna fino*, they come back refined, sophisticated and educated, they always dress well. The new authority and cosmopolitan identity acquired through the European experience by returning migrants also had a huge motivating force for the young men. Europe did not merely mean a better education and more money: it also meant fame, victory, respect and admiration. As Ulf Hannerz wrote, 'the cultural manifestations of center/periphery relationships frequently become entangled with matters of class. To have wealth and power is to have easy access to the metropolis; and it is through one's relationship with the metropolis that one often gains wealth and power in the periphery' (1992: 242). Justin-Daniel Gandoulou, commenting on the situation of the students in Congo, remarked that :

> La fascination quasi-mythique exercée par l'Europe, l'ancienne métropole, et l'image culturelle qu'elle s'est donnée (ou qu'on lui a accorde), font que tout élève africaine considère sa formation globale comme incomplète tant qu'il n'a pas réalisé une partie de ses études en Europe. Le départ vers l'Europe est alors perçu comme un rite de passage, un épreuve complémentaire à la promotion personnelle. A ce titre, les étudiants africains s'inscrivent réellement dans les groupes 'déshérités' qui acceptent l'épreuve à endurer pour répondre à un besoin de ré-ajustement culturel (1989a : 49).

Given the social and economic marginal position of the boys in the context of the Praça, Europe also was the only chance to have access to women, to a house, to important charges: in other terms, it was the sole chance to become a man. As Hannerz has shown, the enunciation of a cosmopolitan consciousness can be an enactment of

autonomy vis-à-vis the native; and the more starkly the cosmopolitan and the native are contrasted, the more conspicuously 'surrender' to the foreign becomes 'a form of mastery at home' (1990: 240)[155].

That 'désir ardent et presque obsessionel de mobilité' described by Mahamet Timera (2001 : 37) was therefore common among the young men. Referring to the project to migrate to the North, Timera wrote that in West Africa 'jamais projet n'a rencontré autant de suffrages au sein d'une jeunesse tant urbaine que rurale et nourri autant de rêves, de fantasmes et d'imaginaires' (2001 : 37).

Agostinho was fascinated by the possibility of a better education and by the chance to earn well. His main desire was that of helping his country and his family, and to do so, he claimed, he had to finish his *liceu* and enrol at university, maybe medicine. Obviously *fora*, outside. This term was recurrent in the conversation with the young, and emblematic of their perception of confinement. *Sai fora* (get out) was the Kriol expression most of them used when talking about their desire to migrate. In two simple words one could feel all the painful experience of being confined on an island, the closed and sealed-off life most of them complained about. Admittedly, Agostinho knew very little about Europe, of its lifestyle, of its cities. Europe implied for him primarily a job and consequently money, which according to Agostinho, was never too much (*dinhero nunca i tchiu*).

Agostinho told me he wanted to get out just to educate (*pa bai furma*), to help his country and his family. However, he admitted, even though he would like to come back to Guinea after his formation, to work in his country, the situation was so critical that it could be very difficult. 'Being a doctor, a professor, or any other thing in Guinea-Bissau is pure madness: there are no job opportunities here, and it is useless to form yourself for a profession which does not even exist here, or which is underpaid. A professor of the *liceu* earns 15.000 CFA per month!'.

However, Agostinho complained bitterly, get out was almost impossible. The only chance they seemed to have was a scholarship to study abroad. However, claimed Agostinho, these grants were always awarded to the sons and daughters of the

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[155] As I have underlined in chapter 7, there is also a component of *adventure*, a fascination for a somewhere else, in the desire for mobility the young men expressed in our conversations. Besides economic motivation and the attracting possibility of an increase in social status, there was an element of appeal, of seduction that cannot be overlooked as a feature of 'modernity' and the 'West'.

politicians. ‘Their children go to educate themselves abroad and we, *coitadis*, have to stay here’.

Among the young men I met, Delito was probably the most enthusiastic about ‘getting out’. ‘Here, he used to say, it is always the same. I am tired of Guinea-Bissau, I want to get out. You see, all the sons of Guiné want to go to Europe (*tudu fidju di Guiné misti bai Europa*). The only ones that do not want to go, it is because they have something here, but I don’t have anything. Guiné is good if you have money (*Guiné i sabi si bu tene dinhero*)’. The relationship Delito had with Guinea-Bissau was contrasted and ambiguous. He often said that he liked his country, but that there were no opportunities, no tranquillity. According to him, Guinea-Bissau was a land rich of resources, of fish for example. Nevertheless, there was no control and exploitation of these resources: others, strangers, came and brought everything away.

One afternoon, a few days before my departure, we were sitting on the pier, looking at the sea and at the horizon. After a long silence, Delito smiled melancholically and told me:

- All the sons of Guiné cry out to go to Europe (*tudu fidju di Guiné é na tchora pa bai Europa*). If God helps me, I want to get out of here. When I sit in the plane that will bring me to Europe, I will cry with joy.

- But what will you do in Europe?, I asked him.

- Well, my profession, what I always wanted to be, is either a musician, or a football player. I like Europe very much. Very much. When I go to Europe, I will study music, if God helps me. There are two reasons why I want to go to Europe: music and football.

Delito told me, fascinated, that he saw on TV how a musical video is shot, and that he was amazed by the multitude of people that crowded a stadium during a football match.

- What about Guiné? Don’t you have any possibility here to do what you want?

- No, here I don’t have any chance. Maybe in a neighbouring country, but not here. I am tired of it. There is no way here. The only way here is to get help, there is no other way but asking for help. The situation here in Guinea-Bissau is difficult. I want to move over. We don’t want to just sit here. I am tired of Guinea, Europe is a good land. I don’t want to stay here, I want to move over (*N'cansa di Guiné, Europa i terra sabi. N'ka misti fica lì, N'misti passa*)

As the Tanzanian young men portrayed by Brad Weiss (2002) – and this is quite a commonplace across the continent – most young men in Bubaque were sure that life elsewhere was better and easier. There was among them (and actually in almost everybody I talk to in Guinea-Bissau) a strong 'faith in the foreign' as Kathy Gardner (1995) wrote referring to Bangladesh. The origins of what Kelsky defines as an 'almost religious faith in a redemptive West' (1999: 232) are multiple: several factors are at play, and it is important to consider the cultural and individual elements which make up a decision or a simple wish to migrate. At the broader cultural level, the narrative of modernity creates a geography of centres and peripheries, picturing Guinea-Bissau as a desperate and poor country (a nation of *coitadis*, as Trajano Filho remarked (2002)) while celebrating Europe, and the northern world in general, as the land of development and opportunities[156]. The development industry and the media as well, from their side, contribute to this imaginary geography, triggering desires and fantasies towards phantasms, and instilling the idea of progress and that progress can come only from the outside.

Migration, however, was a luxury that only a few could afford. In most cases, the desire to escape of the young was frustrated, and they remained between the village and the dream of Europe, adopting survival strategies in the Praça or in Bissau. In some cases, even moving to Bissau could be a difficult step, as only few of them had in the capital city a relative willing to support them during their studies, while finding a job had become increasingly difficult. The idea of involuntary immobility, proposed recently by Jørgen Carling (2001, 2002) as a central issue in contemporary migration studies, seems perfectly fit to describe the situation of youth in Bubaque. Carling describes his aspiration/ability model as such:

> An important first step is to distinguish between people's *aspiration* to migrate and their *ability* to do so. Some people in the countries of origin have an aspiration to migrate, defined by a belief that migration

[156] Similar conclusions have been drawn also in other contexts. In Cape Verde, for example, underlines Lisa Åkesson, the notion of home as barren and impoverished has traditionally been counterpoised to the image of *stranjer* as a 'paradise' where the ones who work hard can get everything they want. Home and *stranjer* are seen as fundamentally contrastive. (2004: 21). Kathy Gardner observed that the dialectically contrasting images of homeland and the receiving countries are 'the ideological concomitant of international dependency' (1993:1).

is preferable to non-migration. The aspiration to migrate can vary in degree and in the balance between choice and coercion. […] Among those who aspire to migrate, *some* will also have the ability to do so. These people are the *migrants*, whose international movements can be observed. Those who have aspirations to migrate but lack the ability are *involuntary non-migrants* (2001: 23-24).

Due to the dramatic lack of opportunities to '*sai fora*', I have found in Bubaque a real mythology surrounding migration and those who made it: those who succeeded in leaving the country had a semi-legendary status, were envied and respected. Domingo once described to me how the grants of the Portuguese government were awarded, in a way that reminded me of the Polynesian cargo cults. His description went down to the tiniest details, like the procedure to hand in the documents, the precise deadlines, how faxes are sent from the Portuguese embassy, how your passport is stamped before leaving the country to allow you to get out. He was speaking with hectic and dreamy eyes about how your family brings you to the airport, how you get there and check your luggage in.

Besides the chance of winning a scholarship, unrealistic possibilities, sorts of urban legends, circulated among young men. Several boys told me of a 'friend of a friend' who met a white man, they got on together well, or, in one of the variants, he saw him playing soccer and he turned out to be a talent scout or a football trainer. So, out of the blue, a few hours before his departure, he told him 'let's go', and 'here you go, over the moon, you make your luggage, bid farewell to your family and you go'. The word go, *bai* in Kriol, was in this conversations always pronounced emphatically, and was accompanied by the movement of the hand towards the horizon, while snapping.

Literature on globalisation underlines that while planetary connections increase, the relationship between centres and peripheries becomes unstable and tends to be less clear-cut. This is not always necessarily true. In Bubaque, every young man seemed to be quite aware of what was going on 'elsewhere', of how life could be different. Nevertheless, this very perception, imaginary and ideological as it was, of a 'global and modern society' triggered merely frustration and exclusion, as young men felt prisoners in a cage. While their expectations were daily deluded, the school, the media, and their very national government promoted the mythical existence of a rich, dynamic centre, to which they had to aspire. Everybody was desperate to go away, everybody kept talking about this. But the real chances were so scarce that this desire was transformed into a set

of urban legends, a cargo cult made of bureaucrats, rich white men and football talent scouts: a true religion of escape.

Conclusion: South

> While it would be too simplistic to see Africans entirely as zombies totally overwhelmed by external forces, one must also be careful not to credit them with utopic agency, which is certainly not feasible within the current global structures and relations of unequal exchange (Nyamnjoh 2000: 11)

I have already quoted the famous lapidary comment by Achille Mbembe: in Africa, globalisation seems to mean only 'licking at the shop-window'. For young people in Bubaque, as I have shown, the widening of their horizon only meant a painful perception of being far and disconnected from the places where 'things happened', confined in a remote place where 'there wasn't anything'. Young men marginalized their own lives in a discourse of modernization and desire. As Liechty underlined, 'the rhetoric of modernization, progress and development wafts into the image worlds of media to give people an acute sense of marginality' (1995: 188). There may indeed be ever increasing interconnections between different points on the globe, and an ever increasing density of flows of people, goods, and information, but this is far from being an uniform process. It is in fundamental and structural ways profoundly uneven. Despite the major narrative of 'globalisation', the economic world order creates marginality as much as connections. If it is true that specific localizing strategies are at work and that the world is not going to be reduced to a totally Westernised place, this does not mean that we are witnessing to the creation of a global culture based on equal exchange (Meyer and Geschiere 1999: 5). Actually, as Kate Crehan underlined,

> [d]ifferent social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't,

although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation *to* the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Crehan 1997)

It is not my point here however to denounce the unbalanced power relations of the contemporary 'globalised' world: it is something too evident and a banal feature of human history. As Jean-François Bayart wrote, '[l]'insertion dépendante des société africaines dans le système mondiale ne brille pas non plus par son originalité et elle mérite d'être *scientifiquement* dédramatisée. L'inégalité est la chose la mieux partagée dans le temps et elle annule pas l'historicité. L'extraversion qu'elle provoque, les césures culturelles qu'elle engendre ont été monnaie courante dans le passé' (1989 : 54). What might instead attract our attention as anthropologists is on the one hand, the continuity (both political and discursive) of this situation with a world order that originated in the colonial era, and on the other hand, how a unique system of values and a single model of planned social change (modernity and development) are globally implemented and desired.

Most literature devoted to cultural globalisation tends to overlook or ignore the importance of the policies that the states and the international agencies continue to have on global dynamics and the old and new hierarchies that the global economy creates and preserves. According to Neil Smith, 'the global restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s embodies not so much an evening out of social and economic development levels across the globe as a deepening and reorganization of existing patterns of uneven geographical development' (1997: 183). While major world institutions affecting national policies and pushing towards 'globalisation' of world economy (the BWIs, Bretton Wood Institutions), keep claiming that this process will bring economic growth and consequently development, democratisation and human rights, and social equity, a number of scholars (see for e.g. Silbey 1997, Mkandawire 2002. See also *infra*, Introduction) criticized the term 'globalisation' itself for it does not describe appropriately the kinds of interconnections between the local and transnational institutions, and does not communicate the idea of the hierarchy of transnational centres that control the flows of financial capital, cultural images and goods in what Michael

Hardt and Toni Negri has called ‘the Empire’ (2000). Gupta and Ferguson wrote in a remarkable passage:

> The production and distribution of mass culture […] is largely controlled by the notoriously placeless organizations, multinational corporations. The “public sphere” is therefore hardly public with respect to control over the representations that are circulated in it. Recent work in cultural studies has emphasized the dangers of reducing the reception of multinational cultural production to the passive act of consumption, leaving no room for the active creation by agents of disjunctures and dislocations between the flow of industrial commodities and cultural products. However, we worry at least as much about the opposite danger of *celebrating* the inventiveness of those “consumers” of the culture industry (especially on the periphery) who fashion something quite different out of products marketed to them, reinterpreting and remaking them, sometimes quite radically, and sometimes in a direction that promotes resistance rather than conformity. The danger here is the temptation to use scattered examples of the cultural flows dribbling from the “periphery” to the chief centers of the culture industry as a way of dismissing the “grand narrative” of capitalism (especially the “totalizing” narrative of late capitalism), and thus of evading the powerful political issues associated with Western global hegemony (1992: 19).

Ulf Hannerz admitted as well that ‘the overarching communication structures of the world today are, after all, center/periphery structures, heavily asymmetrical’ (1992: 29. See also 1996). According to Silbey, transnational social relationships would be better described by the term ‘postmodern colonialism’ (Silbey 1997. See also Escobar 1995 and Stiglitz 2002 for critical analysis of the dynamics of global capitalism).

In this sense, the fashionable term ‘postcolonial’ largely adopted in contemporary anthropology, seems rather inappropriate to describe the power relationships of the present day world order[157]: Ivan Karp – focussing on the ideology of development – claimed in this sense that postcoloniality is barely emergent, more a hope than a reality (2002: 88). In this vein, Anne McClintock underlined that:

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[157] In order to anticipate criticisms, and to make it clear once and for all: to acknowledge the existence of prevailing narrative forms or imperialistic political and economic strategies does not mean that individuals are reduced to obedient robots. I picture rather the individual in an intermediate position between a hero (total resistance) and a victim (total passivity). Therefore, the acknowledgement of individual creativity (which does not mean that *everyone* is a creative resistant) is not in contradiction with the denunciation of dominant global narratives and forms of economic domination. The meanings and narratives an individual happens to grow up with can be accepted, transformed, adapted, beaten, broken, and ignored. The vision of the world each of us is living in is always a unique arrangement, a mediation between individual creativity and dominant narrative forms.

[…] the term postcolonialism is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory. Ireland may, at a pinch, be postcolonial but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing "post" about colonialism at all. Is South Africa postcolonial? East Timor? Australia? Hawaii? Puerto Rico? By what fiat of historical amnesia can the United States of America, in particular, qualify as postcolonial – a term that can be a monumental affront to the Native American peoples currently opposing the confetti triumph of 1992? One can also ask whether the emergence of Fortress Europe in 1992 may not also signal the emergence of a new empire, as yet uncertain of its boundaries and global reach. […] orienting theory around the temporal axis colonial-postcolonial makes it easier not to see and therefore harder to theorize, the *continuities* in international imbalances in imperial power. Since the 1940s, the U.S.' imperialism – without-colonies, has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic and cultural), some concealed, some half half-concealed. The power of U.S. finance capital and huge multinational corporations to command the flows of capital, research, consumer goods and media information around the world, can exert a coercive power as great as any colonial gunboat. It is precisely the greater subtlety, innovation and variety of these forms of imperialism that make the historical rupture implied by the term postcolonial especially unwarranted (1995: 13).

On the same tone, João de Pina Cabral highlighted that 'our own contemporary world is permeated by even more complex forms of domination that lead to even more inscrutable quandaries … by choosing to define a present condition by reference to a past colonialism (as in "post-colonialism") we run the risk of obscuring present-day neo-colonialism. This would contribute toward the naturalization of the already faceless (nationless) appearance of contemporary globalized capital' (Pina Cabral 2001a: 510; see also Feldman-Bianco 2001). The same author wonders in an illuminating passage:

Em que medida podemos nós afirmar que o 'Estado', tal como ele existe presentemente na maioria dos países pós-coloniais da África austral, é um '*novo* Estado'? Será que podemos afirmar que houve uma quebra de tal forma radical com a constituição anterior do aparelho do Estado que foi possível fundar um Estado novo? Na perspectiva por mim adoptada, formulações deste tipo continuam a estar excessivamente marcadas pela propensão cesurista típica das ciências sociais modernistas. Não tenho a intenção de negar que ocorreram mudanças radicais nos tecidos sociais dos países da África austral. Tudo o que quero sugerir é que a visão cesurista radicada no tropo retórico colonial enfatiza excessivamente o cisma entre os dois períodos e esquece as continuidades (2004: 388).

Dual categories (like modern/traditional, centre/periphery etc.) therefore, which may be traceable to the period of colonial rule, continue to have relevance and are locally

used because they express something fundamental about a world order that exhibits marked continuities with the asymmetries of the colonial era[158]. They capture the complexities of contemporary experience and the social, cultural, political, and economic process that have shaped people's lives over the years of colonial and postcolonial history, retaining, as Philip Thomas wrote about Madagascar, 'interpretive power as signs that capture something about continuities in people's political impotence and economic marginality' (Thomas 2002: 367, 373). Categories such as civilisation, progress, development, globalisation, and modernity are part of a genealogy of discourses that prefigure empire (Hardt and Negri 2000)—the constitution of a supposedly single, systemic totality of legal, economic, political, and cultural forms of exerting global power. We are facing in other terms what Bela Feldman-Bianco called the 'continuing colonizing projects of former colonial powers' (2001: 477): the same power that created the *civilized* produced and produces the *underdeveloped* (see Latouche 2004).

In fact, as I have already underlined, the discourse of modernity and development conserves the same ambiguity implicit in the notion of civilization: on the one hand, it has an ecumenical and universal character, on the other it produces segregation and new geographies of exclusion[159]. While underlining the local tentative strategies to follow the promised modernity, we cannot forget that the very institutions of modernity *preclude*, with a certain efficacy, this very path. Modernity produces its outcasts. Africa, that Smith identified bitterly as the 'veritable ghetto of global capital' (Smith 1997: 179), is emblematic of this process of exclusion. 'Globalisation' from this point of view, as a political and economic project rather than as a feature of contemporary cultural dynamics, is just the last label of 'modernity' (Dirlik 2004). Already in 1971, André Gunder Frank, criticizing the basic assumptions of modernization theory and anticipating much of contemporary attacks to 'globalisation', claimed that 'the developed countries export their particularism to the underdeveloped ones, wrapped up in universalistic slogans such as freedom, the political liberalism of free elections, the social liberalism of free social mobility, and the cultural liberalism of the free flux of

[158] On the question of continuity with colonialism, see also Pina Cabral 2002, 2004

[159] A recent book by Zygmunt Bauman (2005) is significantly titled *Wasted lives. Modernity and its outcasts*.

ideas' (1976: 15)[160]. Many social scientists who have specifically worked in African contexts, seem to share these views, openly contesting the democratization and liberalization project implicit in the current view of globalisation, and denouncing its perverse effects on local contexts (Naerman 2000; Nymnajoh 2000; Owolabi 2001, Ninsin 2000)

Mainstream anthropological literature exploring the cultural effects of 'globalisation' focuses mainly on the 'localizing strategies', highlighting how people in specific places appropriate external elements and transform them into aspects of their own world. This process is crucial – witnessing the resilience of local agencies - and cannot be overlooked; we need however to acknowledge another local process, prior and moving in the opposite direction. We might call it 'globalizing strategy', denoting the local aspirations to the 'global', how people crave for and dream of it, however they might locally configure it. In other terms, I am talking about the efforts to be 'connected', to become 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' that are spread throughout the world. This social phenomenon is increasingly relevant, shaping local cultural practices and imaginations in most regions of the world: the aspiration to citizenship in the 'modern' world is a distinctive feature of local realities – an aspiration to membership in the global order which is however often negated or postponed (see Ferguson and Fabian 2002).

Stacy Piggs writes on this subject about Nepal that: 'from the point of view of this small, marginal, and impoverished country, modernity is somewhere else. […] In fact, development institutions are among the most important forces brokering ideas of modernity through specific projects of modernization. Nepalis experience modernity through a development ideology that insists that they are *not* modern, indeed that they have a very long way to go to get there' (1996: 163). A similar self-perception has been described by Mark Liechty in Kathmandu (1995: 185), where young people were acutely and painfully aware of their life as Nepali, a life that they compared to lives lived in distant power centres. Referring to this feeling of marginality, Liechty pinpoints that:

[160] This is the translation in English of the Portuguese translation (Frank 1976) of the original 1971 text to which I could not have access. The sentence in Portuguese was: 'os países desenvolvidos exportam o particularismo para os subdesenvolvidos, envolto em slogans universalistas, tais como a liberdade, a democracia, a justiça, o bem comum, o liberalismo económico do comércio livre, o liberalismo político

> this persistent self-peripheralization is almost unimaginable outside the context of global media and a host of other marginalizing transnational cultural forces including tourism and commodity imports. Mass media (but also tourism and foreign goods) are like windows on to modern places that are distant both in time and place. But if the video screen is like a window, it is one with bars that keep viewer […] outside, 'out there' looking in. […] But media and tourism only work in conjunction with the Nepali state and its ideology of progress and modernization. By assuming the role of recipient and dependent in the global development aid economy the Nepali state also languish in this 'out there', self-peripheralizing mentality in which modernity is essentially a foreign commodity […] The rhetoric of backwardness, development, foreign aid and education collapses time and place such that Nepali youth learn to situate themselves on the margins of a meaningful universe as consumers of an externally generated material modernity (Liechty 1995: 186-187).

Wolfgang Sachs pointed out as well that to the extent that third-world people have themselves sought development they have been misguided; the schemas of development have provided only 'the cognitive base for [a] pathetic self-pity' (1992b: 2). In the same vein Serge Latouche, underlining the urgency of a radical criticism of the notion of development, calls for a 'cognitive subversion' and a decolonisation of mentalities and imagination as an indispensable premise to any social, political and cultural change (2003, 2004). Moving beyond or outside modernity thus becomes a *sine qua non* for imagining after the Third World (Escobar 2004: 209).

Discarding 'development', 'globalisation' and their paraphernalia, I am not condemning Africa and Africans to immobility or cultural isolation, dismissing as irrelevant the expectations and desires of many people across the continent, like the young men I met in Bubaque. I am just stressing that the ideas of progress and development are just *one* way of thinking about social change and transformation, and that this specific way places (and keeps) Africa, structurally, from the start, at the margins of an increasingly global market economy. As Michael Kearney pointed out, 'attempts to assimilate to identities that have been constructed on structures that are the bases of inequality serve not so much to liberate as they do to reinforce the structuring of that inequality' (1996: 7-8). The Euro-American model, democracy and liberalism are neither human destiny nor the highest degree in human social organization (despite

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de eleições livres, o liberalismo social da livre mobilidade social, e o liberalismo cultural do livre fluxo de ideais'.

Francis Fukuyama's opinion [1992]). They are just a phase in history. Development, long before being a set of economic and social indicators, is a *system of values*, and as such, it is true only as far as it is shared, believed and embodied (Illich 1992). As Wolfgang Sachs wrote incisively, 'development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions […] it is a cast of mind' (1992b: 1).

Neither I am foreseeing a form of resistance to Euro-American economic and cultural expansion implying a return to 'traditional' or 'authentic' African cultures and identities, ignoring the proliferation of new cultural idioms around the continent. Nor I am condemning mimetic strategies, or imitations, as loss of authenticity and value. This is not the point. Authenticity, as Eric Gable underlined, is an obsession of modernity (2002; see also Hountondji 1996). I am rather wondering if we can still envisage *alternative models of social change and organization*, non-unilinear and non-evolutionary, and not biased in favour of the Euro-American model; if we are able to move beyond modernity and occidentalism towards *worlds and knowledges otherwise* (Mignolo and Nouzeilles 2003, Dussel 2002). If we are able to *think otherwise* (Sousa Santos 2002: 278). All autonomy derives from relativization, or as Chakrabarty puts it (2000), from the provincialization of the dominant symbolic universe, from the neutralization of its assumptions of centrality and authenticity. An African youth that starts to think about itself autonomously, rejecting the impossible imitation of the 'North', turns upside down the dominant representation (Cassano 2005: ix).

Because, if alternatives can still be formulated, it is more likely to be at the margins, rather than in the centres, to be context-specific rather than issued from grand socio-economic theories, in concrete local settings but not in isolation, rather in a network capable of transforming worldwide connections in a counter-hegemonic strategy, or as Santos defines it, a 'counter-hegemonic globalization' (2002: 459)[161]. The experience of the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico might be exemplary, in this sense. As Mary Mills wrote, 'The potential exists for the production of new meanings and practices in the resulting disjunctures between dominant meanings and lived experience, and between imagined possibilities and limited opportunities. […] The recognition of such breaks

between dominant cultural meanings and lived experience provide subordinate groups with crucial opening to contest hegemonic forms and generate alternative understandings' (Mills 1997: 41).

[161] See also Escobar 2001, 2004 and the whole Latin American modernity/coloniality research program (see *infra* p. 37 and Escobar 2002, 2004). Nouzeilles and Mignolo 2003 also call for the necessity to envision alternative global world orders.

Epilogue

The night before my last departure from Bubaque in 2002, many young men came at the hotel to bid farewell, asking for last hour presents. Among them Delito, wearing his perennial red Nike baseball hat. At first, he asked me for some help to put together a band. I answered in the usual way, that I was there on a scholarship to carry out research, and that I was not a rich man. He gave up, and told me he did not really mind. We were sitting on the porch of Dora's hotel, just in from of the street. We remained silent for a while, and when I turned to him, I realized he was crying. In the Praça, a man is a man, and a *cool* man must be even manlier than the others. And there he was, crying in front of everybody. I tried to console him, imagining what he might be mulling over: his frustration for remaining on the island while I was leaving. I felt uncomfortable, and I guessed he too might be ashamed, so I proposed to have a walk along the dark streets of the Praça. As we walked side by side, Delito explained me, sobbing, that that's the way he was, that he got to like me and those tears were for the *saudade* he was feeling already. It was true, he continued, he had many friends, but he never had a stranger like me as a friend, somebody to talk to about his dreams, about Europe, about his future. 'For you, he accused me, it is just work: you come here, you ask about my dreams, but tomorrow you'll be gone, leaving me here, and you will forget about me'. What could I tell him? How could I reply to the heaviest accusation that can be levelled against anthropology, of exploiting human relationships, at times intense and troubling, for work, for a career, for a personal benefit? I tried to explain to him that it was not always like that, that with him the relationship had been different, that I will not forget him. He remained silent for a while, then he offered me his last present, the one I cannot forget. He had composed a song for me, about our friendship. He had not finished it yet, but as I was leaving the next day, he wanted me to hear it before I left. To leave, to go… I almost felt guilty for the chance I had to go away. I felt

so sympathetic towards him, as I sensed his frustration, his exasperation. With his timid and hesitant voice, he whispered sobbing a song about friendship, *saudade*, about how little money had to do with our relationship. I held him tight. Then he bade farewell and left. The next morning he remained on the seashore until my canoe sailed out of his view behind the island of Rubane, waving now and then his red Nike hat.

> I am interested in frontiers as horizons that extend from the insistent reality of the here and now into that optative space or time – the space-time – of the imaginary. It is this realm that gives us an edge, at times wrenching and painful, at times relieving and pleasurable, on the here and now in all its viscous immediacy (Crapanzano 2004: 14).

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