

AMBIGUOUS
REPRESENTATIONS:
POWER AND MIMESIS IN
COLONIAL GUINEA

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This paper explores some aspects of the ambiguity of power relations during the colonial period that still influence the postcolonial construction of the nation. The colonial encounter led to the confrontation of local political institutions with the colonial project of cultural and political hegemony. Local intermediaries were particularly sensitive to this mutual game of domination, integration and exclusion. Focusing on the iconographic representations of a category of such intermediaries, the *régulos* or local chiefs in Guinea-Bissau – both from the local point of view and from the colonialist one – we have access to a *mirror of the empire*: the perverse and continual negotiation of identities and references between colonizers and colonized.

Colonialism, as a hegemonic domination project, was transmitted by different means of influence and authority that included – besides the domain of local populations – the control of work and production, of time, of domesticity and familiar practices, of intimacy and of the body (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992). These heterogeneous authoritarian practices led to the establishment of colonization processes that represented a definitive rupture with the previous socio-cultural structures. As Talal Asad states, the history of European dominance cannot be understood as a

temporary repression of subject populations but as an irrevocable process of transmutation, in which old desires and ways of life were destroyed and new ones took their place – a story of change without historical precedent in its speed, global scope, and pervasiveness (Asad 1991: 314).

Colonialism, as a project and as an action, was not a process of univocal nature. It was imposed over active subjects that reacted to it, opposed it, manipulated it or even collaborated with it. These reactions were creative processes that led to the creation of new identities, either collective or individual. The relations created under and by colonialism generated new agents, statutes and references. The control of local sovereigns and chiefs is one significant example of such processes of interaction and manipulation. Every colonial administration sought to integrate autochthonous chiefdoms in their projects of establishment of European hegemony. Controlling local chiefs was a pragmatic way of superintending the local populations. However, autochthonous sovereigns were not just the privileged middlemen amongst two social structures but also amongst two cultural formations. In this sense, they represent a special perspective for a reflection about how colonialism was imposed.

In this paper I try to approach the subject of the ambivalent relationship between colonial authority and local chiefs through the example of manjaco *régulos* from the Cacheu Region in Guinea-Bissau. This relationship should be understood in its double meaning of the establishment of relations of power and dominance on the one hand, and of the creation of new symbols and significants on the other. The consequences of this process can still be felt today. The practices of opposition and/or seduction regarding the forms of hegemonic power are expressed in every moment of social life as in values, acts or representations. The purpose of this paper is the representation of local dignitaries and the representation of power, based on the confrontation of the iconographical representations of the manjaco *régulos*, done by the colonial administration through the photographic register, and by the local population, expressed in the local *post-mortem* statuary.

Representing the colonized and the “scientific colonization”

One of the problems recurrently faced by colonial administrators was the ability to understand local social structures in order to integrate them into intelligible sociological models. African social reality presented itself as unyielding to European references. The colonial project was imposed in two interrelated ways: the creation of sociological models that translated a complex reality into intelligible sociological models, and the imposition of a certain representation of power that intended to obtain indirect control of the populations through the autochthonous authorities. The need to administer led to the demand of a more detailed knowledge of the effective social structures, and it motivated the systematic ethnographic production done in the colonies. This was part of a general project of scientific colonization developed by different researches on agronomy, zoology, engineering, but also anthropology and ethnography. The colonial project co-existed with the imposition of a scientific project. Creating a typology of the territory and of controlled populations – or in order to control them – was essential for the delimitation of that same space, of those same people. As reminds Gyan Prakash,

The [colonial] administration became regularized and extended its reach farther down into the colonized society in its effort to generate new forms of knowledge about the territory and its population (Prakash 1999: 4).

The forms of sociological knowledge undertaken in the colonial context sought, in the first place, to delimit the colonized populations, attributing to them the ideal characteristics of the European nation-state of the 19th century (a territory, a nation, a language, a governmental system). This process con-

ducted in the African context recognized an ethnic multiplicity, an enterprise whose limitations have been demonstrated in numerous studies about the fallacy of the ethnic concept.¹ The ethnographic studies done in this context sought to translate heterogeneous social realities into intelligible sociological models and recurrently presented the autochthonous hierarchy of power. Colonial administrators generally assumed that local populations were organized according to familiar hierarchy models. This interpretation could have a pragmatic consequence, as it was applied both in the identification of local hierarchies and in the creation of new ones (Ranger 1994 [1983]). It has been done both in societies where new chiefs were imposed, or in which chiefdoms were invented, as well as in those where local chiefs or sovereigns were induced to co-operate with the colonial administration. In this sense knowledge, power, manipulation of local social structures are all elements of the same network of significance that may be understood in their empiric interconnection.

Ethnographic studies in Portuguese Guinea

In Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese Guinea during the colonial period), the ethnographic, historical and agronomical research was centered in the Center of Studies of Portuguese Guinea (Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa), created in 1945.² This institutionalization of ethnographic research corresponds to the effective installation of an administrative and military organization in the colony, which went together with the systematic development of economic structures in the colony (Lima 1981: 15). This was partly due to the Portuguese new colonial politics, and to the personal involvement of Manuel Sarmiento Rodrigues, Guinea's Governor during the period. A priority of the Center consisted on the elaboration of local ethnographies, generally done by colonial administrators. The first ones were edited in the following of the *Inquérito Etnográfico*, in 1945, under the aegis of Avelino Teixeira de Mota, a Navy official and historian who conducted some of the main studies about that region.³ Of all of the inquiries accomplished until then just this

¹ See, for instance Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'bokolo 1985, or Thomas Eriksen 1993 on this subject.

² In their speeches both the Minister of Colonies, Marcelo Caetano (later Prime Minister) and Guinea Portuguese Governor, Sarmiento Rodrigues, refer to the need of a "scientific colonization" (Lima 1981: 16) as the purpose of the *Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa*. The Center was an excellent case of ethnographic and scientific production in the context of the Portuguese colonial administration. Besides the regular publication of the Portuguese Guinea Cultural Bulletin, begun in 1946, and the fact that the Center would assist in the independence process, the institution edited numerous occasional publications, organized the Western Africa Second Conference in Bissau in 1947, and maintained a regular collaboration with several scientific societies, among which the IFAN (Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire). On the creation of a Portuguese colonial ethnography see also Donato Gallo 1988.

³ Other ethnographic inquiries with the purpose of establishing the code of indigenous justice were undertaken in 1918, 1927 and 1934. The number of answers obtained, however, was limited (Lima 1981: 25).

one had effects and much of its data is still a source for the local ethnography. Actually, the first published monographs consisted of answers to the several items that constituted the inquiry.

The collection of monographs published by the Center of Studies of Portuguese Guinea began in 1947 with the work of António Carreira entitled *The Social life of Manjacos (Vida Social dos Manjacos)* which constitutes a paradigmatic example of the ethnography undertaken by the Center. At the time of its publication the author was the administrator of Teixeira Pinto (Today Canchungo, Region of Cacheu) and his ethnography can be understood as an answer to the problem faced by every local administrator: how to govern? This monograph constitutes an exemplar case of the relationship between ethnographic research and colonial administration interests. Carreira based his work on the answers to the 1945 inquiry, obtained according to a well known method of colonial ethnography, consisting of a questionnaire given to selected informants (chiefs and sovereigns or *régulos*, as they are called in creole) gathered through the administrative center expressly for that purpose. An essential part of his book is dedicated to the problem of succession and the organization of chiefdoms, and the author attempts to give a unified presentation of these populations based on his interpretation of the data regarding the Babok or “Manjacos of Costa de Baixo” (as they are known in the colonial ethnography), the inhabitants of the chiefdoms of Bassarel, Calequise and Canchungo. This monograph was, for four decades, the main source of information about the populations of the area. A new ethnographer of Babok, Eric Gable, who conducted research in Bassarel in 1986-87, has recently questioned Carreira’s interpretation of manjaco society (Gable 1990 and 1995). According to this author there are two main problems raised by the “administrative ethnography”: the concepts used by most authors published by the Center of Studies of Portuguese Guinea had a juridical (and European) origin and its application to an alien reality created several misunderstandings; and these authors also overvalued political organization and local economy over the religious and ritual system. We can add two other limitations to these works, derived from the application of sociological models inspired in the Western social hierarchy and the tendency to make general conclusions based on limited data. In order to explain these points, we shall begin by an abbreviated characterization of the populations that today identify themselves as Manjaco.

The designation of Manjaco is applied to groups with different social and linguistic characteristics. Those identifying as Manjaco are populations who speak dialects of a language that are unintelligible to each other, who both observe patrilineal and matrilineal succession rules, and who may or may not have a centralized authority (king). They are known to other ethnic groups of the area and are expressive of the limitations of the concept of

ethnic group.⁴ Manjaco people, just as their neighbors the Pepel, Mancanha, Balanta and Djola, are part of the Bak linguistic group.⁵ Bak populations are characterized by an economic system based on rice production, the productivity of which allowed for economic prosperity (Gable 1990: 8), their integration in regular pre-colonial regional trade circuits; their organization in small communities of one or two thousands inhabitants, distributed among territories of about a five kilometer diameter. These communities could be organized as small kingdoms or *regulados* (the Portuguese expression that is widely used), where the judicial, legislative and executive responsibilities were concentrated in the hands of chiefs and *régulos*. Along their history they had met the mandé expansion and were among those societies that had since the 16th century a closer contact with Europeans (Mark 1985, Pélissier 1989). Despite that proximity, these populations maintained their economic and political independence and retained the characteristics of micro-States (Gable 1990: 9, Mendy 1994). Eventually, these kingdoms were organized over the last three centuries (at least) into defensive confederations that contributed to the establishment of a common identity. Standing out among these confederations is the so called “manjaco kingdom” (Carreira 1947, Crowley 1990: 114), that came into being at the beginning of the 19th Century around the *regulado* of Bassarel, which is still important to the formation of local identity. Several *régulos* and their subordinated chiefs recognized the sovereign of Bassarel’s authority, the “king of kings” (Carreira 1947) to whom they rendered tribute. Today the *régulo* of Bassarel continues to be granted the same title (Gable 1990), although the position has been deprived of the authority and the power it once had. Effectively, the sovereign of Bassarel – around whom the resistance to the Portuguese was organized (Crowley 1990: 138-142) –, was defeated in 1914 during the “pacification campaigns” that consecrated the colonial domain by military victory. On that occasion the king was deported to São Tomé and the court was destroyed. After the defeat of the manjaco kingdom, the different manjaco *regulados* were integrated into the colonial administrative system, as part of Teixeira Pinto’s District (today Canchungo) that included the native regions (*posto*) of Bassarel, Bull, Cacheu,

⁴ The diversity of ethnic identities of the Guinea-Bissau population is characteristic of this area. According to the census of 1979 (the last one to include an ethnic classification) the country possessed a population of about 900,000 inhabitants, of which 200,700 identified as Balanta, 178,700 as Fula, 95,200 as Mandinga, 82,000 as Manjaco, 78,700 as Pepel, 26,600 as Bijagó, 26,000 as Mancanha, 25,100 as Beafada, 15,000 as Felupe, 6,300 as Nalu and 1,200 as Baiote; the remaining population, corresponding to 18% of the total, did not consider themselves to possess an ethnic identity. In spite of this diversity, many of these populations possess linguistic and cultural affinities that cross local divisions: Felupe and Baiote (a total of 16,200 people) integrate the Djola, while the group of Manjaco-Pepel-Mancanha (186,700 people) were generally described from the 16th century onwards as the same population, the Brames.

⁵ Manjaco, Pepel and Mancanha inhabit the coastal area between the rivers Cacheu and Geba and form the Bak linguistic group, a subgroup of the West-Atlantic languages (Doneux 1975: 5) that also includes the Balanta, Djola and Banhum. The manjaco language, with the mancanha and the pepel, appears to form a group of dialectal variants of a same language.

Caió, Pecixe, Calequisse and Canchungo (Crowley 1990: 153). In each one of these divisions the district officers (*chefes de posto*) sought to collect taxes and to increase the production of cash crops through the *regedores*, recruited among traditional chiefs.

As was the case in other colonial regimes, also here the establishment of a colonial administrative order involved knowing the social organization of local populations and establishing alliances with their chiefs, or even putting in that position those from factions who were trusted by the colonial administration, with the purpose of avoiding conflicts and resistance movements (Newitt 1981). It is in this context that one should understand the constraints of António Carreira's work, which deals precisely with the subject of power and autochthonous political organization. According to Carreira, the power structure of manjaco society was "pyramidal": the sovereigns or *régulos* dominated and were responsible for the appointment of local chiefs, who in turn designated their subordinates. This hierarchy of power was accompanied by a system of land leasing, from the *régulos* to the chiefs and so forth. This interpretation ignores that the tribute due to the *régulo* consisted essentially of gifts of cattle with ritual ends (Gable 1990). Insisting on the leasing allowed Carreira to interpret the system of ritual tribute installments as a tax system, one close to a European model as it was seemingly adjusted to the logic of the colonial market.

Also, as Gable points out, Carreira's description of the manjaco social system is based on a negotiation between the administrators and the *régulos* of Costa de Baixo, inhabited by the Babok. The *regulado* of Costa de Baixo was a creation of the colonial context, and occupied the territory that was the jurisdiction of the first born of each *régulo* of Bassarel. The *regulado* was an inherited position following a model of circular succession among the several kingdoms, obeying a system of alternate inheritance among a limited number within a titular matrilineage (Carvalho 1998). According to this succession model, the eldest sons of an ancient *régulo* (who did not have any genealogical relationship amongst themselves) would successively inherit the territory of Costa de Baixo. In the 1930s, however, the colonial authorities supported the pretensions of a titular's son of Costa de Baixo as the legitimate heir of his father's domain, thus institutionalizing a model of patrilinear (and adelphic) inheritance while consecrating a new dynasty of sovereigns and a new *regulado*, independent from Bassarel. The *régulos* of the Babok, or of Costa de Baixo, were the local political figures with interests compatible with the colonial administration. Through the *régulos*, the administration assured control of the central area of the District. The model of succession and inheritance presented in *Vida Social dos Manjacos* consecrates this situation of fact and institutes it as "manjaco customs", based on data negotiated between the administrator and the *régulo* of Costa de Baixo. Even if this was the most

typical case demonstrating the manipulation of local chiefs by the colonial authorities, the same process occurred in other *regulados* of this District, namely in Calequisse and Caió. In this last *regulado* three interpreters (a support position to the administration) were successively installed during the 1930-1940s, although only one of them was an heir legitimated by the “customary right”.⁶

Carreira’s monograph reveals the relationship of mutual manipulation established between the colonial authorities and autochthonous groups of interest that created new power significant. Control and knowledge appear in this text intimately mixed. The same happened in other contexts, as suggests Michael Adas’s work on the politics of the colonial domain in British West Africa. Adas, who studied the institutionalization of “indirect rule” in the beginning of the 20th century, recognizes that socio-cultural analyses of colonized territories by colonial administrators express their conviction that these societies

had possessed act-old and clearly bounded cultural configurations of ‘traditions’ that had been basically static – despite often far-reaching political and social changes – in the era prior to the rise of European domination (Adas 1996: 292).⁷

Local elites were considered the representatives of traditional practices that had been altered by European hegemony, and Adas considers that

if the initial alliances between European colonizers and indigenous elites resulted in a stress on the preservation of tradition, the widespread transformations that accompanied colonial rule prompted European administrators to adopt a number of different strategies in the defense of colonial orders that in most instances rested on accommodating indigenous elite groups (Adas 1996: 293).

As was the case in the context studied by Adas, the Manjaco colonial administration also tried to govern with the support of the local elites. Pragmatic interests related to gaining power by both interests motivated this dubious process. Ethnographic studies in this context express that negotiation of power and impose biased interpretations of political models. The monograph *Vida Social dos Manjacos* prompted such a reading of the manjaco society and institutionalized changes introduced by specific groups. It legitimated a social picture where colonial intervention could be easily integrated into the local ideology.

⁶ The fate of these individuals varied: while in Caió the last sovereign was imprisoned by the same colonial authorities that had previously supported him, in Canchungo-Teixeira Pinto the *regulo* stayed as a leader and a prosperous merchant until independence, having been publically judged and executed in 1975. He was succeeded by two of his brothers, the last one simultaneously assuming a head position in the public administration.

⁷ In his reference text on the invention of tradition in Africa, Terence Ranger also refers to the colonial creation/restoration of what was believed to be local tradition (Ranger 1994 [1983]).

Representations of the mediators

As referred to above, local sovereigns were the mediators *par excellence* between the colonial order and local populations. Because of their central role, these characters were always the subject of an attempt to control that stemmed from the support of certain factions with access to power along with the appointment of preferential middlemen (the interpreters) as sovereigns. As political and cultural mediators, local sovereigns were particularly exemplary of the perverse but multifaceted domination game undertaken in this period. In the Manjaco case we have access to the sovereigns' iconographical representations carried out by both the colonial administrators and the local populations, which I propose to analyze as significant. I intend to compare two representational forms of characters that occupied equivalent positions in the colonial game of force: on one side are the images of the *régulos* included in Carreira's monograph, and on the other the representations of the *régulos* of Caió in the local *post-mortem* statuary. Iconographical representations, and photography in particular, were interpreted in the Western gnosis as an element of increased objectivity, allowed both by its own materiality and by an approach to the subject that is represented as a copy process. But photography is another interpretation (or even manipulation) of reality, just as every other iconographical representation is (Sontag 1983, Mirzoeff 1999). Following this perspective we propose to compare the representations of the sovereigns that were elaborated almost simultaneously by the colonizers and the colonized.

The monograph *Vida Social dos Manjacos* includes a varied iconography, including drawings, pictures and maps, allowing for a cross textual and iconographical interpretation and appealing to a multiple reading of the book. This monograph includes 38 drawings by a local youth and 30 pictures done by Carreira himself and two other administrators. The majority of this iconography consists of portraits of individuals (17 drawings and 24 pictures). They all follow the same representational pattern, the characters in poses, either staring at the camera or in front of the artist. These portraits are accompanied by titles that portrayed the subject as an example of a "type":⁸ as a manjaco boy or girl, clothes of the initiates, hunter, etc. Only in four pictures are the specific people and situation portrayed enunciated clearly in the title. All of these are pictures of *régulos* and chiefs who are referred to as the main source of the author's information on "manjaco uses and habits." These pictures are particularly expressive of the parameters that delimit the relationship between the colonial authorities and the local dignitaries. The first

⁸ This pose representing avoidance and distance is common in numerous pictures taken in the colonial context, an attitude interpreted by Nicholas Mirzoeff as a form of symbolic resistance to the settler (Mirzoeff 1999: 141).

two represent a group of local authorities, senior men wearing long shirts of Muslim inspiration, barefoot, their hats in their hands, assembled as a school group (see photos 1 and 2), and are accompanied by the following title: “Population chiefs, ‘Nagák’ and ‘Namuã’ [local titles] of some of the territories of the area of the *posto*, photographed during the meetings for the administration of the ethnographic questionnaire.”



PHOTO 1 – Source: António Carreira, *Vida Social dos Manjacos*, 1947.



PHOTO 2 – Source: António Carreira, *Vida Social dos Manjacos*, 1947.

The third picture represents the *régulos* of Costa de Baixo and Pandim, photographed from a low angle (*contre-plongée*) to emphasize their importance, wearing Western civil suits (see photo 3). The last picture, the only that was not taken in the District capital, portrays a *régulo* of Pecixe in institutional clothes, including a hat over a scarf, “band cloths” that cross his shoulder, an enormous earring, a collar of the initiates (see photo 4).

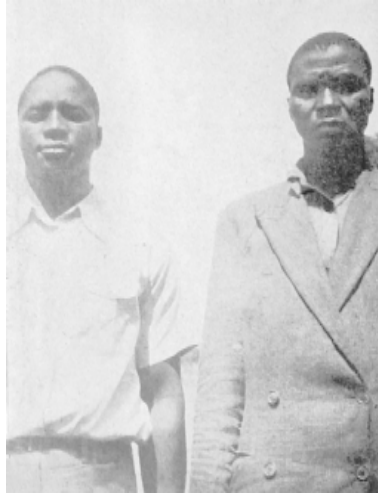


PHOTO 3 – Source: António Carreira, *Vida Social dos Manjacos*, 1947.



PHOTO 4 – Source: António Carreira, *Vida Social dos Manjacos*, 1947.

From the unidentified group in the first photos to the three identified *régulos* of the last set there is a shift which elucidates how the colonial administration regarded the representatives of the local power and valued those sovereigns as preferential partners. Even if different local personalities

were asked to come to the Central Posto to answer the ethnographic questionnaire, it was only the *régulos* who were identified and portrayed separate from a group. The three *régulos* portrayed do not however form an homogeneous group, as their diversity is expressive of both different representations of power and of different relations with the colonial administration. As referred to above, in Costa de Baixo, inhabited by the Babok, the *regulado* was imposed after negotiations between the colonial administrators – who were looking for influential allies – and a group of heirs (sons of a *régulo* of Bassarel) – who would later become a dynasty. The *régulos* of the Babok were the local political characters with interests aligned with the colonial administration, which, through them, guaranteed control over the central area of the District. Refusing the uniforms that were imitations of the military clothes distributed to all the *régulos* as an “official costume”, the sovereign of Costa de Baixo wore a suit (the model of Portuguese civil masculine elegance of the time), which implied not only a refusal of the administrative proposal, but also a usage of significant elements of urbanity.⁹ The titles emphasize this relationship, declaring him “the main expert of the habits and uses of Manjacos” (Carreira 1947), demonstrating the ease of communication between him and the administrator. This adherence contrasts with the title accompanying the picture of the *régulo* José de Pintampil, in the island of Pecixe, where it is stated that he is wearing the “characteristic clothes” and that “In Pecixe there are curious particularities in the two *regulados* of the island” (Carreira 1947). In these titles “knowledge” is opposed to “characteristic” and to “curious particularity”, contrasting the ease of communication with an attitude that was considered unyielding by the administrators. As official representations, these portraits are expressive of the colonial administration’s interpretation of local populations, as well as of the hierarchies established by the external observer.

The iconographical representations of the *régulos* are an expressive element of colonial history. They appear as representative of the power relations supported and embodied by the dignitaries. But we also have access to another representation of the sovereigns involved in this process through their *post-mortem* representations in the local statuary. One of the most expressive local representations of the *régulos* during the colonial period can be observed through the *icap* (manj.) or *forkilha di alma* (creole) that represented deceased sovereigns. In the continent (but not in the manjaco islands of Jeta and Pecixe) several houses have a place of libations constituted by a group of wooden sticks, each one invoking an ancestor of the house independent of his/her gender. The aspect of the *icap* is diversified: the older examples look like a fork or even a straight piece of wood, sometimes decorated

⁹ The significance of clothes in the representations of colonized subjects is analysed by Jean Comaroff in an inspiring article (Comaroff 1996).

with parallel engraved lines (see photo 4), common to numerous libation places in the area; while recent examples are clearly anthropomorphic, varying between the simple evocation of the honored ancestors gender and a complete representation of their physical features. These last representations are today more valuable, as they imply that the payment was made to a local sculptor, which would have increased the costs of the ceremony in which the *icap* was placed (see photos 5-6). The *icap* are installed in the course of a ritual that works as a second funeral (manj.: *ussái pesser*; creole: *cerimónia di korda*), constituting the final collective homage to the dead that establishes him/her as an ancestor of the house. It is the *régulos* who are the main characters to be honored in this way.



PHOTO 5 – By Clara Carvalho, Jeta, 1992.

In Caió, near Canchungo, it is possible to follow the evolution of these representations of the sovereigns. Near their residence (manj.: *kor*; creole: *reino*) in Belabate are several sculptures of the ancient *régulos* and their wives, grouped by their respective matrilineage (manj.: *kakanda*). The oldest among them did not resist time and the termites' hunger and so only a hole marks the place of libations; the most recent are sculpted thoroughly and painted, as it is the case with the *icap* of the last three *régulos* who have reigned through the 20th century (1920-1967). These last sculptures are representations



PHOTO 6 – Source: António Carreira, *Vida Social dos Manjacos*, 1947.

of Europeans, two of them wearing a military uniform, one with his honor strip, the other with gallons. In the most ancient and deteriorated statue the drawing of a tie can still be recognized (see photos 7-9). This europeanization of the image occurs equally in its physiognomy, with fine lips, long noses and black mustaches that stand out over the clear painting that represents the skin tone. The contrast with the women's figuration is obvious: the *régulo's* first wife or *namaca* (manj.) is portrayed transporting a gourd and a "band cloth" attached by a ceremonial string, usual ceremonial clothes used in several rituals. Besides their clothes, sculptures of the women are painted in a dark tone with African physiognomic lines. One of these *icap* represents Francisco Mango, a *régulo* of Caió that was eventually imprisoned in Galinhas island in 1962 (where he would die in 1967), accused of supporting the liberation movements. Before this episode (occurring in a period of strengthening oppression that accompanied the raising of the colonial war) there was another interpreter who became a *régulo* with the support of the colonial administration. In the 1940s, Caió's administrator, Artur Meireles, like his homologue in Costa de Baixo (Babok), was photographed wearing a masculine Western suit, representing the characteristics of European urbanity (Meireles 1949: 17).



PHOTO 7 - By Clara Carvalho, Caió, 1997.



PHOTO 8 - By Clara Carvalho, Caió, 1997.



PHOTO 9 – By Clara Carvalho, Caió, 1997.

Two of the Caió's *icap* were sculpted by Sango Mendes who learned his technique among the Bijagó where anthropomorphic sculpture was already practiced at the time (Duquette 1983).¹⁰ Mendes, who came from Caiomete (Caió), became particularly known in 1947, during the commemorations of the 500 years of the discovery of Guinea, when many of his works were sold or distributed. Some of the works of Mendes portrayed the colonial administrators like governors Silva Tavares and Manuel Sarmiento Rodrigues. It was probably in these characters figures that the sculptor was inspired to represent the *régulos* of Caió. It should be noted that not all the representations of *régulos* of Sango Mendes have the same characteristics. Through the pictures of the sculptor's works, conserved in the Photographic Archive of INEP in Bissau, we find several stylized sculptures of *régulos* with their traditional ceremonial clothes and African physiognomy, representations that contrast strikingly with those of the *régulos* of Caió.

As described above, the *régulos* were some of the preferential middlemen of colonial intervention, who were related not only to a perversion of the model of traditional authority, but also to an alteration of their own role and identity, as they appeared as allies of a foreigner power as well as of an alien

¹⁰ I would like to thank Eric Gable for giving me this information.

culture to the local population. The attempt of cultural assimilation of the *régulos* was effected through several strategies, including the preferential education of the sovereigns' children, and the support of candidates with whom the administrator had a good communication (namely with those who spoke Creole). Cultural assimilation was also attempted through the *régulos* in the administrative circuit, giving them responsibilities on sensitive subjects such as the collection of taxes or the responsibility for collective projects (Mendy 1994, Newitt 1981). This europeanization of the *régulos* also occurred through their adoption of the dominant culture's mode of dress, even if the styles could not be used during traditional ceremonies such as an enthronement. This europeanization is portrayed in Carreira's illustrations of the *régulos* of Costa de Baixo and Pandim or in the picture of Francisco Mango. These factors contributed to present the sovereigns to the population as an embodiment of the *brankundade* (creole), following a typology based on differentiated cultural identifications. This classification opposes the *branku* (creole) – all those that share a way of life and cultural habits associated with urbanity and Western values – to the *pretu* (creole) – those linked to a rural existence and habits. The opposition between *pretu* and *branku* is inspired, obviously, in the antagonism between the urban European and the African farmer and, above all, in the hegemonic dominance system imposed by the former where the body stands as the significant element *par excellence*. As recognized by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, concerning the dramatization modes in postcolonial contexts, racial characteristics become one of the first significant elements precisely because colonial hegemony has emphasized physiognomic differences as expressive of the relation of dominator/dominated (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 206). In this sense, the representations of the *régulos* of the *icap* of Caió naturalized a cultural and power attribute in order to make it more expressive. Free of their original references, these representations privileged the cultural attributes and incorporated the elements of colonial power in the portrayed *régulos*. What meaning can be given to these portraits of the *brankundade*?

Mimesis and creation

Power mimesis and the way it marked the colonial encounter have been the object of research in different colonial contexts, notably Fritz Kramer's classic comparative study on foreign representations in African statuary and performances (Kramer 1993 [1987]), Michael Taussig's works on the Cuna figures (Panama) (Taussig 1993) and Paul Stoller's analysis of the mimetic performances of the Hauka cults of Niger (Stoller 1995). Taussig analyzed the meaning of mimetic acts and figurations – from the point of view of the colo-

nized who reproduced the gestures and figures of the colonizers, using them as elements of power, and of caricature, sometimes in true terror representations. Inspired by sir James Frazer's reflection about the logic of magical thought, as well as Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert's classical study on magic, Taussig invokes the notions of infectious and sympathetic magic to explain mimesis as a form of adapting and controlling the unassimilated characteristics (because of their aggressive or incomprehensible nature) of social groups marked by the colonial encounter. According to Taussig, mimesis is a way to think and to react to alterity:

Pulling you this way and that, mimesis plays this trick of dancing between the very same and the very different. An impossible but necessary, indeed an everyday affair, mimesis registers both sameness and difference, of being like, and of being Other. Creating stability from this instability is no small task, yet all identity formation is engaged in this habitually bracing activity, in which the issue is not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity (Taussig 1993: 129).

This interpretation of mimesis as an act of political creation offers insight into the representations of the manjaco *régulos*. Their anthropomorphic representations provide the *régulo-ancestor* (as they are destined to be an object of libations) with attributes of power, and *brankundade* is recognized as one of these elements of power. As with the case of the Cuna illustrations, interpreted by Taussig, the figurations of the *régulos* also mimetically integrate the symbols of an alien power as a way to control it. The mimetic *icap*, as it combines elements of a new power in a traditional figuration, represents an attempt to integrate and to control terrible and powerful forces and symbols. In Paul Stoller's formulation, the mimetic character of these representations of the sovereigns signifies an *embodied opposition* (Stoller 1995).

The colonial encounter has not just fractured the previous social structures (paraphrasing Talal Asad 1991: 314), as it has forced the creation of new relations, symbols and significant. The *régulos*, for the role they played and were constrained to play, were some of the most sensitive elements of this process. Colonial dominance was not applied on passive subjects, but on people who reacted to it in many and different ways. Colonialism did not just control political regimes, it was intended to dominate global forms of social existence and to institute a hegemonic ideology. This control could be effected through continuous interrelation with populations. In the case of the *régulos* and chiefs, it becomes obvious that there existed a continuous and mutual negotiation among them. The examples referred to in this paper demonstrate that the colonial process must also be seen as the construction of a dominant ideology constantly negotiated among the involved parts. Government, as a form of power that infiltrates the social fabric, cannot be reduced to a single

strategy. As Peter Pels states, trying to define the field of an “anthropology of the colonialism”,

it is still unusual for researchers to fully escape the dichotomy of colonial state and oppressed and/or resistant others, and to realize how much colonial empires were fragmented by other tensions (Pels 1997: 176).

Colonialism brought goods, technologies and symbols that were desired, possessed, used and interpreted by groups with divergent interests (Pels 1997: 176). In their role as middlemen, traditional chiefs form an excellent case through which to analyze the constitution of colonial hegemony. The actual role of the *régulos*, their representation and the way they embody power may only be understood in relation to the recent influence of colonial presence in the postcolonial context where they were invoked again, in a movement that revitalized tradition in Guinea-Bissau.

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REPRESENTAÇÕES AMBÍGUAS: PODER E MIMETIZAÇÃO NA GUINÉ PORTUGUESA

Neste artigo são explorados alguns aspectos da ambiguidade das relações de poder do período colonial, cuja influência está ainda presente na construção pós-colonial da nação. O encontro colonial provocou um confronto entre as instituições políticas locais e o projecto colonial de hegemonia cultural e política. Os intermediários locais foram particularmente sensíveis a este jogo mútuo de dominação, integração e exclusão. Ao centrarmos nas representações iconográficas de uma categoria desses intermediários – os régulos, chefes locais na Guiné-Bissau –, tanto sob o ponto de vista local como sob o ponto de vista colonialista, temos acesso a um espelho do império: a constante e perversa negociação de identidades e referências entre colonizadores e colonizados.

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