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MANJACO RULERS AFTER A REVOLUTION

Eric Gable

Today, as James Clifford puts it, 'all the beautiful primitive places are ruined' (1988: 4), if there ever were such primitive places. Visit a West African village and you seem to enter a 'ruptured landscape' a 'pulverized space of postmodernity' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 8–9) in which the here and the there, the then and the now, are inextricably 'entangled'.[1] What kind of ethnography can anthropologists write about the 'ruptured landscape' of a village in contemporary West Africa?

This article is a part of a larger work—my attempt to write such an ethnography about the land, or *utchak*, of Bassarel, a cluster of villages inhabited by members of the Manjaco ethnic group who are often reluctant and usually cynical citizens of Guinea-Bissau, an erstwhile colony of Portugal and a recently independent country. The larger work is also my response to an on-going critique of 'africanist' anthropology by African intellectuals that our discipline uses a particular historical narrative to account for postcolonial 'rupture', 'fragmentation', and 'malaise' which perpetuate colonialist distinctions between African and Western mentalities. We suffer, as Paulin Hountondji puts it, from an 'ethnologic addiction to' a particular kind of 'past' in which authority is sacred and the acceptance of authority the rule rather than the exception. Or—to put it in the register of postcolonial theory—when

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[1] 'Entangled' having, since Nicholas Thomas used it so effectively, become a nearly ubiquitous term that anthropologists associate with the experience of modernity on the margins. People on the periphery—people in the world's 'out of the way' places, to borrow another now nearly ubiquitous phrase, this time from Geertz—are inevitably 'entangled' in the webs of (in)significance modernity generates for them. They are, in our new way of seeing this old problem, invariably accomplices in their entanglements rather than, say, resistant, as they once (and briefly) were as late as the 1980s (but before the Berlin Wall came down?). 'Entangled' is such a post-sounding word. But it imports as usual a pre- outlook toward modernity itself: it ventriloquises our anxiety about modernity's destructive seductions. I initially used the word 'entangled' in the body of the text out of a kind of reflex: another lemming over the same cliff. I leave it there to remind the reader of the seductive powers of scholarly fashion. We tend to copy a common vocabulary. The words we use have a life of their own.

[2] I am referring here to Benita Parry's discussion and critique of Spivak and Bhahba's notions of the subaltern in imperialist discourse and practice. Subalterns who are revolutionaries, who resist the coloniser from behind the bulwarks of a genuine local culture, are easy to portray as heroes—our proxies—in various countermodern critiques. Subalterns who wish to emulate their ostensible oppressors, who admire them, copy them, are harder to embrace. Manjaco tend to be subalterns in this second sense. They are our 'bad copies' (see Gable, 1998).

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subalterns speak or act in inappropriate or unappealing ways, rather than confront their presence we retreat into history.[2]

When I began fieldwork in Bassarel in 1986 I felt compelled to retreat into the kind of history Hountondji criticises because the topic I had chosen for research had also seemingly receded into the past, leaving at best shattered and adulterated traces in the present. I was interested in the intersection between political and religious power and authority. My focus was kingship. According to pre-colonial and colonial accounts, Bassarel was the site of the court of the 'king of kings', a quasi-divine 'rain priest', who sat at the centre of a congeries of more than two dozen similar 'lands' whose rulers paid him allegiance (Carreira, 1947). In 1913 a column of Fula and Mandinga irregulars led by a Portuguese officer, Teixeira Pinto, marched on Bassarel and defeated the Manjaco in a pitched battle. The invaders put the royal court to the torch; they captured the king, and exiled him to São Tomé, where he died in obscurity. For months after the campaign the Portuguese-led troops systematically pillaged what was left of Bassarel. Then, during the colonial era (from 1914 to 1974) Portuguese colonial administrators meddled in local politics, using kingship as an arm of a notoriously corrupt and incompetent government. After the revolution, the post-revolutionary state abolished kingship because it was considered to be an exploitative colonial relic.

In 1986 the dethroned king still lived and still tended the royal shrines as a 'divine king' should, but he resided in a village whose inhabitants shunned and scorned their erstwhile leader. Like other colonial-era rulers in the post-revolutionary Guinea-Bissau, Vincinti Nai had been stripped of his official title by government decree, and a Comite had been selected to take his place as interlocutor between the village and the newly independent state. Manjaco—who were hardly patriots, who had for the most part stayed out of the revolutionary struggle, and who were as likely to resist as follow the dictates of the new nation's leaders—assured me that they 'laughed' in celebration when they learned that their king would be forced to step down. To them he was a corrupt despot who had abused the authority the Portuguese colonial presence made possible. And so in 1986, long after the revolution, long after the new state had ceased to blame old rulers for colonial era complicities, the Manjaco I met continued to deride him. Indeed, in sharp contrast to other regions in the new nation, where colonial-era chiefs or their descendants had been quietly reinstated as Comites, the king of Bassarel remained a pariah (Carvalho, 1998). Kings and kingship had become a thing of the past.

One way to explain the king's fate is to blame colonialism itself for his political demise. In recalling the circumstances of colonial rule in the decades that led up to and through the revolution, Manjaco stressed that era's corrosive corruptions. As they recounted it, as Manjaco aristocrats competed for local political 'titles', and the valuable wet rice fields associated with them, they allied themselves with Portuguese administrators, made under-the-table deals, bribed and were bribed, and enriched themselves at the expense of their subjects. By the late

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1950s most of the 'titles' and the 'titled fields' that were the collective property of the Manjaco realm were under the control of usurpers—members of aristocratic houses who 'sat where their fathers sat' in defiance of royal prerogatives.[3]

Portuguese colonial administrators blamed colonialism—or at least the unfair economic advantages their neighbouring colonies had—for making Manjaco so hard to rule, hard to 'fix' as colonial subjects. Manjaco were of special concern for the Portuguese administration because they offered such promise: the 'typical' Manjaco was 'a worker who had escaped, for the most part, the atavistic indolence inherent in the great mass of the negro population' (Viegas, 1939: 135). Hard-working Manjaco inhabited a region rich in resources to be exploited for the benefit of the colony and its civilising mission. Their forests were virtual oil-palm plantations. Their cultivated upland fields already produced more of the colony's leading export crop—peanuts—than any other region. Their wet rice fields were extensive enough to feed their entire population and more. But Manjaco had the disturbing propensity to vote with their feet against local chiefs and the colony and for greater freedom and better economic prospects in French Senegal or British Gambia. Already by the 1940s roughly a fifth of them in any given year were hard at work in neighbouring Senegal, their labour adding nicely to the French balance sheet (Carreira, 1962). Meanwhile dikes protecting wet rice fields crumbled and upland fields reverted to scrub forest. Worse, Manjaco rulers tended to be a disruptive rather than a constructive influence—becoming tyrants or getting deposed with alarming regularity. As administrators saw it, if only they could protect the villagers from the polluting effects of contact with Western civilisation, and if only they could discover how to find and nurture 'duly constituted authority', Manjaco would climb palms, cultivate peanuts, and grow rice under the benevolent direction of pliant chiefs and rulers.[4]

Certainly the revolutionary government of Guinea-Bissau blamed colonialism, or rather Manjaco complicity in colonialism, for what they

[3] In the Portuguese 'administrative anthropology' (see Pels, 1996) the Manjaco kingdom was a loosely organised 'pecuniary polity' (Carreira, 1947). The king in Bassarel selected rulers in the other Manjaco lands, who paid him for the 'titles' they received, and these rulers in turn selected chiefs and other title holders in the region under their tutelage. Rulers of vassal lands obtained use rights to titled fields and in turn received tribute from other incumbent title holders in the villages. Kinglists from these lands reveal that in the ostensible 'vassal' lands to Bassarel, two, three or sometimes four houses shared, in a circulating fashion, the rulership. These houses claimed direct patrilineal descent from kings of Bassarel. In regions more distant from Bassarel, such as Caio and Pecis, the political connection with Bassarel was more tenuous and affiliation to aristocratic houses followed a pattern of matrilineal descent (see Carvalho, 1998; Meireles, 1948, 1949). In this article I use the term 'Manjaco' to refer to the various lands directly associated with Bassarel, including the densely populated region of Canchungo.

[4] To glimpse the chaotic early years of colonial administration in Guinea-Bissau see Mills (1929), Lyall (1938), Viegas (1936–40) and Mota (1954). For a sketch of archival sources on the Manjaco polity during this period see Gable (1998).

[5] For the most comprehensive overview of the revolution and its aftermath see Forrest (1992).

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took to be a disturbing lack of patriotism among the members of this ethnic group.[5] Manjaco, unlike the other so-called 'animist' or coastal ethnic groups such as Balanta and Papel, had not been enthusiastic supporters of the war for independence. Rather than joining the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e do Cabo Verde (PAIGC), Manjaco expatriates in Senegal had formed their own nationalist party. Meanwhile, throughout the long, violent struggle, Manjaco aristocrats manipulated Portuguese gullibility and fear by accusing their competitors of working with the revolutionaries. As a result many erstwhile rulers (such as Antonio Mango) were arrested and tortured. In the first chaotic months after the Portuguese defeat, some of the more powerful rulers (such as Baticam Fereira) who could be portrayed as allying themselves with the Portuguese, were executed. Because the revolutionary government could not trust Manjaco rulers to join them in the national project, a law was enacted to cede the 'titled fields' they controlled to the commoners who rented and tilled those fields. As a result the king's power and his authority was effectively made moribund.

Yet to blame (or explain) the Manjaco king's fate after the revolution on colonialism is at once obvious and yet perhaps too easy. Colonialism has always been anthropology's 'usual suspect' when we confront what appears to be the collapse of traditional authority. And colonialism's corruptions have also been used by postcolonial regimes as a convenient excuse for rural chaos. In both discourses colonialism's corruptions can be safely contained as a kind of boundary between an authentic 'before' and an adulterated 'after' in an imagined African political landscape. When order dissolves into disorder the catalyst is colonialism. But Manjaco memories are not infused with this kind of longing for a return to tradition. Their vernacular political anthropology is very different from the kind Hountondji criticises.

In what follows I want to use Manjaco reflections on the fate of their postcolonial king to sketch an ethnography of Manjaco leaders and followers that does not inadvertently import colonialist anthropology's nostalgia into a new era. To do this I will first frame my sketch of Manjaco rulers by highlighting what I interpret to be the salient stylistic features of the very different kinds of royal portraits anthropologists of the colonial era were given to making. Specifically I am writing my article to be hung alongside Evans-Pritchard's revealing little lecture 'Zande kings and princes' (1957), his other snapshots of the Azande aristocracy scattered through his classic study of Azande witchcraft, and, by extension, his widely cited words on 'divine kingship' in general.

By comparing 'my' Manjaco to 'his' Azande I am making no claims about their ethnographic equivalence. Manjaco kingdoms and Azande kingdoms are as incomparable as a Balinese Negara (as described by Geertz) is to the valley of Swat Pathans (as discussed by Barth). Indeed, one could claim that coastal West Africa and the Sudan could not be more culturally distinct, yet because both are lumped together as 'Africa' Evans-Pritchard did not merely inscribe an ethnographic

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location, he pioneered the landscape of political anthropology which generated its own geography. His Azande, Shilluk, Nuer, and Anuak, have become paradigms of a very large ethnographic space—a kind of imaginary and authentic 'Africa' before (just before!) the colonial encounter—a space that always makes the 'after' of colonialism a kind of degeneration. Eventually I would like to imagine what such a map of an African political anthropology would look like if it began in an always already colonial West Africa, rather than a Sudan of seemingly clear befores and afters. Because, if aphorisms are anthropology's axioms, then Evans-Pritchard's assertion—that kingship is sacred, not kings—is axiomatic only in such neatly divided landscapes.[6]

But for the purposes of this article I wish to be much less presumptuous. Here my interest in Evans-Pritchard's Azande entails a comparison of a different order—a comparison, not of ethnography, but of ethnographers. When I read his work I am constantly impressed by Evans-Pritchard's fluency in turning the particulars of a tense personal encounter between two deftly drawn subjects—a 'native' and an 'anthropologist'—into a vignette that characterises an 'ethnological type'. We are all familiar with his widely cited sketch of the way Nuer consistently 'blocked' his 'inquiry' (1940: 12–13). His confession of his 'Nuerosis'—that deft textual exposure of himself as frustrated interrogator—made 'the Nuer' as distinctively real as any protagonist in the best fiction. In Evans-Pritchard's day such alchemy was taken for granted. In my era, it no longer is. When we write of such anxious interactions, it is to signal a certain scepticism about the ethnographic product itself. So always for me, thanks to Evans-Pritchard, looms the question 'How much is "my" ruler me, how much "him"?'

Given a certain admiration for the way Evans-Pritchard transforms the interpersonal into the ethnographically generic, I am also fascinated and troubled by his current incarnation as a 'prime target' (McKinnon, 2000: 36)—a subject of ridicule, or a 'native', if you will—in anthropology's own auto-critique, a critique which is also an anthropology of colonialism.[7] One clear by-product of this 'anthropology of anthropology', as Peter Pels (1997: 177) succinctly calls it, is that nowadays many of us attempting to write ethnography in the age of the postcolony assume as a given an earlier anthropology's complicity in the colonial project.[8] We might, for example, read into Evans-Pritchard's descriptions a kind of would-that-it-were world in which an ideal order

[6] Paulin Hountondji (1996: 36) notes that colonialist anthropologists tended to stress that traditional politics was underwritten by 'a hierarchy founded on a metaphysical order of subordination'. It is in this sense that African kingship, above all, was 'sacred'.

[7] It is my impression that Evans-Pritchard has now, at least in America, attained the apotheosis of a 'classic' ancestor. He is 'remembered' rather than read. Derision is oral—something every graduate student knows—rather than literary—something that needs to be proved by a close scrutiny of texts.

[8] Typically it is asserted that in the colonial era anthropologists consigned colonised subjects to distant and timeless places far removed from the metropole's worldly helter-skelter (Fabian, 1983; Clifford, 1988).

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always exists just beyond the horizon of the present, obscured (but only temporarily) by colonialism's disruptions. We might argue that this anachronistic vision mirrored ideas that underwrote the plausibility of indirect rule that was a return of sorts. It was, often as not, a nostalgic return: reinstall old kings, reinvigorate a new polity. Evans-Pritchard, it might be argued, wrote the kind of political anthropology that made indirect rule imaginable. In this political anthropology particularly offensive kings could be discounted as exceptions in a platonic order in which 'kingship' after all and not particular kings was sacred. And this theory may have echoed the mundane practice of colonial administrators who, ever searching for genuine 'constituted authority', could in all good faith depose now this recalcitrant ruler, install now that pliant one, yet all the while complaining about colonial subjects who were not sufficiently and authentically subservient (e.g. Pels, 1996). But is it fair to read into Evans-Pritchard's close yet cool descriptions a hidden (if perhaps unintended) agenda (e.g. Kucklick, 1991; Goody, 1995)? And if we are to read into Evans-Pritchard something 'colonialist' (or 'anti-colonialist') beneath the page, how should we scrutinise our own inscriptions? Is there a typically 'postcolonialist anthropology' in this vaguely pejorative sense? I take up this question in my concluding remarks. But first a glimpse of Azande aristocrats after colonisation. Then of Manjaco rulers after a revolution.

A GOLDEN AGE OF LAW AND CUSTOM

To me Evans-Pritchard's swift sketch 'Zande king and princes' epitomises the colonialist genre. He paints a royal portrait at odds with the evidence the essay itself contains. The essay comprises a dozen or so biographical sketches by European travellers of Azande nobles in which 'one [ruler] is unctuous, another brutal and hotheaded, another cruel, another arrogant and a fop . . .' (Evans-Pritchard, 1962: 116) bracketed by his own recollections of Azande aristocrats he met while doing fieldwork in Sudan in the 1930s. Out of this oddly dishevelled bunch of rogues and fops he paints a portrait gallery of the royal house, framed by these wonderful sentences (1962: 87):

> I have myself met many members of this ruling house and I have been most impressed by—in general, for not all are alike—their proud bearing, their politeness, fastidiousness, reticence, even shyness; their intelligence, sharpened by suspicion of Europeans to cunning; their conservative clinging to tradition, a demeanour and manners unsurpassed by any aristocracy in the world, even among those who have no political position, and a superiority which requires for its acceptance neither display of force nor ornament . . . Even under colonial rule their prestige was quite considerable and their power, though curbed by alien governments, was strongly exercised behind the scenes; their subjects, in spite of European efforts to undermine their dominion, continuing to submit to them to the point of subservience. I never heard a commoner question their authority.

As is characteristic of much of Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic

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descriptions, the colonial presence in this passage is a translucent curtain through which we see a more essential reality. Colonialism is introduced, and glancingly critiqued, but it is in effect dismissed as insubstantial. 'Even under colonial rule,' Evans-Pritchard writes, and 'in spite of,' he adds, 'European efforts to undermine their dominion,' Azande royal authority persists. 'I never,' he stresses, 'heard a commoner question their authority.'

Here too a certain kind of attitude toward 'authority' becomes almost a stand-in for 'tradition' itself.[9] In this ideal kingdom indigenous authority is sacrosanct. On the other hand (as we shall see below) foreign—that is, colonial—authority is inevitably contested—subjected to endless suspicion—by some Azande. And this too is a sign of cultural authenticity. Indigenous authority entails rulers 'whose superiority is never challenged and whose commands receive immediate obedience' (1937: 14) and 'commoners' who make perfect subjects 'who . . . were often keen to furnish information' (1937: 13):

> in the experience of the author, as well as in the experience of other Englishmen who have lived among them, the Azande are so used to authority that they are docile; that it is unusually easy for Europeans to establish contact with them; that they are hospitable, good natured, and almost always cheerful and sociable; that they adapt themselves without undue difficulty to new conditions of life and are always ready to copy the behaviour of those they regard as their superiors in culture and to borrow new modes of dress, new weapons and utensils, new words and even new ideas and habits; and that they are unusually intelligent, sophisticated and progressive, offering little opposition to foreign administrations and displaying little scorn for foreigners. [1937: 13]

Aristocrats, by contrast, question the 'authority' of their new overlords, and by extension, the anthropologist:

> The noble classes are more proud and conservative; they are contemptuous of their subjects and detest their European conquerors. They are often handsome, frequently talented, and can be charming hosts and companions, but generally they mask behind a cold politeness their dislike of the new order of things and those who impose it, and I found that, with rare exceptions, they were useless as informants, since they firmly refused to discuss their customs and beliefs, always deflecting conversation into some other channel . . . [1937: 13]

[9] It's often amazing how a certain anthropology takes 'authority' for granted as a given in kingdoms. Thus, in criticising Kucklick's critique of Evans-Pritchard, Goody notes that Evans-Pritchard's interest in Nuer 'ordered anarchy' was primarily intellectual rather than romantically anti-authoritarian; Goody notes the 'source of order was not difficult to perceive in state systems'. He also remarks dryly, 'nor do I think that Evans-Pritchard always had time for egalitarianism if that meant the abolition of rank and authority in a complex society' (1999: 193). Yet it is precisely the ceaseless contest of authority that we assume is endemic in the complex societies we inhabit.

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Evans-Pritchard's Azande aristocrats might count as bad colonial and ethnographic subjects. Yet they also scan as literary precursors to the proud Nuer, for whom 'When I entered a cattle camp it was not only as a stranger but as an enemy, and they seldom tried to conceal their disgust at my presence, refusing to answer my greetings and even turning away when I addressed them' (1940: 11). These were the proud Nuer whom Evans-Pritchard would later respect as rough equals, whose rough treatment of him made them in a sense perfect ethnographic companions.[10] But only Azande 'commoners' treated Evans-Pritchard as a 'superior'. So Nuer in effect are a kind of synthesis of the two types. When Evans-Pritchard wrote about Azande and Nuer he was already predisposed to contrast them, following in the footsteps of his mentor Seligman (see Seligman's foreword to Evans-Pritchard, 1937), with the Nuer being more resistant and therefore more ethnographically appealing. So, if Azande aristocrats made frustrating informants (because they questioned colonial authority), this may have made them more enticingly authentic than their quick to please (and copy) erstwhile subjects. At least Evans-Pritchard seemed inclined to let aristocrats speak for 'Azande' when he inscribed colonialism itself as a boundary between an authentic before and an adulterated after, as in this paean to the last pre-colonial ruler:

> Gbudwe was king in that part of Zandeland in which I worked. He was shot in an affray with British forces and died of his wounds in 1905. To Azande his death was not simply the death of a king, but it was the end of an epoch, nay more, it was a catastrophe that changed the whole order of things. When older men talk about their customs they contrast what happens to-day with what happened 'when Gbudwe was alive', and in their opinion what happened in the days of Gbudwe is what ought to happen. Although Gbudwe died only twenty-one years before I commenced my work in his kingdom his reign was already looked back to with regret by those who had experienced his rule. To them it was the Golden Age of law and custom. [1937: 19]

Here a borrowed nostalgia erases or diminishes the potentially interesting distinction between Azande commoners who are quick to copy new ways and discard old ones and 'proud and conservative' aristocrats, not to mention the conflicts that may have become endemic between them as (some?) 'Azande' 'looked back with regret' to a 'Golden Age of law and custom' when a certain authority was accepted and acceptable. Here, too, Azande regret (or should we say aristocratic regret?) perhaps dovetails with the colonial-era ethnographer's regret as well—that anthropology is too late to do much more than write history in the present tense.

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[10] In *The Nuer* he would write that 'Azande would not allow me to live as one of themselves; Nuer would not allow me to live otherwise. Among Azande I was compelled to live outside the community; among the Nuer I was compelled to be a member of it. Azande treated me as a superior; Nuer as an equal' (1940: 15).

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THE PARIAH KING

I must confess that sense of having arrived too late characterised my postcolonial ethnographic condition. When I first met the king of Bassarel, he sat alone on the crumbling veranda of his house—a dark shadow, shaded by the eaves of the thatched roof. He was a smaller man than most of his peers, and he wore a long black raincoat and a tattered black fedora. His face looked bitten, the nose cut short and the eyes constantly red and watering. When he laughed or smiled, his lips dragged downwards at the corners as if betraying more bitter emotions. I came to know the king as a not altogether pleasant figure. And I often wondered if his fate was a reflection of his character or what had happened to his office during the chaotic era of colonialism.

He was alone most of the times I subsequently visited him. We would sit together on the veranda. I'd have brought some palm wine or he would have had some and we would have drunk a few glasses—his sometimes mixed with cane rum because he was an old man and needed something stronger 'to grab the veins'. People would pass by. The king would call out a greeting, but they would hurry by, never stopping. Even though old Manjaco men generally seemed to spend much of their time alone—they farmed alone, they 'guarded' their fields alone, they tapped palms alone—the king was more alone than most. Vincinti Nai was a man in internal exile. In part his exile was self-imposed. He was angry with the community for forsaking him and they, in turn, were not pleased with him. So he visited no one and had few visitors himself. But his exile also went with the territory of kingship. Even though Vincinti Nai was no longer a ruler in a political sense, he still was affected by what we would call the religious or mystical restraints of office. He was, as Manjaco habitually remarked, 'fire', and as fire he was not supposed to leave his compound during the rainy season, nor were people to see him bathing. As 'fire' he could kill a newborn infant just by passing by the hut in which the infant was being born. As 'fire' he could not sit on a stool another might use lest that person catch a horribly painful and disfiguring disease. As 'fire' the king's movements were supposedly restricted, although since the revolution he had begun farming his ricefield on his own and therefore he had begun leaving his compound for the fields during the rainy season. His fellow villagers seemed to accept this change in custom, although many still grumbled that the king's fire could wilt growing rice if he passed too closely.

The king, like all kings before him, was a kind of guest to Bassarel, an outsider from another Manjaco 'land'. He was from one of the westernmost regions of the Manjaco territory, near the area that starts to tail off into the land of the Felupes, whom the Manjaco consider more primitive, cruder. He was born some time in the first decade of the twentieth century. His father died when he was very young and he had been fostered to a classificatory father's brother in a different compound. He emigrated to the Casamance long before the Second World War. There he had, he claimed, been elected village chief of

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Baraka Pekau because he was one of the most successful peanut farmers, because he had three wives from successful families, but mostly because he had, as he put it, 'a big head'.

I would usually bring a tape-recorder when I paid the king a visit because he wanted his voice to be the permanent record of the lessons in Manjaco 'custom' and history he taught me. He invariably began his session with me with a rhetorical question: 'Who is speaking here?' I would answer, as I was coached by him to do, 'Vincinti Nai,' and he would repeat, 'Yes, Vincinti Nai, King of Guinea-Bassarel, king of all, of everything . . .' and ask me to repeat what he had said. Sometimes he would remind me that 'Only I, Vincinti Nai, know these things.' He would assert that 'Others are old, but their heads are not big, their ears not open.' At the end of our session he would ask me to play back his words and chuckle when he heard himself say how great he was.

During these sessions he liked to boast about his 'big head' to me—about his 'open ears' or his ability 'to talk'. He told me over and over one story in particular which happened during World War II. The French were fighting 'Hitler' and 'de Gaulle' was trying to recruit Africans to fight for the French. According to Vincinti, they opened the border between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, giving every Manjaco who crossed over a uniform and citizen's papers. Those without 'big heads', according to Vincinti Nai, leapt at the chance of becoming French. But Vincinti Nai knew that 'many would not return from the war'. Using his office to good effect, he cadged a ride on a government transport going south, talked his way across the border, and spent the war years safely in Guinea-Bissau, while other Manjaco were fighting and dying (stupidly) for France. Many of those who fought, he pointed out, 'never got papers', 'never got a pension'. But he, 'Vincinti Nai', returned to Baraka Pekau after the war and became chief again.

On other occasions he told me stories about how his nose had been disfigured. He recalled that, as a young man in Baraka Pekau, he had once been so handsome that when he danced or went to funerals the women could not keep away from him. Other men envied him and someone with 'eyes' got his revenge by infecting the young Vincinti's face with invisible worms. Vincinti began to cough and sneeze up bits of bone and gobs of blood. He got to a diviner in time to save his life but not his nose. On another occasion he told me a different story. His nose had been smashed by Portuguese troops when, near the end of the war, he had been suspected of aiding the guerrillas and had been taken to Canchungo for interrogation. Thus, while the villagers claimed that he had colluded with the Portuguese, his smashed nose proved otherwise.

The king also wanted me to take photographs of him so that his image would live on after his death. While he was still alive he planned to hang the photographs, one in the entryway of his hut, the other inside the 'palace' which the Portuguese had constructed for him during Spinola's campaign for 'A better Guinea'—the 'palace' Vincinti never used but left to his oldest son. He wanted to frame the photographs to decorate his grave after his death. He told me that he planned to construct an elaborate tomb for himself. It would be of 'cement'. 'The

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villagers will pass by when it is being dug. They will ask, "What are you making?" I will say, "It is a latrine." They will think I am making a latrine. The walls of cement, the floor of cement.' He laughed as he talked of how his neighbours would be fooled. 'No one will know until after I am dead. My body will go there in the hole of cement. The ants, the termites—they will not eat my body. The earth will not touch my body. I will make a door of cement. In the door will be a frame, in the frame your photograph. Glass will keep the rain from the photograph.' Other kings, he explained, had all been buried surreptitiously in the patch of tangled sacred forest that abutted the court, and their tombs were ephemeral and invisible, but Vincinti Nai's tomb of cement would last for ever. And 'everyone going on the path will see it.'

The photo session with me was to be conducted secretly. The king chose a time when others would not be around and I was to keep my camera hidden in my bag until I reached his courtyard. He needed help dressing for the occasion. He asked me which of the several suits I thought would look best—all of them were gifts, he said, from sons 'in France'. He decided to wear the white cap which was a part of the uniform the Portuguese had given the chiefs and rulers. It was of cheap white cloth, so thin it had the consistency of crepe paper—a hat a child pretending to be a sea captain might wear to a costume party. We selected a tie and he asked me to knot it for him. The light was fading; we were in a hurry so I did not notice his grandchildren, who kept creeping into the frame behind him to gesture and make comic poses when I took the photos.

To me that cheap white cap was so pathetic. Seeing him in that white cap reminded me of other stories the king told about himself and the colonial authorities—about how Spinola, his dark glasses reflecting the sunlight, had personally come to the village to give the king the keys to 'the palace' of cement and tile they had constructed for him in the centre of the village; about how Spinola had sent a helicopter to the village to fetch the king to attend the congress in Bissau. That Vincinti Nai would recall such stories with pride, that he would still want to be photographed in the cap the Portuguese had given him during the war, and yet simultaneously want to claim that his deformed nose was a result of Portuguese brutality, showed how pitifully trapped by events he was. If I found the king pathetic because of that hat he had saved all these years and still was so proud of, because of the transparently boastful stories he told about himself, then the villagers, I soon discovered, simply found him insufferable.

About half-way through my stay in Bassarel a particular incident made this graphically apparent. The king had asked me to translate a letter he had received from a government functionary. The letter asked Vincinti Nai's help in soliciting funds from the people of Bassarel to help pay for a ceremony in Cacheu in which several cattle, and dozens of litres of cane rum, would be offered up to the river spirit. The request was striking because of its seeming official sanction. The 'President' of Cacheu—an office something like that of a governor of a state—a party man, and a non-Manjaco Muslim, had okayed the ceremony. In fact

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the funds would be channelled through him. All the Manjaco villages in the region were being asked to chip in because they used the state-run ferry from Cacheu more than any other group and because recently there had been several disasters in which boats had capsized and people had drowned.

The king wanted to use the letter to reassert his authority. He asked me rhetorically as I read it, 'Who is the letter addressed to? Is it Vincinti Nai, king of Bassarel, or is it the Comite?' The king then sent the letter by way of the *namuan*, his erstwhile assistant, to the weekly meeting of the men of Bassarel in the sacred grove of Penau, where they purposely ignored the king's connection with the letter. Initially the assembly voted to reject the letter. Knowing that it came from the king, one man set the tone by noting that it had arrived 'unsealed' and without a proper 'address', therefore its provenance was in doubt. Was it 'official' or not? Certainly it had not arrived in an official way. Before the men of Bassarel would decide whether or not to take up a collection, they would get word to the government in Canchungo that they expected a more official letter. It was agreed that an official letter should come directly to the shrine priest or to the Comite.

The 'official' confirmation eventually did come, but in the meantime Vincinti Nai, incensed that he had been snubbed by the assembly, sent a letter (his son wrote it) direct to Cacheu in which he claimed that he as king had tried everything to convince his subjects to comply with the wishes of 'the land' (that is, Guinea-Bissau) but they had refused. As he put it in the letter, 'the cattle had escaped from the enclosure' and would 'no longer heed the word of their master'. Subsequently the men of Bassarel got wind of what Vincinti had done and accused him of besmirching their good name with the 'law' (that is, government officials) in Cacheu. They worried aloud that the 'law' would single out people from Bassarel and refuse them passage on the boats that crossed the river for the Casamance. Even those who believed that the canoes had capsized because they were overloaded, and not because of the spirit, believed that Bassarel should donate its share to the ceremony. All feared that Bassarel would suffer collectively if they did not pay. But most feared retribution from the state, not from spirits.

The incident ended badly for the king. The village called a public meeting and invited the king to appear to defend himself. When he refused to show up, they spent the time recounting the evils he had committed since Independence—how he had consistently failed to provide sacrificial beasts when it was his job, how, for example, when the neighbouring 'land' of Calequisse had performed their initiation ceremony, it had been the villagers who had provided the bull that was Bassarel's gift rather than the king, as it should have been. Others blamed him for the misfortunes they had suffered during the revolution.

During the revolution the Portuguese stationed in Bassarel needed to be fed, and the quartermaster, as some villagers recalled it, left it to the king to organise the villages to supply meat. The king, for his part, took advantage of the Portuguese presence. Before and during the revolution it was the king's right to receive a foreleg of at least one of the livestock

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sacrificed at every funeral. Before the revolution the king distributed what he could not eat to the young men of the village. But during the revolution, as the villagers tell it, the king became greedy and simply sold all that he could to the garrison. But what the king himself was able to provide was only a small portion of what the garrison needed, so the Portuguese also paid for livestock the king expropriated from the villagers at an official price which was horribly unfair to the owners. As the garrison grew, the Portuguese's ever greater appetite became an imposition upon the people. Late in the war, too, the villagers were ordered to move into specially constructed huts closer to the garrison. Ostensibly the move was meant to 'civilise' the natives. The huts had zinc roofs, windows, four rooms, each of a size meant to encourage a more sanitary life style. Both those who were forced to move away from cool and scattered households to tight and hot quarters, and those who were burdened with providing meat, blamed the king. Although 'everyone' ostensibly was to move, some stayed put and escaped punishment. Although all households were to provide livestock in rotation, some seemed to provide it less frequently than others. The king used his powers to play favourites or to punish his personal enemies.

This was how the king was remembered. It was because they wanted the king to suffer for committing these fairly banal sins that they 'laughed' when the post-revolutionary government ordered him to step down.[11] As such one could characterise the king as a typical casualty of colonialism. A pitiful little man whose head got too big for his shoulders. A scapegoat for the larger, more encompassing, sins of colonialism's corruptions.[12]

For the Manjaco of Bassarel colonialism's corruptions had become naturalised in public memory as an essential fact about kingship. For Manjaco the collective portrait of royalty was a rogues' gallery. And in this rogues' gallery Vincinti Nai was merely one more instantiation of a warped pattern. When people complained of Vincinti Nai, they did not spontaneously hold him up to some ideal standard or compare him with a past king who had acted properly. When, indeed, I heard Manjaco speak of kings in the past, it was usually to disparage them. The king who preceded Vincinti Nai was, if anything, hated far more than was Vincinti Nai. This king, Mango, was known for his greed. He had used Portuguese decrees about *corvée* labour to force villagers to farm peanut fields on his account. As one story goes, King Mango refused to eat fish or chicken, but craved only goat meat or pork. Each day he sent his sons off to confiscate livestock from the villagers. Should they complain, he called in the colonial police—the *cipaios* or sepoys—to beat them. The

[11] Their laughter as they reported it was akin to that discussed by Mbembe (1992) as a characteristic of postcolonial responses to power.

[12] I have outlined the forms these corruptions took in another work (Gable, 1998). In my estimation the legerdemain of Portuguese governmentality and Manjaco complicity in colonial rule paralleled similar entanglements as described by Berry (1985) and Feierman (1990).

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villagers nicknamed Mango 'Eats the she-goat, not the he-goat', an ironic inversion of the hunter's praise name 'Kills the stag, leaves the doe; we'll eat, we'll eat'. If the hunter took his prey, but ensured that there would always be prey for others, then Mango by contrast was a destroyer virtually cannibalising his kingdom.

I once asked the chief of the village praise drummers if there had ever been any good kings. The praise drummer was among the oldest of the elders, and he was known for his gentleness. He spat out, '*Mok*.' Never. 'They have all been bad.' But then he thought for a moment and recalled for me an incident that had happened when he was a young unmarried man. 'King Umbera was good. The whites wanted the tax; they called the king. The king came and opened his hand, he showed them a palm kernel in his hand.' Telling me this story, he held out his closed fist and then opened it, revealing an imaginary kernel. ' "The kernel is small," King Umbera told them, "not yet ripe." We did not have to pay our tax.'

King Umbera had been the first king to reign in the colonial era. But Manjaco such as the chief of the praise drummers did not think of him as the last exemplar of the Golden Age before the scorched earth of the colonial encounter. The kings, my interlocutor remembered, before Umbera, are not noted for their altruism or their heroic qualities. If the kings of the colonial era were remembered as corrupt and abusive, those before the colonial era did not rise out of the ashes of the past as an imaginary alternative. Manjaco—politically astute, but given to a certain paranoia about power—had no room for an ideal ruler.

UNWANTED GUESTS

The king's court (*kor*) is surrounded by the courtyards of the *babosin* or aristocrats—houses who claim descent from previous rulers, and whose members farm wet rice fields ceded to them by the court. There is nothing more dramatic in this flat landscape than the tall trees—with their thick trunks and fin-like roots—of these courtyards. When the trees lose their leaves in the fall, you can see the several parasitic plants called *ubosin* which make the top branches of the tree their home. The 'aristocrat' plant, high up in the silk cottonwood tree which is itself rooted in the soil of the Manjaco land, is a wonderful and ambivalent image of the aristocrat's place in Bassarel.

A commoner youth once pointed the plant out to me on the tree in our compound; he noted the implication of the name. 'The plant is a guest,' he said. Just as the 'aristocrat' plant was a guest of the silk cottonwood tree, so too, he noted, are aristocrats as a group 'guests' of 'the people of the land', or the 'simple people', as they are known in Criol. Yet one does not, unless one wants to provoke an argument, call an aristocrat who lives in the village a guest. I witnessed such an argument. A group of men was gathered near the village schoolhouse and one of them, as far as I could tell, apropos of nothing in particular, began talking about his 'house'—the *katchalam* house—claiming that it had once owned the very land upon which the *kor* sat and that all

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aristocrats were guests. One of the younger men, of another commoner house, reminded the older man that it was a well known fact that the *katchalam* were originally from the far west, from Batchuki or Felupe country, and that everyone, in short, was a guest. The Manjaco look down on the Batchuki. The word means roughly 'the originators' but carries a negative connotation—'the savages' is more the flavour of the word. The young man's comment got a laugh from the rest, including his target, who admitted that Bassarel had once all been forest before his ancestors arrived—attracted by the sight of the towering cotton-woods—to make Bassarel their home.

Meanwhile Louis, the *de facto* leader of the aristocrats, took offence and began haranguing the men sitting there in the sunlight. The old men in their overcoats sat in silence. He pointed to the walls of the schoolhouse against which they were leaning and said, 'This is mine. The land is mine. My father's house was there.' He pointed to the silk cottonwood behind the school. 'Who was my grandfather?' he asked rhetorically. Everybody knew that his grandfather had been a king. And he went on like this, yelling at the men, his voice hoarse, until one by one they got up to leave or to go to the little shed that served as the village *cantina* and general store. Louis owned the shed, too. In fact he owned all three of the small buildings that housed the mostly bare-shelved stores in Katama which he rented out—one to a Syrian, one to a Cape Verdian, and one to the 'government'.

Louis and I were not on friendly terms. He had consistently refused me access to some of the ceremonies the aristocrats performed as a group. But, in part because I felt so keenly the need to be liked, in part because I enjoyed the force of his personality, I always tried to get into discussions with him. After the argument we found ourselves together at the *cantina*. 'White, you're rich,' he demanded. 'Buy me a glass.' I countered that I could see the money he had sticking out of his shirt pocket. (He had just returned from visiting his sons in Senegal and, wearing a straw hat, glasses he did not really need, and a short-sleeved shirt of translucent cotton, he looked like a gangster out for a stroll on the boardwalk in Havana *circa* 1953.) He reached into his pocket as if to buy me a drink. But I felt suddenly ashamed, so I said, 'You're the elder. Let me pay.'

When I then asked him about the silk cottonwood tree and the aristocrat plant, he yelled his response so all could hear. 'Yes, we are that plant. Where is that plant? It perches on the top branches of the tree.' The word 'perches' evoked the image of a bird perching, and it is in the cottonwoods that the vultures, avatars of ancestors, nest. 'We stand on their shoulders,' he shouted, pointing at the other men. 'I own the land; I perch on top.'

One of the guiding questions I had in my research was to find out what constituted the aristocrats as a group and how they exercised and maintained their political power. In Katama, the core village of Bassarel, about a third of the total inhabitants counted themselves as aristocrats. There were twelve aristocratic houses and twenty-nine commoner houses. On the whole, the aristocrats were slightly richer

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than commoners. The three wealthiest houses in Katama (in terms of wet rice holdings and livestock) were aristocratic houses. In relation to the commoners they acted as a single corporate group, but they were divided into three named Kayit, or clans, with the Kayit Babosin *kor* being composed of the wealthiest houses.[13]

Aristocrats were 'guests' because they claimed descent from foreigner kings who were brought to Katama to rule Bassarel.[14] An aristocrat had to be able to 'point to' an ancestor post in the *kor*. An aristocrat must occasionally come to the *kor* to libate to his or her ancestor. To 'forget' that one has an ancestor in the *kor*—and this often means to fail to replace a post which has been eaten away by termites or which has 'fallen' for some reason—is to drift away from one's roots, to become, as an aristocrat in Canchungo put it, a 'simple' person like any other. Louis, for example, was the son of the youngest son of a King Umpati who had reigned probably around 1870.

Most important, the aristocrats controlled several titled fields. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that an aristocratic house without a titled field is no longer an aristocratic house. In a sense, for an aristocratic house to lose a titled field meant that it would become landless. In one generation the wealthiest aristocratic house could become the poorest, if wealth were measured in land holdings. Louis controlled the titled field called Galimbat—the second largest wet rice field in Katama. He had inherited it after his father died in 1955. And his father, in turn, had received the titled field some time in the late 1920s. Galimbat, I was told, 'always' went to a son of a king, but never was a father to pass title on to his son. Louis, in short, had inherited the land against the ostensible rules; indeed, most aristocrats in Katama and in the other villages of Bassarel and its satellite lands were, in effect, usurpers or the sons or grandsons of usurpers. Moreover, most of them were also technically in violation of a national land rights law (written with Manjaco specifically in mind) which forbade individual households to 'own' wet rice fields larger than a few hectares.[15] But if Manjaco spoke disparagingly of their corrupt king, they treated aristocratic violations as a *fait accompli*.

Louis had a reputation as an angry and volatile man. People were afraid of him. Louis liked this, and he also liked to remember his forebears as similarly fierce. When he (and other aristocrats) talked of

[13] These are the Babosin *kor*, the Babosin Batchabu, and the Babosin Bameane. All but one of the houses were founded before the scorched earth of colonialisation. One house was headed by the son of Joku, a king who reigned from 1930 to 1954. The Babosin Bameane have been in Katama the longest. The Bameane are a single house who trace their origins to a king who came from the neighbouring land.

[14] But they also considered themselves to be the true rulers of the land because it was they who were charged with nominating the king-to-be and it was they who would go out to capture their nominee, tying a cord around his neck to lead him back to Bassarel.

[15] The General Assembly passed the law in 1980, and it outlawed the sale or rental of titled fields while granting the farmers who currently rented parcels of the fields the right to perpetual possession of the field. In Bassarel at least the law had little practical effect.

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his 'grandfathers'—these men were 'warriors' quick to use the sword. They were 'leopards' as opposed to 'hyenas' (a common term, of derision and of praise, for elders in general)—they were brave and forthright rather than stealthy. They fought among themselves for titled fields and they wrested control of fields away from commoners when they could.

Louis, like the aristocrats of the 'old times' (*uwal uyek*), had a reputation for violence. Louis had been one of the first in the village to go not to Dakar but to Paris. He had worked as a house painter and lived there for almost ten years. Returning to the village just before the revolution, he had built the three stores to rent out to merchants in Canchungo. For a while he was not only the loudest but the most cogent voice at village meetings. But late in the war something happened. Other people had good ideas and could talk cogently. He lost an argument and struck an opponent. After the war he stopped coming to meetings for several years. The young men of the generation who formed the Culture Club disliked him because 'his ears were closed' to them. His house was way off at the eastern edge of the village, far from the well travelled paths. While his hoarse voice was heard only occasionally in village-wide affairs, he still remained a dominant figure among the aristocrats.

As their leader, he took it upon himself to block my 'inquiries' into aristocratic affairs. On several occasions when—as a guest of the king—I observed aristocratic functions, he ordered me to leave when it came time for the aristocrats to discuss their 'secret business' (*kakut*). He always made a point of reminding me that I was not to take photographs or make tape-recordings. He told me that he knew what was done with such recordings. 'In Paris, I have seen them in the theatre. The pictures of Africa. The people watch and laugh.' Other people had told me similar stories. Once, when I accompanied the women to the meander where they were going to fish, the women warned me not to photograph their 'arseholes' when they bent over to scoop at the water with their fishing baskets and accused me of planning to sell their images in the form of postcards on the streets of Dakar. When I wished to take some photographs of the thatch-roofed hut of a clan 'father' who usually enjoyed my fumbling inquisitiveness, but who happened to have a daughter who had married a devout Catholic in Dakar, he too asked me not to, because 'They show our poor huts to the Manjaco at church. They make them ashamed. They say, "Look how poor your fathers are, living in the forest," and they make them pay to the church.'

The old man did not want me to aid the missionaries in their efforts at extracting money from people like his son-in-law. But Louis's interdiction was more emphatic and he explained his reasons differently. Several times I visited Louis alone to try to explain to him my work and why I wanted to hear what the aristocrats talked about when they reviewed their business. One occasion I remember in particular because Louis and I drank several gourdfuls of palm wine before getting down to business, and our subsequent conversation was

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tinged with the affection of shared wine. Louis pointed to the chickens scrabbling about in the courtyard. 'Ask me for one of those and my wife will cook it for you.' But then he asked me rhetorically, 'In America, if I went to the White House and asked to talk to the President, would they let me?' I answered 'No,' and he explained that the same rule applied in the village. 'What you ask for I cannot give you because it is not mine. What you ask "the law" [that is, the state] cannot give you because it is not theirs.'

FROM KING TO COMITE

If aristocrats acted like an embattled minority and the king was reviled by the people, cadres of the newly independent state were willing to be more charitable. Postcolonial administrators, like colonial ones, often dream of an era—somewhere in the past, some time in the future—where you might never hear 'a commoner question their authority'. Like the Portuguese whom they had defeated, they needed some kind of locally constituted authority to make the state work in the village.

Here is a summary of what Armando, my host and a leader among the commoners and the postcolonial youth (see Gable, 2000), told me of events just after the war as Bassarel chose a secular leader, the 'Comite', who would satisfy the people and the party. I have tried to preserve the flavour of the story as Armando told it because it reveals the ways that (to borrow from James Scott, 1989) the 'hidden transcript' of a Manjaco political sensibility is written into the 'public transcript' of a state-sponsored event. I did not tape-record the conversation, but wrote the notes up right after we talked. Where I have quotations, they are quotations as I recalled them at the time, usually of Armando quoting one or another of the actors in the drama. Armando recalled and indeed emphasised these quotes so as to let his retelling of the 'hidden transcript' seem to speak for itself.

As Armando recalled it, right after Independence the party told the villagers to elect a Comite. Kompas, an aristocrat, was chosen. He had recently returned from France, 'He spoke the language of the whites,' and—Armando stressed—he owned a motor cycle. In the early days of Independence there were 'no stores, no markets, the single party had cooking oil, tobacco, sugar. The party could sign a piece of paper and get the oil and sugar.' Kompas signed these papers, and those who were his friends were fortunate.

Kompas was in charge of what remained of the Portuguese garrison. In those early days 'all was confusion'. The party still went around armed. Some drove cars but no one knew who outranked whom. When the party men needed a desk or chairs or kerosene drums, they came to Kompas. But a letter came from Cacheu: Kompas should not give out supplies unless he saw a letter telling him to.

Kompas, like the king, believed that Bassarel was the centre of the Manjaco polity. But Calequisse was higher in the party hierarchy. The Comite in Calequisse, Umilia, did not like it that Kompas could give out or refuse what the garrison contained. At party meetings Umilia and

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Kompas always disagreed. Kompas said that the party had chosen Umilia as chief of the region, but that this was because the Portuguese (in violation of local tradition) had made Calequisse a central square, and not Bassarel. Now that the Portuguese were gone, Bassarel should be chief again as it was before the Portuguese.

One day Umilia sent his men to Bassarel to collect the flagpoles from the garrison. Kompas refused them 'because they had no letter'. Umilia went himself. Kompas refused him. Umilia wrote a letter to the party. Kompas was questioned and locked up.

The party told Katama that Kompas would no longer be Comite, but that Pedro, the king's son, would be. Pedro and Umilia were friends; they had been classmates in Portuguese-controlled Bissau during the revolution. The people refused. The party had said there would be no more kings, yet now the son of a king would become their chief. The men met in the sacred forest. They told Armando to write a letter to the government. Armando recorded each man's words. He repeated them to me as he recalled them. 'We refuse Pedro; the party is wrong; we refuse to follow their choice. Kompas is our chief.' After each man's statement Armando wrote the man's name. Then he sent the letter.

The party came to Katama in several jeeps. Kompas was with them. The party chief was with them. He made a speech which Armando quoted from memory:

> Your king is a great man. It was he who gave us the plans to attack the Portuguese. It was he who showed us the paths. It was because of him that we were able to attack the fort successfully and kill their captain. Your king is a hero of the revolution. His son is the best man to lead you.

The villagers sat in silence. As Armando explained it, they were silent because they knew the party chief's story was not true. The attack on the garrison had made them all afraid. Many had run to other villages when the shooting began. The shooting went on and on, but no one had been killed. Armando emphasised that the Portuguese had stayed inside their fort and had shot at the bush long after the 'bandits' had fled. The next morning the captain—very much alive—came out of the fort to interrogate the villagers.

So the villagers listened but looked at the ground while the party chief spoke. When he had finished speaking he asked them to vote for their new Comite. 'Kompas has resigned,' he said. 'Kompas will not be a candidate.' He asked those who favoured Pedro to raise their hands. According to Armando no hands were raised.

Then the accusations began. The party man read from a long piece of paper. 'Faran Kapeper [a man's name] on the day of 20 January [the villagers recognised this as the day of their meeting in the forest] said that the party had no right to govern, that Pedro should never be chief, that "Kompas is our chief".' After reading a man's name and statement, the party chief ordered the man to stand up and explain. When he tried to explain, the party man raised his hand and said, 'Enough,' and ordered each man in turn to climb into the truck.

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Armando, remembering the incident, said that, as the party official spoke, one of the young men his age just returned from Senegal scribbled in a school notebook everything that was being said. The party man saw him and asked what he was writing. 'The minutes of the meeting,' he responded, using the French. They ordered him to read the words aloud. He read in French. The party man asked, 'Is that the language of Guinea? Speak in Criol.' But the boy could not speak Criol, so another tried to translate for him. The party chief ordered the boy to join the others in the back of the truck. He took the notebook and said, 'We have cadres in Canchungo who speak French. They will read what you have written.'

It was now very late. The party men went into the house the Portuguese had built for the king to eat a meal of chicken with Pedro. After a while they emerged from the house. The elders were ordered out of the truck. The assembly was asked for another name—not Pedro, not Kompas. They named another aristocrat (who, Armando stressed, later left for Senegal and was replaced by a commoner).

Armando concluded his retelling of the Comite's selection by remembering the fate of the boy. When the party cadres left they took the boy with them. They arrived in Canchungo but didn't know what to do with him. They took him to the restaurant and fed him a meal. 'There, we've fed you,' they said, 'but we have no place for you to sleep.' He was released. He slept with family in Canchungo. The next morning he walked the 20 km home.

That Manjaco after the revolution looked to the aristocrats to choose a Comite might seem to indicate a certain home-grown respect for 'traditional' nobility. Manjaco may have deposed a king, but the 'sacred' aura of village authority still worked its magic. This, I would suggest, is not what motivated Manjaco at all. Aristocrats, by virtue of their wealth and position in the colonial regime, had been to school or to France or in the military. They knew, as Armando and so many others put it, 'the language of the whites'. It was enough to say of Kompas that he 'had a motor cycle', for that indicated a certain worldliness and implied that he was sufficiently savvy to deal on behalf of the village with the powers that be. As they selected a Comite the villagers acted upon practical self-interest but also (and typically) against what they perceived (and here the boy with his notebook is an apt encapsulation of that perception) as the capriciousness of governmentality.[16]

ABOUT AUTHORITY

Elsewhere I have argued that the youth scribbling notes reflects a

[16] For a perfect portrayal of that capriciousness in colonial era Tanganyika see Pels (1996) and (as such issues extend into missionary activity) Pels (1999). For an excellent road map of current research on colonial era 'governmentality' in general see Pels (1997).

[17] See, for preliminary sketches of this larger argument, Gable (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000).

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pervasive and enduring attitude toward authority which also underwrote Manjaco attitudes toward local earth spirits and household ancestors.[17] This attitude is characterised by a certain proactive scepticism which often encourages a quick cynicism about those in positions of authority. Such cynicism continues to be a characteristic of the way Manjaco in Bassarel view leaders in the postcolonial nation state. If Manjaco I met were more likely to revile than revere their kings, they were also bad citizens. Or so it has seemed to colonial administrators, revolutionaries, and, on occasion, Manjaco themselves.

Now, how to frame this attitude? In the above I have offered a series of vignettes that feature Manjaco attitudes toward authority—what I am suggesting is a rhetorical analogue to Evans-Pritchard's equally subjective 'portrait' of his Azande princes. Let me return briefly to Evans-Pritchard, who, as we have seen, also noted a certain scepticism about authority among his Azande. Subjects, he may have kept asserting, respected their rulers (to a degree that the Manjaco I met would find improbable), but he also took every opportunity to stress that Azande aristocrats were 'suspicious' of their new colonialist overlords. Evans-Pritchard (it has often been argued) tended to make a sharp distinction between the idealised 'before' and the all too unpleasantly real 'after' of the colonial encounter. In drawing such a distinction Evans-Pritchard typified a discursive tendency in (what we now disparage as) 'colonialist' anthropology. In the Azande version of this dichotomy, authority is ultimately intact and unquestioned on one side of the historic divide. On the other side authority is about to disappear, with colonialism's impositions being the catalyst of this disappearance. Thus Evans-Pritchard would occasionally intimate that the kind of suspicion he routinely reserved for a disenfranchised aristocracy was a more pervasive (even quintessential) feature of Azande life in the colonial context:

> Azande have seen more of European doctors than most peoples in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan owing to the presence of trypanosomiasis in their country. I found that Azande of the bush usually regarded European doctors with suspicion, I have often been told by older men that their work is to make people sick. They thought that when a doctor felt their necks in his rounds of inspection for trypanosomiasis he somehow put the disease into certain persons and then ordered them to be removed to a sleeping-sickness settlement. Likewise, when their watering-places were inspected . . . they thought that the inspecting European was putting dysentery into the water. There was a general suspicion that the surgical operations were performed for cannibalistic purposes, and I have seldom heard a Zande give other than a cynical explanation of Government leper settlements. [1937: 490]

It is hard to know how Evans-Pritchard felt about this self-destructive suspicion. Are we to read a passage such as this as straight reporting or as redolent with knowing irony? If we assume that 'colonialist' anthropology was also (mildly) anti-colonialist, we might read into this passage a certain pleasure: Evans-Pritchard enjoying the way the

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'good intentions' of colonialism would be perceived through the screen of its larger bad intentions—its arrogance.

We cannot know, of course, what Evans-Pritchard intended. But we can see a clear connection between this kind of commentary on the colonial situation and a similar (more explicitly ironic, more obviously critical) postcolonial ethnography. Reading the ethnography our discipline produces today, there can be no doubt that many postcolonial Africanist anthropologists like to dwell on such forms of indigenous suspicion and see in them a well placed criticism of ill-advised national projects, of the excesses of globalisation, of the cannibalism of capitalism. This way of framing modernity has become our collective contribution to the 'countermodern' critiques modernity itself seems routinely to generate. And this postcolonialist anthropology shares a certain affinity with what Manthia Diawara (1998) calls 'Afro-pessimist' discourse. An 'Afro-pessimist' discourse dwells on decay, corruption, ruin. It is a discourse of incompatibility in which the state is always malignant, modernity inevitably a disease, rather than a cure, and Africa a victim, a patient, a corpse. As Diawara sees it, 'Afro-pessimist' discourse is a hybrid echo of colonialist inscriptions of Africa. Many African intellectuals are fluent in the language of Afro-pessimism, as are foreign commentators on current conditions in Africa. It is, to extend Diawara's commentary, a narrative frame we, in Africanist anthropology, often generate because it resonates with our feelings, our aesthetic sensibilities. It goes with the territory of our current condition.

At least, that is how I would now evaluate my response to what I encountered 'in the field'. I found myself admiring Louis's declaration of local independence against the state, while I felt a certain masochistic pleasure in the way he associated the ethnographic enterprise with the state's desire to make him 'legible' and therefore controllable (see Scott, 1999). I especially enjoyed listening to Armando tell his story of the new government's muddled attempt to make local authority in a village that really did not see itself as part of a state.

Armando and I shared a laugh (and this made us seem to me to be rough equals, or so I wanted so insistently to believe) at the government's expense. But on other occasions Armando also shared with me his frustration with co-villagers who refused to participate in government projects that clearly served their interests as well as the state's. For Armando and his peers the work of making a community was, to be sure, a messy, often frustrating business. 'Burn your hands, you lick your fingers,' a Manjaco proverb had it: you have yourself to blame and you can only look to yourself for comfort (such as it is).

In this way a Manjaco attitude toward authority is, in a deep sense, a democratic one. It is an attitude which allows a certain cynicism, admits to a kind of pessimism, but which enjoins local responsibility. It is an attitude, therefore, that does not lend itself to either easy critiques or celebrations. So, rather than be heartened or disturbed by an attendant tendency toward a cynicism about authority, we should above all be curious about how this attitude plays itself out locally.

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In the Manjaco village I came to know, neither kings nor kingship were sacred, nor was there a nostalgic hope that some clear and uncontestable authority would be recovered or invented. Manjaco attitudes towards kings, colonial officers, comites and presidents may not be the kinds of attitudes that are all too often assumed to lend themselves to national projects, but the crucial question is: do they make civil society work? Manjaco struggle to make society where it counts most—in villages and in emerging transnational communities that bypass the state. They realise that making society is a struggle against what they perceive as indigenous, if understandable, suspicion. Yet they can be suspicious and sceptical of authority without succumbing to the paralysis of Afro-pessimism.

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ABSTRACT

This article juxtaposes a series of vignettes that feature the attitudes of the Manjaco of post-revolutionary Guinea-Bissau to traditional rulers with a similar series of vignettes E. E. Evans-Pritchard used to paint a portrait of Azande attitudes towards aristocrats. It poses the question: if what Evans-Prichard wrote about the Azande reflects the desires and preoccupations of a typical colonialist anthropology, what might the way we write about Manjaco reveal about postcolonialist anthropology as it is currently being constructed? Evans-Pritchard drew a sharp distinction between the idealised 'before' and the all too unpleasantly real 'after' of the colonial encounter. In the Azande version of this dichotomy authority is ultimately intact and unquestioned on one side of the historic divide. On the other side authority is about to disappear, with colonialism's impositions being the catalyst of this disappearance. By contrast,

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Manjaco were more likely to revile than revere their kings, and they tended to treat this as an enduring fact rather than to historicise it. Manjaco were also bad subjects and citizens. Or so it has seemed to colonial administrators and revolutionaries. Are we to frame this pervasive cynicism about authority and order as a kind of degeneration—an extension of colonial-era malaise into the era of the postcolony? Or are we to take Manjaco attitudes at face value? The article suggests that, in posing such questions, an emerging postcolonialist anthropology is inevitably a reflection of our view of the capacity of people like the Manjaco to make society work in the postcolonial era.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article juxtapose, d'une part, des croquis illustrant le comportement des Manjaks de la Guinée-Bissau postrévolutionnaire face aux dirigeants traditionnels et, d'autre part, des croquis similaires d'Evans-Pritchard dressant un portrait du comportement des Azandes face aux aristocrates. Il pose la question suivante: si ce qu'Evans-Pritchard écrivait à propos des Azandes traduit les désirs et les préoccupations d'une anthropologie colonialiste typique, que peut révéler ce que nous écrivons des Manjaks sur l'anthropologie postcolonialiste telle qu'elle se construit actuellement ? Evans-Pritchard établissait une distinction nette entre l' «avant» idéalisé et l' «après» bien trop désagréablement réel de la période coloniale. Dans la version azande de cette dichotomie, l'autorité ressort intacte et incontestée d'un côté de la ligne de partage historique. De l'autre côté de cette ligne, l'autorité est sur le point de disparaître, les impositions du colonialisme étant l'élément catalyseur de cette disparition. A contrario, les Manjaks étaient plus susceptibles de vilipender que de révérer leurs rois et ils avaient tendance à le traiter comme un fait immuable plutôt que de l'historiser, Les Manjaks étaient également de mauvais sujets et citoyens. Ou du moins c'est ce que pensaient les administrateurs et les révolutionnaires. Faut-il considérer ce cynisme généralisé envers l'autorité et l'ordre comme une forme de dégénérescence—un prolongement du malaise de l'ère coloniale dans l'ère de la postcolonie ? Ou faut-il se contenter de juger le comportement des Manjaks sur les apparences ? L'article suggère qu'en posant ces questions, une anthropologie postcolonialiste émergente est inévitablement le reflet de notre opinion sur la capacité des peuples comme les Manjaks à faire fonctionner la société dans l'ère postcoloniale.

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