Paideuma 68:81–118 (2022)

LOCAL AFRICAN RESPONSES TO THE EARLY SLAVE TRADE IN UPPER GUINEA, SIXTEENTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES*

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ABSTRACT. When Portuguese mariners reached the Senegambian coast shortly before 1450, they quickly engaged in taking small numbers of captives back to Lisbon. In Senegambian societies, varied forms of limited or temporary servile status existed before this first contact, and the interior was connected to the older trans-Saharan slave trade. By the 1580s several thousand Africans a year were being purchased and taken either to the Cape Verde Islands, to Europe or, increasingly, to the Americas. Africans responded rapidly but variously to the development of this slave trade. They protected themselves by moving into remote or geographically protected areas; and they learned to defend themselves and to turn the tables by capturing their aggressors. Some, such as the Bijogo, actively entered the slave trade, even capturing Portuguese. Finally, several communities of escaped slaves were established, with at least the tacit support of local Africans. These Maroon communities were composed at least partly of captives who had escaped from the Portuguese.

Introduction

The Atlantic slave trade originated with the arrival of Portuguese merchants along the West African coast in the mid-fifteenth century. The early history of that commerce, throughout the mid-seventeenth century, is well established. Primary sources document the major ports, the goods exchanged for human captives, as well as the approximate numbers of captives exported. Far less well known, however, is the impact of the early Atlantic slave trade upon the societies of the Upper Guinea Coast and the immediate hinterland. To address this issue, a range of other questions, only indirectly accessible to the historian, needs to be addressed: one needs first to determine the nature

* I wish to express my appreciation to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung for supporting my research for this article and to the Frobenius Institute for hosting me in the spring of 2021 and again in 2022. Special thanks are due to my hosts, Roland Hardenberg and Mamadou Diawara. I also thank David Wheat for his close reading and commentary on a draft of this article, and for providing his most recent estimates for the volume of the early slave trade from Upper Guinea. Particular thanks are also due to two anonymous readers, whose suggestions led me to rethink, elaborate and, hopefully, strengthen my central arguments.

of unfree labour or servitude in Upper Guinea before the growth of the Atlantic trade. There, various forms servitude or 'unfreedom' existed. As Mamadou Diawara argues, the historian of early slavery needs to seek evidence of gradations of subservient status.[1] An important distinction is whether servitude was temporary or, rather, a permanent status. Only by addressing these questions it is possible to assess the impact of the Atlantic slave trade upon local societies and upon social institutions in Upper Guinea.

However, even these questions do not go far enough. In order to place the inhabitants of the Guinea Coast at the centre of the historical focus, one needs to ask how people responded to the growing threat of the slave trade. What practical steps did they take to defend themselves? Did coastal communities take to slave-raiding themselves? Or did they try to prohibit all contact with Portuguese and *lançado* merchants who were associated with this trade?[2] What of the captives themselves? Presumably some individuals managed to flee captivity. What evidence survives in the historical record that reflects individual or group efforts to escape enslavement, or to assist escaped slaves? Since captives were often far from their home by the time they were sold, most escaped slaves would necessarily have been 'strangers' in the communities to which they fled: is there any evidence that fugitives were protected or welcomed by these local communities? These questions constitute the focus of the second part of this article.

Pre-contact commerce and trade networks

When Portuguese mariners and merchants established regular trade with the peoples of the central Upper Guinea Coast (i.e. the region from the Gambia River south to the Rio Grande), they found a well-established trading system connecting a series of riverine ports. The Portuguese and their Luso-African descendants, who would serve as intermediaries between local populations and European traders, were forced to adopt local African models of social interaction and commercial practices, to accept restrictions imposed on them by the indigenous populations, and to provide specific goods,

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1 Diawara (n.d.) and personal communication (24 January 2022)

2 *Lançados* were Portuguese who settled on the West African mainland in defiance of a royal prohibition. Many *lançados* married local women and assimilated into local African society. They and their descendants served as cultural intermediaries between their host communities and visiting European merchants.

especially iron, demanded by their African trading partners.[3] This African trade network, which pre-dated the fifteenth-century arrival of Europeans, is the subject of an earlier article of mine (Mark 2021), for which the present essay serves as a pendant and which can be summarized as follows.

The coast, from the Casamance River south to present-day Guinea-Bissau, constituted an important commercial nexus; trade here differed significantly from commerce further north, from the Gambia to the Senegal River.[4] Established before the arrival of Portuguese mariners in the mid-fifteenth century, regional trade brought forest products, notably kola nuts, north in exchange for finished cloth, cotton, and other goods. The north-south trade was largely along the coast, being dependent upon the expertise of local African mariners whose small vessels were especially equipped to navigate coastal waters.[5] The required expertise may well explain the fact that 'Juula' merchants did not play a role in the coastal trade,[6] nor do 'Juula' trading networks appear to have played a significant role at the trading ports, where pre-contact trade was centred near the mouths of the Rio de São Domingos, Rio Geba and Rio Grande.[7] Furthermore, Kaabu was not able to conquer and rule coastal areas, in part because cavalry could not operate in the coastal region of winding waterways and dense vegetation.[8] Both the coastal route navigated by Biafada-Sapi mariners and the inland routes using small vessels piloted by local Papel likely served to convey goods between Rio Geba/Rio Grande and Rio de São Domingos. In addition, an overland caravan route

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3 George Brooks writes: 'When Europeans arrived in western Africa, they were constrained to accommodate to the landlord stranger reciprocities that had evolved over centuries' (2003:49). See also Brooks (1993).

4 On the trade in this region, see Brooks (1993, 2003).

5 Mark (2021:13). For a fifteenth-century account of these dugout canoes (*almadies*), see Cadamosto (1895:162).

6 'Juula' traders are Manding-speaking traveling merchants. The term 'Juula' is used by coastal populations to refer to Mande-speaking traders and is not to be confused with 'Diola' or 'Joola', the name of the predominant ethnic group in the Casamance.

7 During the pre-contact period, commercial ties certainly existed between coastal societies and the interior Mande states, including Kaabu, but they were less important than they would become during the eighteenth century. A significant aspect of the later ties to Kaabu was the fact that, as Hawthorne argues, 'until the mid-eighteenth century, most slaves exported from the region had their origins near the coast' (2003:16).

8 Hawthorne (2003:32). A more recent battle, richly documented in archives and oral tradition, illustrates the vulnerability of cavalry among the tidal waterways of the coast. The northern Diola of the Boulouf region retain detailed memories, in the form of songs, of this encounter. In 1886, a Manding warrior named Fodé Sylla led a slave raid among the northern Diola. His horsemen were ambushed in a swampy tidal river and soundly defeated (Mark 1985:68–69).

connected the Rio Grande/Rio Geba to Kaabu and the middle Gambia,[9] where the kola trade met a Mande-dominated east-west trading network, and coastal merchants linked up with 'Juula' merchants.[10]

Slavery in pre-contact coastal societies

In pre-contact Upper Guinea, there was often no clear-cut distinction between the status of 'unfree' and 'free'. Contemporary categories of 'slave' and 'free' are ill-suited to describing sixteenth-century society in Upper Guinea. Several forms of servitude and subordination existed, including pawning; the ransoming of relatives to secure debts; protective custody, frequently used to strengthen treaties; and *panyaring* or forced subordination to cover an unredeemed debt.[11] Widespread, too, was the practice of capture and forced adoption, usually of children, who were then raised as subordinate members of the extended family.[12]

Written sources about slavery in coastal societies do not exist before the mid-fifteenth-century arrival of Europeans.[13] Oral narratives speak only in the most general terms of the pre-colonial period. They do not distinguish pre-contact or early-contact slavery from eighteenth- or nineteenth-century enslavement, so that information about slavery can rarely be dated, Small-

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9 The role of Kaabu in this east-west trade is underlined by Giesing, who writes: 'la richesse légendaire des gouverneurs du Kasa était basée sur leur rôle d'intermédiaires entre l'intérieur et la côte atlantique' (2020a:2).

10 See Hawthorne (2003:64) on the *lançados*' trade at Farim, up-river from Cacheu, with Mande-speaking merchants from Kaabu.

11 For a more detailed study of these varied forms and usages of human 'collateral', see Mark (2018).

12 Pawning, ransoming and forced incorporation are all discussed by Miers and Kopytoff in the introduction to their seminal study, written nearly half a century ago (1977). At that date, detailed case studies of Upper Guinea Coast societies did not yet exist. Miers and Kopytoff's introduction seems almost to predict what later generations of historians have found. My research among the northern Diola is a case in point. Informants in the community of Thionck-Essyl described the slave raids their ancestors had carried out to capture children who were then integrated into their captors' lineages. They were raised as members of their Diola extended family, and, as adults, were provided with wives and rice fields. Yet they faced the implicit threat that, should they not accept their subordinate status, they could be sold to the Manding to work as agricultural slaves (interviews with the elders of Daga ward [Thionck-Essyl, June 1976] and with Cheikh Abba Badja, 'chef' of Batine ward [Thionck-Essyl, June 1976]). See Mark (1985:25–28).

13 For the Upper Guinea Coast, there are no medieval Arabic sources such as exist for the Muslim and partially Muslim states of the southern Sahara or western Sudan.

scale slave-raiding[14] and the forced adoption of the captives, quite likely characterized the ancestors of the Diola and the Balanta before Europeans arrived on the coast,[15] though this remains a historical hypothesis.

Oral sources

Oral sources among the coastal populations of Upper Guinea do not offer significant information about the institution of slavery five hundred years ago. Unlike what might be termed states, such as Kaabu or, more generally, the socially hierarchical western Mande peoples of the Gambia, the stateless and decentralized societies of the Upper Guinea Coast do not have either oral historians, griots (Mande: *jeli*), or formal oral traditions. Among the coastal populations from the Casamance south to present-day Guinea-Bissau, historians must rely on informal oral narratives. Such historical research has been carried out among the northern Diola (Mark 1985, 1992, 2002) and the southern Diola (Baum 1999, 2016), as well as among the Balanta and Bagnun (Giesing 2020a, b) and among the Balanta (Hawthorne 2003). These oral narratives, however, do not recall in detail events that occurred many generations before living memory.

Among the different Diola groups extending from the Casamance River to the Rio de São Domingos, oral sources, including shrine histories (Baum 1999), initiation songs (Mark, de Jong and Chupin 1998) and informal narratives (Mark 1985, 1992), preserve relatively detailed historical memories from the early nineteenth century. Baum (1999) has been able to take such detail back to the eighteenth century in relation to religious shrines and participation in the slave trade by southern Diola groups. However, for the earlier periods that are the subject of the present article, only the most general information concerning migrations and the founding of settlements is preserved.[16] Hawthorne finds a similar situation with oral history among the

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14 Diola narratives describe small-scale raids conducted by war canoes holding up to forty people (Mark 1985:26, 66). See also Archives Nationales de Sénégal (1860a, b). Further evidence that slave-raiding was on a small scale is furnished by Lovejoy (1983:41). He observes that the earliest Portuguese traders did not transport slaves from one place to another on the Upper Guinea Coast as they did on the Gold Coast; this implies a lack of demand for slaves in the former location.

15 Hawthorne (2003:139). See also Giesing and Coasta Dias (2007:65) and Giesing (2020a).

16 Mark (2001). Even among the Vai of Sierra Leone, who are descended from socially stratified Mande-speaking peoples, Holsoe writes, 'Did slavery exist [ca. 1500] […] The answer must rely on Portuguese accounts of the general area' (1977:292).

Balanta.[17] However, oral traditions do offer information about nineteenth-century slave raids led by Jahanke and Wolof warlords, as well as general information about local practices that may be termed slavery in the sense articulated by Miers and Kopytoff (1977).

Primary sources

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese commerce along the Upper Guinea Coast is exceedingly well-documented in contemporary Portuguese narratives.[18] Already during the first decade of the sixteenth century, two chroniclers or geographers, Duarte Pacheco Pereira (1958), later governor at São Jorge da Mina, and the German-born Valentim Fernandes (1963), who was based in Lisbon and did not travel to Africa, produced detailed accounts of the West African trade. Their writings provide a baseline of information about local societies, barely half a century after the establishment of sea-borne contact between Portugal and 'Guiné de Cabo Verde'.

Between 1582 and 1669, three Portuguese merchants and an administrator based in the Cape Verde Islands, as well as a Portuguese Jesuit priest, left detailed accounts drawing upon their first-hand experience along the adjacent African coast. In 1582, Francisco d'Andrade, Sergeant-Major on Santiago Island, wrote a relatively brief but useful account of the coastal trade (Andrade 1964). André Alvares de Almada's narrative (1964), which exists in manuscript versions from 1593 and 1594 and an amended edition from around 1596,[19] provides detailed information about the peoples and cultures from Senegal to present-day Sierra Leone, with extensive information about local religions and rituals. Almada describes Portuguese and Luso-African participation in commerce; he enumerates the products imported and exported, and he describes some of the individuals who engaged in this commerce. Almada was the first commentator to describe in detail the all-important coastal trade in kola nuts from Rio Nunez and the region further southeast, northward to the Gambia.

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17 He writes: 'The informal manner in which Balanta relate narratives does restrict how much […] is handed down from generation to generation […] narratives simply do not survive "intact" or in detail for long' (Hawthorne 2003:5).

18 For a comprehensive and detailed study of these primary sources, see Horta (2011).

19 On the three manuscripts of Almada's work and the question whether one of them may be an autograph edition, and if so which, see Horta (2011:178–183, 194–197).

André Donelha who, like Almada, was a member of the Cape Verde Islands' social élite, wrote his account in 1625, retrospectively based on his experience as a merchant along the Upper Guinea Coast from the 1570s to the 1590s.[20] In 1669, the Cape Verdean Francisco de Lemos Coelho composed an account based largely on his own experience as a merchant and slave-trader along the coast, which he himself revised in 1684.[21] Finally, the Jesuit missionary Manuel Álvares wrote a first-hand account in 1615 or 1616. Álvares (1615/16, 1990) provides detailed information about the local cultures and political organization of Senegambia and of the region extending south from Cape Verga and known to the Portuguese as 'Serra Leoa'.

Material culture as historical source

Delicate ivory carvings, in the form of hunting horns, decorated spoons and lidded vessels embellished with animals, human figures and Latin inscriptions, were produced by the Sapi peoples at the moment of early commerce between Upper Guinea and Portugal. The Sapi, ancestors of today's Temne and Bullom, and perhaps also of the Baga, inhabited the coast south of Cape Verga (see map). The carvings, known as Luso-African ivories, or the more Eurocentric 'Afro-Portuguese' ivories, provide a local African perspective on the commerce they are used to illustrate (Mark 2014). Whereas the ivories do not refer directly to the slave trade, they do illustrate the myriad other trade items that were exchanged along the coast. One salt cellar depicts Muslim clerics, thus corroborating Portuguese accounts of the presence of Muslim holy men in all of the major African trading ports, at the moment of – and certainly pre-dating – the establishment of commerce with Portugal (Mota 2019). The refinement of these ivories clearly reflects a local artistic tradition that was already long established before the earliest documented exports to Europe (1506).[22] This, together with the diversity of trade goods illustrated on the salt cellars, confirms that interregional coastal commerce existed before the arrival of European traders.

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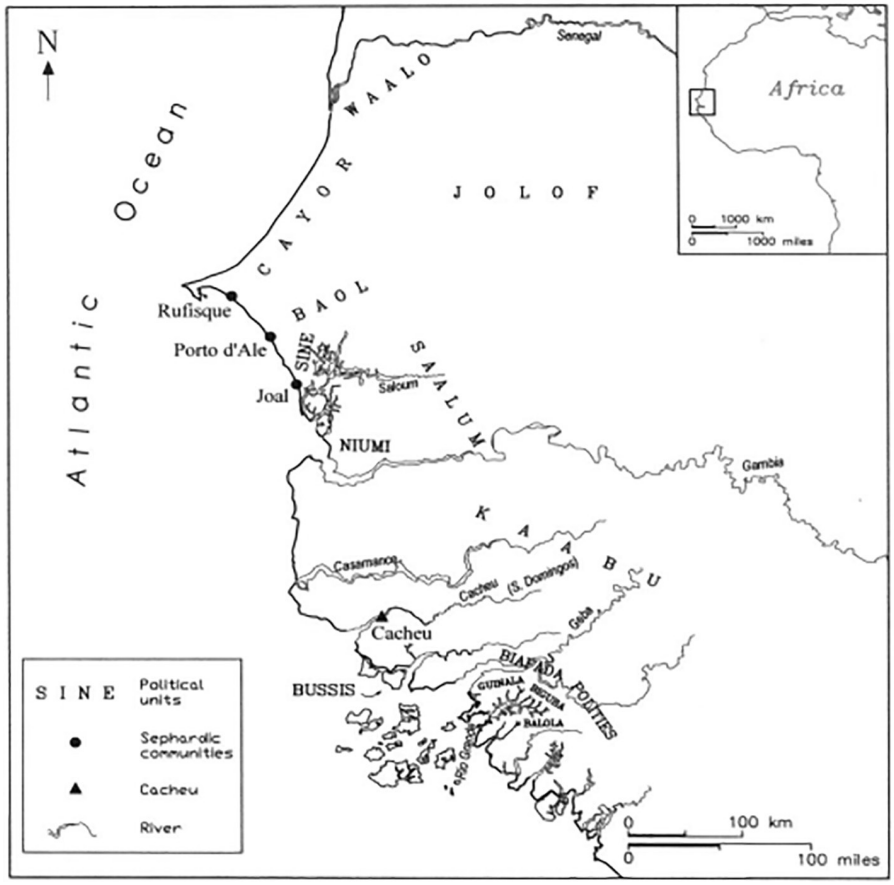
20 Donelha (1979). See also Donelha (1977).

21 Lemos Coelho (1985). For a Portuguese transcription of the manuscript, see Lemos Coelho (1990).

22 For a proposed early sixteenth-century dating of the ivories, see Bassani and Fagg (1988). For a proposed dating extending into the seventeenth century, see Mark (2014:243–245).



Political map of Northern Senegambia and Guinea-Bissau region in the seventeenth century (courtesy of José da Silva Horta)

Among the northern Diola peoples, cattle-horned initiation masks have been fashioned for the men's initiation since at least the seventeenth century. As I have shown in my earlier work, the bovine symbolism is an indirect reference to the slave trade: captives and cattle were closely associated as trade goods. Sometimes slaves were exchanged for cattle, and a captive might redeem himself by providing two heads of cattle. This commerce existed into the nineteenth century.[23]

[23] Mark (1992:124). This work has recently been cited and summarized by Green (2019:101). His suggestion, however, that the bovine symbolism emphasizes the role of masculine power in 'an increasingly militarized society' does not accurately portray northern Diola

Ongoing archaeological evidence promises to add to our knowledge of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century slave trade. The Brazilian archaeologist Bruno Pastre Maximo's study of shell middens among the southern Diola (or Felupe) of the São Domingos region offers insight specifically into Diola responses to that trade (Maximo 2022). Maximo suggests a connection to a burgeoning demand for oysters and other shellfish to feed captives while they were held at Cacheu, awaiting the arrival of Portuguese slave-traders.[24]

The Upper Guinea Coast: the early slave trade

The earliest extended European-West African commercial contact occurred along the northern and central Upper Guinea Coast. It was there, too, that the slave trade developed. This sub-region can be defined as the Atlantic coast and the immediate hinterland, extending inland along about fifty kilometres of navigable waterways. It reaches from the embouchure of the Gambia River south-eastward to encompass the Casamance River in south-western Senegal, as well as the Rio de São Domingos (Rio Cacheu) in present-day Guinea-Bissau and the estuary of the Rio Grande/Rio Geba/Rio Grande de Buba as well as the adjacent Bissagos Islands.[25] One may also include the coast as far south as Cape Verga, which marked the northern limit of what the Portuguese called 'Serra Leoa'. However, the major coastal and inland ports lie along the rivers from the Gambia, south to the Rio Grande. As the Portuguese-Cape Verdean merchant André Donelha observed in 1625:

> From this river [Rio Grande] as far [south] as Cape Verga, where Serra Leoa begins, there is no trade with ocean-going vessels nor any river of significance, though the launches [shallow-draft vessels] of the tangomãos purchase a few

society, which could in no way be described as militarized, either during or prior to the colonial period. The term perhaps better characterizes eighteenth-century southern Diola society as described by Baum (1999).

24 Maximo and I are engaged in a collaborative interpretation of these shell mounds in the context of the slave trade through the nearby port of Cacheu.

25 Although, strictly speaking, the coast from the Gambia River north as far as the Senegal River may be considered part of the Upper Guinea Coast, this sub-region is characterized by a much drier climate and a correspondingly distinctive agricultural economy. It should more accurately be treated as the western extension of the 'Sahel'. Furthermore, at the time of first contact it was populated by larger and more centralized political entities than the stateless societies that characterize the region south of the Gambia.

> Blacks, wax, ivory, going from port to port as far as Rio Nunez and Cape Verga.[26]

It was along the coast north and south of the Gambia River that, in the twenty years after 1445, Portuguese mariners first made sea-borne contact with West Africa and established trade. Trading ports established near the mouths of the Gambia and Casamance River, Rio de São Domingos, and Rio Grande, served an incipient sea-borne commerce that brought to Europe and to the Americas animal hides, ivory and human beings. The Portuguese referred to this entire area as 'Guiné do Cabo Verde'. Over the succeeding two hundred years, Portuguese merchants, missionaries and geographers left extensive accounts of the newly established commerce. These records give detailed information about the goods imported and exported from each of the coastal ports. The writings also describe the various African populations engaged in, or sometimes refusing to engage in, the European trade. Together, these sources enable the historian to reconstruct the growth and evolution of European African relations and trade. However, they constitute a one-sided record, being written from a European perspective.[27] The writers were not interested in African agency or responses, except in so far as these had an impact on who would trade with the Portuguese, what goods they demanded and provided and, of course, whether they welcomed foreign merchants at all. Nevertheless, buried in these accounts is information about African attitudes, indicating which local African societies traded in human beings.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the trans-Atlantic slave trade had become the defining feature of commercial relations between West Africa, Europe and the Americas. The institution ultimately brought bondage or death to nearly fifteen million human beings.[28] It transformed and determined relations between peoples of European, African and mixed ancestry in a way that, nearly five hundred years on, continues to define and plague U.S. American society. The immense human cost, as well as the historical

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26 Donelha (1979:178). In this article, all translations from the Portuguese are mine, and hence my responsibility, except for P.E.H. Hair's translation of Lemos Coelho (1985).

27 The authors of two of the most important narratives, André Alvares d'Almada and André Donelha, were actually Euro-Africans from the Cape Verde Islands. But they belonged to the island elite considering themselves to be 'Portuguese' and were so considered by their contemporaries.

28 The number is probably much higher if one takes into account those who died in the course of slave razzias or while being transported from point of capture to coastal trading centres.

Rio de São Domingos near Cacheu 2020 (all photos: P.M.)

weight of the Atlantic slave trade and its long-term consequences, create a challenge to the historian. In looking at this earliest period, one needs to avoid anachronism. Not only the scale of the Atlantic commerce, but also the specific nature of captivity underwent significant transformation during the latter half of the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth century. That transformation constituted a significant early element in the impact of the Atlantic trade on Senegambian societies.

The earliest Portuguese expedition, under the command of Nuno Tristão, arrived at the Senegalese coast in the year 1444. Tristão took a few Senegalese captives with him when returning to Lisbon. But while chronological periodization is convenient for the historical narrative, to consider 1444 a starting date for the West African slave trade would be misleading. Portuguese navigators under the sponsorship of Prince Henry had begun to explore the coast of Northwest Africa by the 1420s and they too returned with captives from coastal raids. Furthermore, the trans-Saharan slave trade from West Africa flourished long before the fifteenth century. As Paulo Moraes Farias (2021) writes, the trans-Saharan commerce in gold and slaves was established by Muslim merchants between the eighth and fourteenth centu-

ries C.E. Over these six centuries, more than three million human beings, perhaps nearly four million, were enslaved.

A significant factor in the subsequent development of the Portuguese trade in West African captives was the fact that Portuguese and other Mediterranean Christians had a long history of both capturing and being captured by North African Muslims. Over the centuries preceding the seaborne exploration of the Guinea Coast, procedures and principles had been developed both for the ransoming of certain captives and for the long-term enslavement of others. These unwritten rules informed the treatment of captives on both sides of the Mediterranean.[29] Significantly, similar informal protocols continued to influence the enslavement and occasionally the liberation of some West African captives for more than a century after the inception of the Atlantic trade. Throughout the sixteenth century, Portuguese merchants in the Cape Verde Islands generally did not capture members of local West African elites. Local African nobility and wealthy traders, if they happened to be captured, were generally not enslaved.

The organization of early African-Portuguese commerce

The first European exploration of the Senegalese coast, as far south as the Gambia, was marked by Portuguese violence. Senegambians forcibly resisted the early raids. In response, by 1448 direct Portuguese raiding for captives was replaced by a system of regular commerce with the coastal populations. Trade with the Wolof state in northern Senegal and with the smaller Serer kingdoms of Sine and Saloum, immediately north of the Gambia River and along what is known as Senegal's Petite Côte, provided the Portuguese with the sought-after cattle hides, some gold and a limited number of captives. In most of these communities, by the sixteenth century the local elites were Muslims; captives were drawn primarily from non-Muslim populations.

Political organization south of the Gambia River differed from the Wolof and Serer kingdoms that extended between the Senegal River and the Petite Côte. There were no centralized kingdoms along the coast south of the Gambia, although Muslim Manding merchants were present in the major ports. The peoples living along the Upper Guinea Coast from the

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29 On the Moroccan captivity of Portuguese nobility and soldiers after the disastrous military defeat at Al-Ksar Kebir (Alcácer Quibir) in 1578, see, *inter alia*, Mark (2018). For a more general study of Iberian captives in North Africa, see Friedman (1983).

Casamance region to the south consisted largely of stateless societies. These included the ancestors of today's Diola, Banyun (Bainunk), Balanta, Manjak, Papel and other groups. In the sixteenth century, the diverse populations of the Casamance were loosely under the control of a Bainunk ruler. This 'Rei' or King, as the Portuguese called him, locally referred to as the 'Casa Mansa', controlled a lucrative commerce, including in human captives, with the Portuguese. The ruler lent his name to the region; the term 'Casamance' has long outlasted the Bainunk state, which disappeared at the end of the sixteenth century.

The Cape Verde Islands, situated about 250 miles west of the Senegalese coast, were quickly established as the administrative and commercial centre for the Guinea Coast trade. The islands were discovered by Portuguese and Italian mariners in the 1460s.[30] The major islands of this archipelago were settled by Portuguese merchants and by Africans brought from the adjacent coast, many as slaves. An island elite, whose members considered themselves to be Portuguese, developed among the descendants of these European Portuguese and African women.

Throughout the seventeenth century, monopoly rights to the commerce of 'Guinea of Cape Verde' were granted by the King of Portugal to a series of 'Contratadors'. Theoretically, all goods (including human beings) were supposed to pass through the Cape Verde Islands. For the historian, the transhipment of goods via Santiago Island has the coincidental effect that it facilitates estimates of the scale of the official slave trade through the islands. However, significant amounts of contraband became the norm, sometimes with the collusion of the 'Contratador', but also through the activity of the *lançados.* The *lançados* transported immense quantities of kola nuts from Serra Leoa (southern Upper Guinea Coast) north along the coast and then up the coastal rivers. Kola nuts were highly valued among Muslim populations, and this trade was extraordinarily profitable. The *lançados* proved to be a thorn in the side of the Portuguese, for they did not hesitate to do business with 'interlopers' from France, England, the Netherlands, or Spain after Portugal had regained its independence from Spain in 1640.[31]

A significant although indeterminate number of *lançados* were New Christians, descendants of the Portuguese Jewish population who had been forced to convert or to face expulsion from Portugal in 1497. Several dozen

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30 The term 'discovered' is appropriate, as the archipelago was uninhabited.

31 For a comprehensive account of the *lançados* and of the history of Europeans and Euro-Africans on the Guinea Coast, see Boulègue (1989), Brooks (2003), Horta (2000:99–130).

New Christians who had fled Portugal, some of them travelling first to Amsterdam, established themselves as merchants along the Guinea Coast. Once established on the African mainland at a safe distance from the Inquisition, these men returned to the practice of their ancestral religion.[32]

Many *lançados*, regardless of their religious orientation, contracted informal marriage alliances with local women. These wives were themselves traders and members of the local social elite. The alliances brought benefits to both parties. Whereas the *lançados* gained access to trade with their wives' lineages and benefitted from their partners' familiarity with local customs and languages, the women gained access to European trade goods and commercial networks. Given the short life-expectancy of Europeans along the Guinea Coast, it was not unusual for successful local businesswomen to contract marriages to a series of European visitors, accumulating wealth with each marriage (Mark 2021).

Landlords and strangers: lançados *in Upper Guinea*

Visiting merchants were welcomed into local communities through the long-established practice of host client or landlord stranger relationships. The host, generally a member of the local elite, frequently offered a woman from his own household to the guest. The resulting relationship ensured that the merchant and any offspring resulting from that union would be dependent upon the host, or at least socially tied to him. European African alliances played perfectly into a social structure where wealth or social status could be measured in terms of the powerful individual's control over other persons.[33]

The *lançados* and their Euro-African descendants formed the foundation of Luso-African communities that continued to play an important role in commerce through the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century. These Luso-Africans were ideally situated to serve as cultural intermediaries. They spoke local languages, as well as the various forms of Creole (Crioulo) that quickly became the region's 'lingua franca'. With the arrival

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32 Mark and Horta (2011:211–219) have identified the names of about 36 individuals.

33 Brooks summarizes the mutual benefits accruing from these unions: 'One of the most important privileges accorded resident strangers, European as well as African, was that of consorting with local women – usually women who were related to or dependents of influential persons in the communities […]. African women took advantage of these circumstances for their own benefit no less than that of their male relatives' (2003:51).

of traders from competing European nations, many of them also mastered French, Dutch and English.

The widespread practice of establishing marriage alliances between local women and *lançados* or visiting European merchants and the institution of landlord stranger reciprocity, illuminate a fundamental organizing principal among the small-scale (or stateless) societies of the Upper Guinea Coast. Stated succinctly, individuals, whether local or foreign visitors, owed their social and economic positions to their kinship affiliations. Those relations, together with their associated obligations and entitlements, reflected one's birth into the local social group. Some of these rights could also be acquired by marrying into the society. But kinship affiliation might also take the form of ascribed connections as a means of assimilating into local social networks those strangers who had no local kinship ties. Ascribed affiliation then served as a means of incorporating the visitor into an existing web of kinship that, from a European perspective, might be termed a network of interconnected obligations and rights. These social relations, in turn, provided a template for establishing and maintaining commercial and economic interaction with members of other kinship groups or with European merchants. Some of the associated practices entailed imposing subordinate status, or degrees of unfreedom, on individual members of the local social grouping.

The small numbers of Portuguese who settled and traded along the Upper Guinea Coast were expected to follow local commercial practices and to submit to constraints, including on where they could travel.[34] In addition,

[34] Brooks (2003:49). Estimating the number of European Portuguese and, by the latter part of the sixteenth century, of their Luso-African descendants, is particularly difficult. Andrade, in 1582, estimated the population of Santiago Island, while several narrators gave rough estimates of the populations in trading centres, notably Cacheu, Guinala and upriver at Farim and Geba (Andrade 1964). Most of the narratives offer global estimates of the number of houses, already a vague parameter for populations. There are two additional problems that make a count practically impossible. First, the definition of 'Portuguese' or of 'white' generally includes Luso-Africans, especially after the first generation, and 'white' is not a description of a phenotype. On this point, see Mark and Horta (2019:57–84). See also Horta (2009). Second, the primary documents refer mostly to adult males. Baptismal records for Joal and Rufisque (St. Lô, 1635), cited by Boulègue (1989:30), do mention both men and women, suggesting that more than half of the adult populations on the Petite Côte were men. The imbalance was likely to be greater in the less healthy climate south of the Gambia, where women are rarely mentioned. Yet, again after the first generation, Luso-African women are an essential part of the 'Portuguese' trading communities. As 'Portuguese' refers to religion (Christian), language (Portuguese or Crioulo), occupation (merchant) and material culture (European manners and clothing and 'Portuguese style' houses), Luso-African women are as fully 'Portuguese' or 'white' as their Luso-African spouses. An extremely approximate estimate for the

they could not own land. Furthermore, along most of the coast from the Gambia to Rio Grande, when Europeans who had married local women died, their goods either passed into the possession of the local ruler[35] or were inherited by the widows, thereby passing to the matriline. In time, the Luso-African descendants of the *lançados* came increasingly to adopt local cultural practices. This was particularly true for Luso-Africans who lived in relative isolation from European merchants, that is, outside commercial centres such as Cacheu and Geba.

The growth of the slave trade: sixteenth century

Servitude or constricted freedom existed among the stateless societies of the West African coast from the Gambia River to the Rio Grande, and it assumed different forms. These ranged from temporary status as pledges for debts to captivity through warfare to a local ruler lending lineage members to an acknowledged and more senior ruler as security for a treaty and as acknowledgement of the local ruler's subsidiary status. The antiquity of pledging is suggested by its appearance, from the moment of first contact between West Africans and Europeans, in their initial socio-commercial interactions.[36]

In the course of the sixteenth century, the increasing Portuguese demand for slaves led to responses and transformations in local African societies. These developments had the aggregate result of significantly increasing the supply of captives by the last third of the century. However, the total number of human beings who were enslaved remains elusive. During the half century from 1580 to 1630, Portuguese exports through Santiago Island reached several thousand captives annually.[37] However, these figures fluctu-

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total of Luso-African men and women on the coast from the Gambia to Rio Grande, ca. 1620 might be somewhere between 500 and 1000 individuals.

35 As testified to, for example, by the Portuguese Visitador to Guiné in his report to King João IV, 5 February 1647. See Brásio (1979a:457–458).

36 These practices pre-date the Portuguese arrival. Local rulers entrusted members of their own family entourage to Portuguese ships no later than the 1480s. See my detailed historical argument (Mark 2021:127).

37 David Wheat suggests an absolute minimum of 43 000 captives shipped from Upper Guinea to the Spanish Caribbean between 1580 and 1630, noting that this number includes neither contraband nor a substantial number of partially-documented voyages. He suggests that the actual total was likely higher than the estimate of 58 311 from the web page "SlaveVoyages" (http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/vO04wunh)

ated significantly, in part due to the increased involvement in the slave trade of French and Dutch vessels. Records are also incomplete partly because significant numbers of captives were purchased and transported in ways that circumvented Portuguese authority. The resulting contraband traffic never passed through the Cape Verde Islands.

For instance, during the second decade of the seventeenth century, there appears to have been a precipitous decline in exports from Upper Guinea. This, however, may have been due to the actions of the 'Contratador' between 1608 and 1614, a man named João Soeiro (Ribeiro da Silva 2013). Soeiro, a New Christian, was accused by the Lisbon Inquisition of selling letters of laden to his relatives, some of whom had emigrated to Amsterdam. Soeiro was said to be responsible for an illicit traffic amounting to two thousand captives a year. The Inquisition charge against Soeiro may be an example of seeking a scapegoat for a commercial decline that was caused by other factors.[38] Nevertheless, it does provide a general sense of the volume of the trade.[39] The uncertainty of figures for the slave trade may be seen by Donelha's estimate, almost contemporary with the Inquisition's accusation, that nearly three thousand captives a year had formerly been acquired from the slave-trading ports of Guinea alone.[40]

Slaves and ivory constituted the foundation of the export trade from the Upper Guinea Coast to the Cape Verde Islands. The two items were often complementary. In this system, a temporarily limited availability of one good could lead to an increased demand for the other. As early as 1523, the 'Feitor' (factor, or chief merchant) at the Casa da Mina had reported: 'Regarding the trade from the island of Santiago with the lands of Guinea

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from 2010 (personal communication, 21 September 2022). See also Mark and Horta (2011:169). Linda Newson (2012) suggests annual exports from Senegambia of two thousand to three thousand human beings. This figure accords with contemporary Portuguese sources; see Mark and Horta (2011:166–169).

38 During the first two decades of the seventeenth century, Inquisition sources include frequent accusations of illicit trade, including of slaves, against New Christian merchants engaged in the Atlantic trade. See Roitman (2009:130).

39 On João Soeiro and the siphoning off of slaves to Dutch vessels, see Mark and Horta (2011:165–169).

40 Donelha here refers to his own experience at Guinala, which would have been late in the sixteenth century, before Soeiro acquired the Contract or monopoly for trade in Guinea of Cape Verde (the Upper Guinea Coast). Donelha writes, 'It was the best trade [to] this island [i.e. Santiago]. I remember now the port of Guinala with eight ships from this island and more belonging to the tangomãos, and two naos [large ocean-going ships] registered in the Indian [i.e. South American] trade, and from this river each year, came close to 3 000 Blacks destined for this island and for the Indies' (1979:176).

[…] [there is] a decline in the ivory commerce and good returns from the trade in slaves'.[41] The Factor is quite explicit. He instructs his traders, when the European market for ivory is weak, to concentrate on acquiring 'pieces', that is, human beings: 'You ought, here and from now on, to acquire pieces from the Rivers, because as a result of the lower value of ivory, it is better to get pieces'.[42]

The close connection between slaves and ivory as trade items is reflected indirectly, half a century later, in Francisco Andrade's report of 1582. Andrade enumerates the ten coastal ports where Portuguese and Luso-African merchants carried on trade. From the Gambia River south to the rivers of Serra Leoa, he mentions five locations where slaves were procured: the Gambia, Casamance, Rio de São Domingos, Rio Grande and the 'rios de Serra Leoa' (Andrade 1964:102–106). In each of these locations, ivory is mentioned together with slaves.

Before Andrade's time, the early slave trade from Upper Guinea had served, in part, to meet the demand for captives by the Portuguese and Luso-African elite in the Cape Verde Islands. This is reflected in census figures reported by Andrade in 1582. On the Island of Fogo, the population included 300 'moradores', that is, some Portuguese citizens and, mostly, their Luso-African descendants. In addition, there were two thousand slaves (Andrade 1964:101). The major settlement, on Santiago Island and called Ribera Grande, had 508 'vezinhos' or citizens, together with 5 700 slaves (Andrade 1964:99). By 1600, however, the great bulk of the trade in human beings was to Spanish America, complemented, until about 1630, by exports to Brazil.

Senegambian responses to the growth of the slave trade

Duarte Pacheco Pereira's 1506 geographical narrative, "Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis" (1958), is particularly useful for a study of the early overseas trade in Upper Guinea.[43] Comparison of the "Esmeraldo" to Andrade's and Almada's later narratives illustrates the evolution of African-Portuguese commerce in the course of the sixteenth century. In particular, this comparison

41 Feitor da Casa da Mina, 26 September 1523; in Brásio (1975b:200)

42 Feitor da Casa da Mina, 26 September 1523; in Brásio (1975b:200)

43 Pacheco Pereira's work was written in 1505/06, but it was not published until the nineteenth century. Brásio's edition gives the original manuscript by individual chapter headings and without the overall title (Pacheco Pereira 1958).

illuminates the considerable expansion of the slave trade and its impact on local societies during that period.

Pacheco Pereira's narrative focuses on trading centres. The author progresses southward, beginning with Arguim Island, then proceeds to the Senegal River. He mentions an important slave market located sixty leagues upriver at 'Tucurol' (Tukulor),[44] where slaves may be purchased, six or seven for the price of one horse (Pacheco Pereira 1958:635–636). However, Pereira makes no mention of any trade in slaves near the mouth of the Senegal River, where there would have been no significant market before the Portuguese arrived. Immediately south of the Cape Verde peninsula (the present-day location of Dakar), Pacheco Pereira mentions three markets for slaves along the Petite Côte,[45] most notably at Ale (Portodale). Formerly, he writes, the Portuguese could acquire ten captives for the price of a horse. Now, he complains, one cannot even get six captives (1958:639). It seems likely that the rising price of slaves, which he notes everywhere along the coast, reflects not – as Pereira thinks – the Europeans' poor administration of the trade, but rather the response of African sellers to increased demand. Pacheco Pereira mentions the Gambia River trade and describes how, far inland, Manding merchants supposedly acquired slaves along with gold by means of silent barter.[46] While he does not specify slaves among the items acquired in the Gambia, he does list textiles and gemstones, as well as 'many other forms of merchandise' (1958:642).

Further south, the next major coastal slave market that Pacheco Pereira mentions is the Rio Grande. It is noteworthy that he does not mention the Rio de São Domingos, which was almost certainly the site of an important pre-contact market.[47] By 1582, however, São Domingos had become a significant slave market. In that year, Andrade (1964:105) writes that wax, ivory, food (rice) and large numbers of slaves were available there.[48] Pacheco Pereira's failure to mention São Domingos strongly suggests that, in 1506, the market there was still primarily of regional importance, rather than of-

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44 The precise length of a 'league' in Portugal varied from 5 555 to 6 172 meters.

45 The Petite Côte is a stretch of coast that arcs south of the peninsula, towards the Gambia River, forming a bay that offers some protection to ocean-going ships.

46 This widespread myth of silent barter, traceable to medieval Arabic sources, has long been discredited by historians.

47 On pre-contact and sixteenth-century commerce in the São Domingos region, see Mark (2021).

48 At São Domingos a market was held on an eight-day cycle; it drew people from twenty leagues around. See Andrade (1964:104).

fering goods for the Atlantic commerce. This interpretation is bolstered by a most extraordinary passage in Almada's 1594 text, in which he describes the Arriata, ancestors of the present-day Diola, who inhabited the coastal Casamance between the Gambia and the mouth of the Rio de São Domingos. This passage is worth citing at length:

> To the south [of the Gambia] extend other Blacks who are adjacent to these Mandingas, called Arriata, […] from the Cape Santa Maria as far as the entrance of the bar of S. Domingos, which is close to 30 leagues. […] These Arriata and the Falupo [another Diola-speaking group] can understand one another;[49] these Arriata do not practice circumcision like most; […] they do not engage in slave trade, as they do not engage in commerce with our people, and notwithstanding this fact, some of them are sold, but not by them, rather by neighboring peoples, who capture them in war (1964:287).

The neighbouring peoples were Mandinga who descended from the Gambia in war canoes, capturing individual Diola who had ventured away from their villages into the mangrove-lined waterways, where they were fishing or eating oysters. At first, the Arriata did not resist: 'They did not flee nor defend themselves; the experience of this now led them to take better cognizance because they fought and defended themselves and they killed and captured their enemies'.[50] Almada is describing a process of transformation: the Arriata had only recently become conscious of the danger of slave-raiding. This indicates that the extension of such raids into coastal Casamance is a new development.

The Falupo and the Arriata did not enslave one another and they did not sell slaves before the Portuguese established nearby slave markets. Almada is absolutely clear on this point. He writes, 'among these Blacks they do not have the custom to sell Blacks' (1964:290). The writer attributes to this refusal the fact that the Falupo population was expanding south to the Rio São Domingos. Having learned to defend themselves from their assailants, the Diola had recently begun to engage in trade there with the Portuguese, to whom they now brought cattle and captives who had tried to raid them.[51]

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49 The Arriata and Falupo were both ancestors of the present-day Diola; they may be identified with different sub-groups. Social anthropologist Louis-Vincent Thomas (1958) identified thirteen distinct dialects of the Diola language, not all of which are mutually intelligible.

50 Almada (1964:288). This passage by Almada has been analyzed by Hawthorne (2003:99).

51 Almada (1964:290). A strong association between slaves and cattle survived into the nineteenth century. Among the Mandinka of the Gambia, demand for captives actually

The Portuguese fortress at Cacheu 2020

It is difficult for the historian to remain dispassionate and not to focus on the human beings whose lives were deeply affected by the wider processes of violence and captivity to which they were subjected. What we witness in these five hundred year-old narratives is nothing less than the transformation of the southern Diola and their society, between 1506 and 1582. The impact of the Portuguese slave trade on local Casamance populations could not be clearer. Together, the narratives of Pacheco Pereira and Almada leave no doubt: a significant slave trade did not exist in the Casamance São Domingos region before the sixteenth century, until Europeans arrived and created the market for captives. Once established, however, the slave trade had a significant impact, even on societies that had initially refused to sell captives.

By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the rapidly expanding market on the Rio de São Domingos had turned this region into a centre for the slave trade in Upper Guinea. The commerce grew further after 1588, when the burgeoning traffic led the Portuguese to establish a trading centre, com-

grew after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, to help grow peanuts. Captives were then brought north by Diola and exchanged for cattle (Mark 1992:124).

plete with a small fortress and a church, at Cacheu on the south bank of the river to serve as their commercial and administrative centre. According to Almada, writing in 1594: 'At this Rio de São Domingos, there are more slaves than in all the other [rivers] of Guiné' (1964:307).

Responses to the slave trade: the Falupo and the Bijogo

The societies that populated the coast from the Casamance south to the São Domingos and Rio Grande responded in a variety of ways to the imminent danger posed by the slave trade. The Falupo were not alone in transforming themselves from the hunted to the hunters. The Bijogo, who inhabited the Bissagos Islands adjacent to the Rio Geba-Rio Grande estuary, were the prime example of this transformation. Lemos Coelho described this process in 1669 (1985:2). His account was obtained in conversations with Bijogo elders, thus parenthetically providing an example of the presence, in early Portuguese narratives, of information gleaned from local oral traditions.[52] The elders recounted how:

> [the Bijogo] were once inhabitants of Rio Grande and its kingdoms, but they were conquered by a race of Blacks called Biafares, a people who came from the interior […] the original inhabitants fled in canoes […] and took refuge on these islands […] they began to defend themselves and counterattack with such valour that from being conquered they became the conquerors. […] they even entered the Cacheu and Geba Rivers in pursuit of their warfare so that they were feared everywhere (Lemos Coelho 1985:2).

The Bijogo quickly established a reputation as fearsome marauders. With their rapid war canoes, manned by twenty or more young men,[53] they preyed upon coastal populations from the Grande to the São Domingos River, selling their captives at the slave market of Cacheu. Already by the late sixteenth century, the Bijogo were so feared that the coastal Papel were living in fortified villages to protect themselves from attack.[54] The Bijogo also captured

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52 Lemos Coelho writes: 'This race of Blacks, according to what the old men say […]' (1985:2). For a detailed study of the incorporation of African oral histories and traditions into early Portuguese narratives, see Horta (2021:153–175).

53 For a photograph of a (much later) version of one of these ocean-going dugouts, see Bernatzik (1939:349).

54 Almada writes that the Papel 'are all persecuted by the Bijogo who continually attack their lands and capture and kill many people' (1964:314).

Europeans, particularly those whose sailing vessels had come to grief on the treacherous shoals that surround the Bissagos Islands, which they ransomed rather than enslaved. Almada reported, 'If any of our vessels should be lost on the coast, they capture those whom they can take, and they turn and sell them back to our people who go there to trade' (1964:319). Lemos Coelho reports similar activity in 1669. From the Rio Grande to the Rio de São Domingos – not coincidentally, the two largest slave markets on the coast north of Serra Leoa – it would have been impossible for anyone to ignore the Bijogo's sea-borne slave raids.

The Falupo and the Bijogo are striking illustrations of a phenomenon first studied among the Balanta by the historian Walter Hawthorne (2003:129) and among the southern Diola by Robert Baum (1999), as well as being articulated as a more general historical theme by Martin Klein (2001:49-65): small-scale societies that fell easy prey to the earliest slave raids quickly learned to defend themselves and, sometimes, to turn the tables on their would-be captors. By the mid-seventeenth century, with the growth of the Portuguese slave markets at Cacheu (Rio de São Domingos) and Guinala (Rio Grande), the Bijogo sought additional sources of captives to sell. These were provided by those individuals who had the misfortune to be accused of witchcraft (Lemos Coelho 1985:7). Lemos Coelho attributes the practice of selling *fetiçeiros* to local hatred of witches.[55] But that hatred was certainly fed by the siren call of the slave market. The Beafada too, by Lemos Coelho's time, were selling convicted *fetiçeiros* and all of their maternal kin into slavery (Lemos Coelho 1985:22). Again, one suspects that the proximity of the important Portuguese slave markets at Cacheu and Guinala was a central factor in the evolution of this punishment for witchcraft.

By contrast, as Almada's account indicates, further south among the Sapi of Serra Leoa, *fetiçeiros* were still being executed at the end of the sixteenth century.

> And at the end of their trial [arguments] the King and the *solatigi* [judges] pass judgment. In a public place the execution takes place of the condemned party. […] The *feiticeiros*, they kill and cut off their heads, and kick the bodies outside of the village to the animals. And those who have been condemned

[55] 'Fetiçeiro' is a pejorative Portuguese term referring to those individuals who had access to supernatural powers, which they used for personal gain and to harm others. A close term in English would be 'witchcraft'. African languages all had their own terms for these individuals. In the Diola language, the term is 'assay', pl. 'kussay'.

> to death they sell to people who purchase them to kill them in order to be [recognized as] knights (*cavaleiros*).[56]

In early seventeenth-century Serra Leoa, unlike further north, there was no major slave port. European traders there had no choice but to make multiple stops along the coast. The absence of a major slave market, and the corresponding uncertainty that there would be a buyer for captives,[57] may have lessened the incentive among the Sapi to sell, rather than to execute those found guilty of witchcraft. Other groups besides the Bijogo were, at different historical moments, both hunters and hunted. Thus, while some Diola were active participants in the slave trade, others ended up as slaves themselves, growing rice in eighteenth-century Brazil (Hawthorne 2010). In both cases, these transformations endured long after the decline of Portugal's commercial dominance on the Upper Guinea Coast.

In 1669, Lemos Coelho describes one group of Diola-speakers living along the Casamance River, the 'Sacalates', as inveterate raiders or 'pirates':

> They make a living only by seizing and robbing the canoes that cross here. They lie in wait on the north side, where there are many small streams […] they shoot out suddenly and attack […] Although they do not kill their victims, they hold them to ransom even if they are whites, and they exact a good sum of money (Lemos Coelho 1985:7–8/folio 10).

This practice of capturing Europeans (or Euro-Africans) and holding them for ransom was far from an isolated case. Other instances of ransoming were found across the Casamance-Rio Grande region, and the practice endured

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56 Almada (1964:349). Parenthetically, a close reading of this paragraph, the second to last in Almada's Chapter 14, where he describes the Sapi judges and the courthouse, strongly suggests that this system of justice, including the role of the *solatigi* and also the physical structure of the courthouse with its porch (*al pendre*) and with a courthouse building called a 'funco', is all directly appropriated from (or imposed by) the Mande. It is remarkably close to the courthouse described by André Donelha (1979:148) at Casão along the middle Gambia. Almada's account offers a specific example of the process of cultural mixing between the Mane and Sapi that followed the upheaval of Mane incursions into Sapi territory in about 1550. It is highly unlikely that the Sapi would have so thoroughly assimilated a Mande system of justice by 1594 if that system had only been imposed by violent conquerors in the period from 1545 to 1560.

57 During the 1550s and 1560s slave exports (primarily of Sapi) did increase from Serra Leoa, the region along the coast south of Cape Verga, as the result of warfare between the Sapi and the Mane.

into the second half of the nineteenth century.[58] By the mid-seventeenth century, the southern Falupo living in the town of Bolol, not far from Cacheu, had extensive experience of Portuguese merchants. These Falupo, too, had taken to preying on Portuguese canoes that ventured up the tidal creeks (Lemos Coelho 1985:7). South of Cacheu as well, the southernmost Falupo would rob Portuguese vessels and then sell the goods, including any African captives, back to the Portuguese.[59]

Those who, like the southern Diola and their Balanta neighbours, could protect themselves from the slave trade did so. They acquired iron, much of it from the Portuguese, to fashion into weapons and hoes (fulcrum shovels) enabling them to farm rice in the labyrinthine web of mangrove waterways. They built palisades of stakes to protect their villages and they constructed houses that were accessible only by passing through additional palisades that also took the form of a labyrinth.[60] They also constructed fortress-like dwellings. But in addition to protecting themselves against slave raiders, these Falupo, Balanta and Bijogo sometimes profited from the slave trade themselves, either by mounting their own raids or by preying on Portuguese raiders.

At the end of the eighteenth century, an ill-fated English colony at Bolama in the mouth of the Rio Grande estuary was aborted, in part because some of the colonists were abducted and held for ransom by Bijogo warriors. In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, after the end of the Atlantic slave trade, Jahanké raids (ostensibly 'jihads') against the inhabitants of the northern Casamance region at Fogny led to the enslavement of women and children from among these northern Diola. The victims were transported further east to labour at peanut farming among Manding populations. In 1889, a French boundary commission under the command of Brosselard-Faidherbe came upon the aftermath of one of these raids. Brosselard-Faid-

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58 The Bijogo were still carrying out raids against Europeans as late as the 1850s. Their final raid, however, brought a *riposte* from the French navy. In like manner, the Diola (then known as the Djougoute) of the community or a village-cluster known as Thionk-Essyl continued their own war canoe raids until 1860, when they captured the wife and infant son of the French consul at Carabane, Emmanuel Bertrand-Bocandé. This earned Thionk-Essyl the unwelcome attention of a French military force led by Pinet-Laprade, Commandant at Gorée, with predictable results. See Mark (1985:66).

59 Lemos Coelho (1985:3) himself abandoned a ship loaded with Black captives when it ran aground. Those captives were then all seized by the Falupo, though Lemos Coelho managed to redeem some of them.

60 Almada describes the houses of the Papel near São Domingos as 'large and attractive and with many doorways arranged in such a manner that they resemble more a labyrinth than houses' (1964:313).

herbe was accompanied by a photographer, whose images probably include what is the only photograph of an actual slave raid on the Guinea Coast.[61]

Senegambian villages of asylum for escaped slaves

Along with the West African slave trade was born the quest for freedom from slavery. Senegambians who were captured and held in slavery on the Upper Guinea Coast by the Portuguese and their Luso-African descendants, developed strategies that occasionally enabled them to regain their freedom. Along the Rio Grande during the late sixteenth century, as Almada reports, fugitive slaves established a village where they were safe from recapture. In broad outline this was similar to Maroon communities in Suriname and Jamaica.[62] Almada implies that this fugitive community was situated on a point of land, apparently a peninsula, not far from the mouth of the Rio Grande.[63] Many of the runaways, he writes, had been slaves of the Portuguese, but others had escaped from local African owners.[64] This Maroon community differed in one important respect from New World Maroon settlements. The latter did not need a military force to maintain their freedom: they were on their own land or on the land of their neighbours. In contrast, the Portuguese did not have the right to own land along most of the Upper Guinea Coast. Apparently, escaped slaves of diverse cultural or linguistic origins were welcomed to this village.[65]

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61 See Mark (2002:121). The photograph is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Cartes et Plans, Série We.

62 Maroons in the Americas were escaped slaves who had banded together to form communities, even what might be termed polities. Prime examples were in Jamaica and in Suriname. Members of both of these Maroon communities gradually established a common identity, while maintaining their independence for generations.

63 The precise location is difficult to establish from Almada's text. The passage (Almada 1964:334) occurs in Chapter 12, which covers Beafada territory along the Rio Grande. Almada apparently describes the river from the mouth, upstream, but then writes that the Befada people are found all along the seaside as far as the outer point. It was at this point, 'the mainland shaped or cut like an island', where the fugitives lived (1964:334).

64 'Here there live and inhabit Blacks who flee from our people [i.e. Portuguese and Cape Verdean Luso-Africans] and also from the Blacks' (Almada 1964:336; emphasis added).

65 Almada does not identify specific ethnic origins.

Seventy-five years later, Lemos Coelho describes a similar settlement further north, located four tides up the Casamance River.[66] It is evident that the population of this community was diverse, as the narrator bemoans the loss of seventeen of his own slaves;[67] who were clearly not all of the same ethnic origin (Lemos Coelho 1985: Chapter 3, paragraph 7). Lemos Coelho's description of this village, which he identifies as Buje, is based on first-hand experience. Buje was an important trading centre. In return for the kola nuts that they sold there, the Portuguese acquired ivory, large quantities of wax, and some slaves. Despite this trade in slaves, however, Buje also served as a place of refuge for slaves who had escaped from the Portuguese. Lemos Coelho writes:

> Blacks who are slaves or servants of white men and who flee there are not returned to their owner, even if the king of the land is given much money for them. Buje does much harm to the settlers at Cacheu and throughout Guinea. Today Buje is an extensive village of Blacks who have run away from whites (1985:4).

Maroon settlements such as these could only have survived with at least the tacit support of the surrounding local populations. In the case of Buje, the local ruler actually protected them. This in turn raises an interesting issue. It is most unlikely that all of the former captives were originally from Buje. Therefore, the protection they were afforded implies the existence of solidarity among the indigenous peoples (or 'landlords') of Buje and the refugees (or 'strangers'). Whereas Almada, in 1594, indicates that fugitives had escaped from both whites and Black owners, Lemos Coelho clearly says that the inhabitants of Buje had run away from 'whites',[68] He spoke from experience: seventeen of his former captives ran away together to Buje. His efforts

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66 Lemos Coelho equates two tides with ten leagues (1985:7), equivalent to between 55 and 61 kilometres. This, however, was on the Rio Grande, a more easily navigable river. 'Four tides' along the Casamance River may well have been less than twenty leagues.

67 Lemos Coelho writes: 'when I was living in the village of Cação in Gambia, in a single night 17 young men ran away from me, many of them carpenters, caulkers or blacksmiths. I reckoned their value to be above that of fifty Black slaves, and no matter what efforts I made I was unable to recover one of them' (1985:4).

68 A caveat is in order: one needs to be cautious about reading the welcoming of runaways through the prism of 'race'. In seventeenth-century Upper Guinea, the term 'white' – Lemos Coelho uses the word 'branco' – was not based on a person's phenotype. Rather, it reflected profession (merchant), religion (Christian), language (Portuguese) and material culture (domestic architecture, table manners, clothing). On this point see, *inter alia*, Horta and Mark (2018:57–84).

to reclaim 'his' escaped captives failed. There was clearly no willingness on the part of the neighbouring African communities to help former 'owners' gain back 'their' human property.

Historically, it is significant that communities such as Buje welcomed Africans who had fled captivity among both Euro-African 'Portuguese' and Europeans.[69] In these coastal societies, where identity was generally fluid and contextually defined, the implicit distinction, in the particular context of escaped slaves, between African and 'Portuguese' reflects the inception of at least some elements of an identity that transcended local social organization or even ethnolinguistic groupings. The development of a wider and more inclusive Guinean identity has been convincingly demonstrated by Hawthorne (2010) among slaves in early eighteenth-century Brazil. The existence of these Maroon communities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Senegambia suggests that the origins of that broader identity are to be found earlier, in Upper Guinea.

Lemos Coelho's captives fled from Cação (Cassan), an important Mande (Mandinga) trading centre that was located on the middle Gambia River.[70] The men must have carefully planned their escape. They obviously knew that Buje welcomed and protected fleeing captives. Since Lemos Coelho and presumably his slaves were based on Santiago Island, it is likely that knowledge of this freed community had spread as far as the Cape Verde Islands. The individuals who escaped from Lemos Coelho were skilled workmen who had lived and worked among the Portuguese. They would have spoken Crioulo and quite possibly other common languages that facilitated the planning for their escape. Most significant is the renown of Buje as a village of asylum. Cação is located several days' travel from Buje. The journey from Cação implies the active support of people living in the communities the men travelled through. For example, to feed seventeen strangers would have entailed a significant outlay for these agricultural communities. These actions too provide evidence of a sense of solidarity that transcended local identities. Finally, once the group reached Buje, they joined a thriving population of freed men.

Nothing is known about the physical layout of Buje. Assuming it resembled other villages in the Casamance region, it is possible that the newly

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69 Both Euro-Africans and European-born inhabitants of the Cape Verde Islands would have been classified as 'Portuguese'. See Mark (2002).

70 On Cação, see Donelha (1979:148).

arrived refugees – 'strangers' in George Brooks' terminology[71] – lived in a section of the village at some remove from the indigenous population, thereby constituting a separate community. In the historical record, there is an earlier precedent that suggests this may have been the case. In the 1560s, a group of Sapi political refugees settled near Cacheu after fleeing from fighting with the Mane in Serra Leoa. These Sapi, including two local rulers from Serra Leoa, were transported to safety by Portuguese merchants.[72]

There is, here, an intriguing suggestion that the communities of refuge for escaped slaves may also have developed from a pre-existing practice along the Upper Guinea Coast, specifically, from the precedent of offering asylum to socially prominent allies or trading partners. Ironically, the sixteenth-century Sapi refugees had been transported to São Domingos by Portuguese merchants who were themselves almost certainly engaged in the slave trade. Almada's account of Maroons living in the Rio Grande estuary dates from 1593/94; Lemos Coelho's report dates to 1669. While one cannot ascertain how long these Maroon populations survived, both are described as thriving. Almada writes of the escaped captives: 'And they come to add their numbers to these parts in such numbers that they populate it and here they are raised' (1964:336). This certainly suggests inter-generational continuity.

However, neither Almada nor Lemos Coelho mentions women. Throughout his narrative, Lemos Coelho is concerned with women almost exclusively as either captives to sell or as potential bed mates, so his silence is not surprising. Nevertheless, women were obviously part of this community. One is reduced to asking historical questions which, given the androcentric nature of the primary sources, may have to remain unanswered. Contemporary Portuguese writers do not enumerate women among the escaping slaves who arrived at Buje. If the refugees were all men, it would be important to know how these men acquired wives. At least by the mid-seventeenth century, the escaped captives had all been slaves of the whites; some, at least, had not been of slave status before they were captured. Certainly, the blacksmiths had initially been free and, if Mande, then they were esteemed and influential individuals who possessed *nyamakalaw*, a special ability to control

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71 Brooks observes that the most important sociocultural paradigm in Upper Guinea involved 'landlord stranger reciprocities that promoted safety of movement and hospitality for travellers' (2003:28). See also Brooks (1993:38).

72 Donelha writes of these Sapi: 'They arrived at the Rio de São Domingos, where they were well-received by the king of the land, and they built their villages separately' (1979:108).

spiritual power.[73] In Buje, these men may have regained their earlier social status. Some of them possessed skills – e.g. iron-working – that would have been highly valued in their new host community. These men would certainly have benefitted from the landlord stranger relations that were a fundamental social practice throughout Upper Guinea Coast societies.

One important aspect of landlord stranger reciprocity was the practice of contracting marriages between local women and new arrivals. Local lineage elders may well have provided incoming foreigners, including escaped captives, with younger women from their extended family group. As explained above, in part social status reflected an individual's authority over members of the lineage or, in the case of a local ruler, control over the members of the community as a whole. Thus, the practice of offering wives to newcomers benefitted lineage heads and members of the local social elite by increasing the number of people under their authority.

Buje was not the only refuge for escaped captives in the Rio Casamance-Rio Cacheu-Rio Grande region: the coastal Balanta, whose own strategies to avoid becoming victims of the slave trade entailed migrating into the mangrove floodplain,[74] granted asylum to other Africans who were fleeing captivity among Europeans and Euro-Africans. Lemos Coelho writes of the Balanta: 'You can go there to do business. They do not commit robberies on the river [this was near Farim], nevertheless, they harbour Blacks who have fled from whites and do not hand them back' (1985: Chapter 4:5/folio 10). There is no indication whether the refugees formed their own community. Furthermore, Lemos Coelho does not say that the Balanta offered asylum only to other Balanta. Here too there is a hint of solidarity that transcends cultural-linguistic borders.

The communities of asylum are another illustration, closely related to landlord stranger relationships, of the incorporative nature of Upper Guinea Coast society.[75] One might argue that Buje is not an example of solidarity, but rather of West African leaders increasing the numbers of their dependents. The ability to do so may indeed have served as an added incentive to welcome refugees in these Maroon communities. The classic text by Miers and Kopytoff (1977:10, 14) is still relevant here. However, I see two problems

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73 On *nyamakalaw*, see Conrad and Frank (1995).

74 Hawthorne (2003) analyses the Balanta's migration into the mangrove region, where they grew wet rice. This required increased access to iron for agricultural implements, much of it acquired through trade with the Portuguese.

75 The term 'incorporative nature' was suggested to me by Walter Hawthorne (personal communication, 2 October 2022).

with the suggestion that the refugees were primarily a means to increase the number of dependents. First, we lack any evidence that the escaped slaves, once established at Buje, were treated as bonded, subordinate members of local kinship groups. In the case of the Sapi refugees at São Domingos, the kings and their entourage actually constituted a separate village (Donelha 1979:108): they were not subordinate to their hosts. A generation later, when the political situation in their homeland had calmed down, Ventura de Sequeira, the son of the exiled Sapi ruler Beca Bore, was able to return to Serra Leoa to take on a role as local ruler.[76] As a corollary, when the Balanta and the Diola did forcibly incorporate subordinate members, primarily captured children, they were obliged to treat the captives as family members. For example, they had to provide the forcibly incorporated young men with wives. This fact was emphasized to me by Diola informants.[77]

The second problem with interpreting the Maroon communities as a source of increased control over people, as opposed to an early instance of trans-ethnic solidarity, comes from the fact that these refugees were specifically the captives of Europeans. Buje did not accept slaves who had run away from neighbouring African societies, not even from those neighbours whom the Balanta sometimes captured and enslaved precisely to grow the number of their dependents. Something else is going on here, strongly suggesting a nascent sense of solidarity. Furthermore, this is precisely the sense that Hawthorne imputes to Upper Guinea Coast slaves in Brazil in the early eighteenth century. I argue that the genesis of both the New World Maroon communities, and a sense of common identity or solidarity may be traced back to the Guinea Coast at the time of the earliest slave trade with Europeans.

Conclusion

African communities along the Upper Guinea Coast responded rapidly but variously to the growth of the Atlantic slave trade in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Some Diola groups sought to avoid commercial contact with the Portuguese, while others quickly learned to defend themselves against slave raids and even to capture their assailants. Throughout the region, villages and dwellings were fortified. The Bijogo developed into

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76 Donelha (1977:110). See also Almada (1964:303).

77 Interviews with the elders of Daga ward (Thionck-Essyl, June 1976) and with Cheikh Abba Badja, 'chef' of Batine ward (Thionck-Essyl, June 1976)

feared warriors and slave raiders. Yet another response to the slave trade, documented in contemporary Portuguese narratives, was the development of communities composed partially or primarily of escaped slaves. Two of these Maroon settlements welcomed only asylum-seekers who had been enslaved by Euro-Africans or Europeans. It is significant that the three documented refugee communities were spread over a relatively wide area, from the Upper Casamance to the Rio Grande, and that they were established on territory inhabited by several different societies: mixed Diola, Banhun and Cassanga in the Casamance; Balanta further south and Beafada along the Rio Grande.

Further historical research is certainly warranted, particularly with regard to the role of women among these escaped slaves. It will also be important to study the implications of these protected communities for the early history of a sense of regional identity among the inhabitants of the Casamance-Rio Grande region. While New World Maroon communities have been the deserved subject of historical study, the West African counterpart, or perhaps even prototype, of these communities is barely known. Yet, it is hardly surprising that human beings, wherever they may be deprived of control over their own lives and labour, should respond by seeking ways, often quite similar, to regain their freedom.

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