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CHRISTIAN HØJBJERG
JACQUELINE KNÖRR
CHRISTOPH KOHL
MARKUS RUDOLF
ANITA SCHROVEN
WILSON TRAJANO FILHO

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AND CREOLE
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Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, PO Box 110351,
06017 Halle/Saale, Phone: +49 (0)345 2927-0, Fax: +49 (0)345 2927-402,
<http://www.eth.mpg.de>, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de

National, Ethnic, and Creole Identities in Contemporary Upper Guinea Coast Societies¹

*Christian Højbjerg, Jacqueline Knörr, Christoph Kohl, Markus Rudolf, Anita Schroven,
Wilson Trajano Filho²*

Abstract

This working paper analyses the social dynamics and meanings of national, ethnic, and creole identities in contemporary Upper Guinea Coast societies where national identities are constructed within an overall context of ethnic heterogeneity and within nation-states that cut across ethnic boundaries. The relationship between ethnic and national identifications is crucial for the conceptualisation of nationhood at the different levels of society. In much of the Upper Guinea Coast region there seems to be a pronounced discrepancy between national identities, on the one hand, and the identification of the nation with the state (its representatives, institutions, and borders), on the other. Social and cultural interaction has been extensive in this part of West Africa for hundreds of years and engendered identities characterised by fluidity and ambiguous means of self-ascription and assigning identity to others. Particular interests of different groups and sections of the society are often explained and justified by historical narratives which at the same time serve as models for the future and inhabit ideological discourses produced by state and non-state actors. Interaction and mixture has also led to new social formations which include creole and settler groups. Depending on their position and function in society at large and on their interaction with indigenous populations and the given colonial power, they played different roles in the construction of transethnic identities and (postcolonial) nationhood.

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² Christian Højbjerg (aalckh@hum.au.dk) is Associate Professor at MINDLab and at the Department of Culture and Society at Aarhus University in Denmark. Jacqueline Knörr (knoerr@eth.mpg.de) is Head of the Research Group ‘Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Department I ‘Integration and Conflict’) in Halle/Saale, Germany. Christoph Kohl (Christoph.Kohl@soziologie.uni-muenchen.de) was a PhD student within the same Research Group and is now a researcher at the Institute for Sociology at the University of Munich in Germany. Markus Rudolf (Rudolf@eth.mpg.de) is a PhD student within the Research Group. Anita Schroven (anita.schroven@uni-bielefeld.de) was a PhD student within the Research Group and is now research coordinator and researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. Wilson Trajano Filho (wilson.trajanofilho@gmail.com) is Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Brasilia in Brasil.

Introduction

This working paper analyses some of the empirical findings concerning the social dynamics and meanings of national, ethnic, and creole identities in contemporary Upper Guinea Coast societies. These identities are among the themes studied comparatively in the framework of the scientific agenda of the Research Group ‘Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast (West Africa)’. It is the aim of this paper to give the reader an impression of the Research Group’s findings, which have been – and are still being – obtained by means of empirical (field) research informed by specific theoretical approaches.

Key concepts guiding our research more generally are the construction of identity and difference by social actors, both groups and individuals. We look at integration and conflict as interrelated dimensions of social interaction that need to be studied as dimensions of social relationships and alliances, identifications and identity constructions within society at large. We conceptualise both integrative and violent forms of interaction as facets of the social dynamics of the societies in which they are situated and therefore also take into account the impact and repercussions of specific historical experience on the processes and practices under study. It is our aim to contribute to a better understanding of the social dynamics that affect processes of integration and conflict at the local, regional, and (trans)national levels.³

The “Upper Guinea Coast” is a primarily geographic label that helps us to place and correlate cultural, linguistic, and social phenomena and processes in regional terms. It refers to that part of the West African coast located between the south bank of the Gambia River and a vaguely defined area along the coast of present-day south-eastern Liberia. Horizontally, the Upper Guinea Coast is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the West, with its easternmost confines placed somewhere in the Futa-Jalon highlands and in the mountains of N’Zérékoré, both in the Republic of Guinea. It covers entirely or partially the territories of six West African countries: Gambia, (southern) Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. From a cultural and historical point of view it includes the western part of the Ivory Coast and Cape Verde as well.

Setting the Context: national identity in postcolonial and ethnically heterogeneous societies

National identities in the Upper Guinea Coast region of West Africa exist within an overall context of ethnic heterogeneity and – in most cases⁴ – within postcolonial nation-states, whose boundaries were drawn by former colonial powers (Knörr 2008). Therefore, the following elaborations focus on the special relationship between national and ethnic identity that is characteristic for many such societies.

Common to both ethnic and national identity is that they are primarily imagined communities (Anderson 1999; cf. Gellner 1983; cf. Eriksen 1993). From the perspective of older theories of modernisation (Wallerstein 1961, 1967; cp. Eisenstadt 2002), which emerged in the early

³ For more detailed elaborations on our approach to integration and conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast and within Department I as a whole, see Knörr and Trajano Filho 2010 and Schlee 2008.

⁴ The only country in this region that was not formally colonised is Liberia, which, however, for large parts of its history has been dominated politically and economically by the so-called Americo-Liberians, i.e. the descendants of freed slaves who settled in Liberia at the beginning of the 19th century.

postcolonial phase, it was assumed that ethnic – “primordial” – identities in postcolonial societies would become less important and would gradually be replaced by a common identity tied to the given nation. This assumption largely resulted from employing the European – or rather the French – model of nationhood as the standard and universal model of ‘true’ nationhood. It is a model based on the trinity of “one people, one territory, one state”. Ethnic identities in this conceptualisation are viewed as ‘smaller’ and more exclusive identities, which precede the ‘larger’, more inclusive national identities, both in terms of time and sophistication. Once the nation-state has been established, the official message goes, ethnic or local identities may maintain some identitarian value, but they do so as pre-national leftovers subordinate to national identity.

Already in the early 1960s, Benedict Anderson noted that his Indonesian acquaintances all called themselves Indonesians, despite the fact that “the term ‘Indonesian’ was not even known at the beginning of the century” (1996: 10). Taking the cue from Anderson’s work, which together with Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1999; see also Hutchinson and Smith 1994) inaugurated a – somewhat belated – constructivist turn in studies of nationalism, the focus turned to the question of how national traditions emerge, concentrating mostly on the process of homogenisation, which continued to be regarded as a condition for the emergence of nations (Gellner 1983; Smith 1994).

This homogenising development did not occur on a large scale in Africa and much of the literature on national identity and nation-building in Africa described postcolonial nationhood in terms of the arbitrariness of the colonial borders within which it is situated. Down to the present day it is often – implicitly – denied that such “true” national identity exists *at all* within ethnically heterogeneous postcolonial societies. If its existence is acknowledged, it is frequently described as lacking in substance, as being deficient, inauthentic, and un-African. The arbitrariness of colonial borders is seen as a major factor hindering the emergence of a profound national identity, and it is assumed that in particular the seemingly everlasting emphasis on ethnic identities – the African penchant for clans, the so-called “tribal imperative” (Chabal 1996: 48) – takes precedence over transethnic identity and hinders the emergence of a true common national identity.⁵ Hence, it was believed also among postcolonial leaders that “for the nation to live, the tribe must die” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008: 168).⁶

However, why should the development of a national identity take the same ‘ideal’ course in ethnically heterogeneous postcolonial societies as it did in Europe from the 17th to 19th centuries?⁷ Ethnic as well as national identity may very well be conceptualised, contextualised, and interrelated differently in postcolonial Africa than the European model suggests. There is no good reason to assume that with the spread of the nation-state all its European particularities would spread as well – just as there is no good reason to assume that modernisation beyond Western society can only be a variant of its Western “original”. Apparently, there are not just *Multiple Modernities* but “multiple nationhoods”, too (Eisenstadt 2002; cp. Özkırımlı 2000; cp. Knörr 2007b, 2008).

Despite the ‘lack’ of homogenisation, national identity did emerge in Africa’s postcolonial societies. Its emergence went largely unnoticed by outside observers because national identity was

⁵ See Chabal 1996 and Bayart 1993, who address the (implicit) European view of the nation and state in Africa.

⁶ This slogan is attributed to the late Mozambican president Samora Machel.

⁷ In Europe, too, (historical) differences exist(ed) in terms of the development of the nation-state and the strategies of the latter’s implementation both “at home” and in the respective colonies, differences which are also reflected in postcolonial leadership and in the processes of postcolonial nation-building.

and is construed and represented in unexpected ways – most importantly, in ways which do not replace ethnic identities or make them obsolete, but often to the contrary, in ways which presuppose ethnic identities as constituents of national identity. Ethnic and national identity are not perceived and practised as mutually exclusive variants of social organisation on the African ‘ground’, particularly within societies, where ethnic identity remains an important factor of social identity in society at large. National identity – conceptualised and enacted in this way – can offer a space for identification that transcends the various ethnic identifications, yet without replacing them or diminishing their significance. For this reason, ethnic identities are often conceptualised and propagated as breeding grounds for national identity – particularly in the context of postcolonial models of nationhood in ethnically heterogeneous societies in which ethnic identification is an important factor in social organisation in society at large (Knörr 1995, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010b). The different ethnic groups within a nation(-state) are understood as the roots through which the tree of the nation nourishes itself.⁸ In the context of this conceptualisation, ethnic identities are part of the nation, just as a national identity is closely linked with “its” ethnic identities. Accordingly, ethnic identity has national dimensions – and national identity has ethnic dimensions.

Such conceptualisations of interacting rather than mutually exclusive concepts of ethnic and national identifications have also found political resonance in ideologies and slogans communicated (to the nation) by the postcolonial state – such as “Unity in Diversity” and “Rainbow Nation”. At the same time, there is also an awareness among postcolonial citizens and policy-makers that ethnic identities may divide people as well. However, whereas *specific* ethnic identities may divide people, the relevance of ethnic identities as *such* can also be understood as a national or transnational commonality – as typical for a specific nation or beyond, as the following statement made by a Ghanaian exemplifies: “It’s typical for us to belong to tribes, it’s typical for Ghanaians and it’s typical for Africans in general.” Thus, whereas belonging to a *specific* such ‘tribe’ may separate a ‘tribesman’ from another ‘tribesman’, belonging to ‘tribes’ can be experienced as an important and unique form of identitarian and social organisation, which may foster both national and transnational identity. Whether or not this national identity is constructed within the boundaries of artificial colonial borders or not seems of less importance to the contemporary African than has often been assumed by the descendants of their former colonial masters.

When studying national identity and the conceptualisation and representation of postcolonial nationhood in the context of ethnic diversity, particularly in Africa, one has to keep in mind that politicians, intellectuals, and other public figures have often characterised ethnic identities as forces obstructing and opposing (postcolonial) nationhood. The hesitation with regard to the acceptance of ethnic identity as a root or constituent of national identity hence has to do with the fact that ethnicity – or ‘tribalism’ – is up to date often portrayed as one of the main factors of conflict in Africa, despite the fact that many in-depth studies of conflict – not least by members of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology – have shown that this is rarely so. Differences in ethnic identities may be instrumentalised in manifold ways to build pro- and con-alliances, but they are usually not the “Root Causes” of conflict (e.g. Højbjerg 2009). It seems that partially as a result of

⁸ The “tree with roots” motif often functions as a symbol for the relationship between national unity and ethnic diversity in ethnically diverse postcolonial societies (Knörr 1995, 2007a, 2007b, 2008).

that, national identity was not obstructed by ethnic diversity and ethnic ties, but by assumptions about their tribalist and evil nature.

The Relationship between National and Ethnic Identity, or: Who Constitutes the Nation?

Given the multitude of ethnic identities in the Upper Guinea Coast region and their existence within nation-state boundaries that cut across them, the relationship between ethnic and national identities is crucial for the conceptualisations of nationhood. Some ethnic identities correspond to a given national identity, others do not correspond (as well); ethnic identities can thus have different degrees of national reference. Ethnic or local identities can also be situated in opposition to the nation or retain meaning largely independent of a national referent, for example in the context of transnational networks and conflict-laden alliances (Glick Schiller et al. 2006; Schlee 2000).

The malleable nature of ethnic identity as well as the ambivalent notions of indigeneity attached to it have also become a political weapon used to claim rights of citizenship (or to deny them to others) at the level of the nation-state, particularly in times of crisis. The heated debate in post-war Liberia surrounding the accordance of citizenship and other civic rights to people of Mandingo background is an illustrative case of such processes (Højbjerg 2010, forthcoming). Ethnic identities are used in a pendulum-like fashion; there are times when they tend to be essential, and times when they are rather transitional and flexible.⁹

In Guinea, the relationship between national and ethnic identity and the significance of Sékou Touré¹⁰ – the country's first leader after independence – for the process of nation-building is emphasised. Like in many other newly independent African nation-states, Guinean leaders engaged in a highly staged battle for nation-building, often couched in revolutionary rhetoric and reflecting standard modernisation theory. During the first years of independence, Guinean authorities inaugurated a famous 'campaign of demystification', which aimed at disclosing local communities and creating national unity. Somehow paradoxically but entirely in line with the idea of difference in unity elaborated above, Guinean cultural policies promoted at the same time cultural folklore at national holidays and during important visits of the state (Højbjerg 2007).

Sékou Touré's goal was the unification of all African peoples, which was to begin in Guinea (Camara 1998; Du Bois 1962; Rivière 1977). National identity is strong among Guineans, and the pride in independence and the socialist revolution under Sékou Touré still figure prominently in that respect. At the same time, the suffering experienced under Sékou Touré has also become part of the national narrative (Schroven 2010b).

Hence, pride in achieving independence can be just as important for the construction of a binding national identity as the shared suffering at the hand of the ensuing independent governments (Kohl and Schroven, forthcoming). While the former is part of the official national narrative, the latter is important at the 'folk-level' of the national narrative. Ethnographic evidence reveals that in times of conflict on the national level, this shared experience unites people as citizens, also in opposition to a ruling government (Schroven 2010b).

⁹ See Schlee (2002, 2008) on the construction of identity and processes of inclusion and exclusion in contexts of conflict; see Berliner (2010) about the interplay between bounded and creolised identities among the Bulongic; see Knörr (1995, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010b) concerning the relationship between creole and national identity and the role of creole identity in postcolonial nation-building.

¹⁰ Sékou Touré was President of Guinea from 1958 to his death in 1984.

In rural areas, the early phase of independence seems to dominate national awareness, whereas the present is regarded with more distance (cf. McGovern 2004). Following the escalation of political unrest that had been simmering in recent years, the suffering experienced under Sékou Touré was brought into public debate in early 2007, linking it to the present suffering under the then-head of state, Lansana Conté (cf. Soumah 2004; Sarró 1999). In Forécariah (situated in the south-western part of Guinea), connecting narratives of past and present suffering also contributed to social cohesion and helped to avoid the kind of violence and unrest, which occurred in most other prefectures in the country (Schroven 2010a).

Concerning the dynamics of conflict and reintegration in Guinea and Liberia, both differences and commonalities between the two countries have been observed, for example in processes of (re-)constructing national identity in the context of (contested) autochthony (Højbjerg 2008, 2010). As regards Guinea, the importance of emphasising and defending the autochthonous against the national has increased in recent years. Højbjerg points to the continuing conflict in southeast Guinea as one example of this process of “de-nationalization” (2007). On the one hand, the conflict between the Mandingo and various groups living in the forest region is historically based. The migration of the Mandingo into this region has been going on for several centuries, and the latter groups thus see the Mandingo as intruders and strangers. On the other hand, this conflict is propagated by a state policy of “divide and rule”. Political liberalisation, structural adjustment policy, and a weakening government influence during the 1990s have all contributed to the increasing emphasis on and defence of ethnic and regional identities. This is particularly true for the east and southeast of Guinea, where ethnic and regional organisations have been founded at the initiative of elites with close ties to the state.

Along these lines, Schroven observed that in Forécariah ethnic identities interlink to a strong regional identity of being Morianais, which stabilises the community and is mobilised in times of crisis to unite the regional population and temporarily distance them from contestations taking place on the national level. In such cases, specific elements of migration history are attached to ethnic and religious identities in such a way that a version of oral tradition is conveyed that emphasises regional identity and situates it above contemporary ethnic categories and potential oppositions propagated on the national level (Schroven 2010a). A prerequisite for this is the continuous negotiation of one dominant ethnic group, the Susu, with other, significantly smaller groups, namely the Mmeni and the Fulbe/Peul, who have been delegated into client/late-comer as well as counselling positions (Schroven 2010a).

While such regional relationships emphasise the mutual dependence of one group on the other within the regional context, on the national level these seeming balances can be very different. On the national level the Fulbe majority, making up more than 40 per cent of the population, is the group least politically integrated into the Guinean nation. Within populist political discourse, historically and today, they are sometimes styled as traitors to the nation and as secessionists. These discourses have also reached the local level where they are negotiated in the context of regional identity, which emphasises shared religious beliefs and family relations. The Mmeni, chronologically speaking the first-comers to the area now the *Préfecture* of Forécariah, form a minority group to the dominant Susu. For two centuries, they have been experiencing a process of Susu-isation (cf. Sarró 2000, 2007); and in specific situations, in which ethnic group markers – such as appropriate Mmeni dress – are not met sufficiently, people nowadays may make statements such as “we are not Mmeni today.” Spiritual, ritual, and other traditional Mmeni practices are

nowadays lived next to Susu such practices. However, many Mmeni fear that with the decrease of Mmeni language practice the younger generations will become even more Susu-ised. From an outside perspective, it is less the language and more the spiritual and ritual practices that render the Mmeni to be the outsiders or significant other to the ethnically dominant Susu and with them all those identified regionally as the Morianais (Schroven 2010a).

Concerning the reconstruction of national identity in Liberia following the long civil war, the Mandingo are currently playing an important role. They have been rebuilding their own history by attributing to themselves an active role in the process of Liberian nation-building. In this respect they are, on the one hand, similar to other indigenous groups in Liberia, for example the small Glebo group living along the Liberian coast (Moran 2006). On the other hand, their changed perception of their own national significance is also based on the suffering they endured during the Liberian civil war, which lasted until 2003 and brought them not only the loss of many lives but also dispossession, long-term exile, and stigmatisation. Largely as a reaction to the status of ‘foreigners’ ascribed to them by the majority of indigenous Liberians, the Mandingo (who are Muslim) are now demanding civil rights, religious freedom, land, and representation in the government, administration, and army (Højbjerg 2010).

A comparison between Guinea and Liberia regarding processes of (re-)constructing national identity offers several interesting perspectives. In Guinea, the French colonial power and the successful struggle for independence played important roles in the construction and representation of the nation and for the development of a strong national identity. In Liberia, however, the politically and economically dominant group of the Americo-Liberians repressed the indigenous population and hindered the rise of an integrative national movement. Particularly in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau the relationship between indigenous and creole populations played an important role in the processes of (re-)constructing national identity (see below).

In the Casamance (southern Senegal), the relationship between national and ethnic identity is shaped by regional isolation and by ethnic, economic, social, and historical differences in relation to northern Senegal (Rudolf 2009a, 2009b).¹¹ Since 1982, a militant secessionist group has been fighting a guerrilla war there using these differences to argue for national independence from Senegal. The conflict in the Casamance is considered the longest-lasting in Africa and has been characterised by organisational splintering among participants and the repeated failure of peace initiatives (Foucher 2003). The relationship between ethnic and national identity is addressed primarily in the context of the rebellion. Representatives of the independence movement stress that they are not an *ethnic* movement (i.e., not a Diola¹² movement), but that they are fighting for the independence of a *region*. The question of the movement’s ethnic, regional, and national identity is closely linked to the legitimacy of their demands and is thus a political issue (cf. Lambert 1998). After many years of political secessionism, the regional dimension of Casamançais identity nowadays takes priority over ethnic identity. It has become the crucial dividing line vis-à-vis the north: “*we* in the south” (the Casamance) against “*them* in the north” (northern Senegal), or simply “Casamançais vs. Nordiste”. All ethnic groups acknowledge the multitude of ethnic identities as

¹¹ The following elaborations on the Casamance and Senegal are based on Markus Rudolf’s research unless other sources are mentioned. Rudolf’s PhD thesis will be submitted shortly. For a background on the cultural, economic, and religious particularities of the Casamance, see also Mark 1985.

¹² The Diola are the majority group in the Casamance.

characteristic for the Casamance – whereas the North (i.e. the ‘rest’ of Senegal) is perceived to be dominated by the Wolof. The common interethnic link among all Casamançais – locality, shared history, comparable tradition, similar livelihood – is regarded as the constitutive marker of Casamançais identity and is used to set the Casamance apart from the North of Senegal. The Casamance furthermore has more ties to neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and Gambia than to northern Senegal in terms of discourses on colonial history, cultural communalities and genealogical origins. Due to refugee movements and shifts in the borderlines, many people have often found themselves on the respective other side of the border. Therefore, the Casamançais stress similarities with Gambia and Guinea-Bissau rather than differences. This becomes particularly obvious at the borders where local and regional identifications clearly supersede national ones and trans-border (and transnational) similarities, common descent and family ties are emphasised. Someone may own a house in Gambia and be registered to vote in Senegal, live on one side of the border and farm his land on the other. Infrastructure (schools, hospitals, etc.) is made use of wherever it is perceived to function better. Other means to pin down national identification are accommodated to situational demands by the individual citizen. People often hold both IDs and the right to vote is not confined to one state only. Accessing one’s home region in Northern Casamance (Senegal) is facilitated by having a Gambian ID, since Gambian border patrols are less harsh on Gambian ID holders and the Senegalese rarely patrol this border region. In the Fogy region, which lies on both sides of the Senegalese-Gambian border, Gambian currency is widespread, and Gambian public transport connects every Senegalese village with Gambian traffic hubs. Just 100 kilometres farther south, on the border between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, the situation is virtually the same. In the Kasa region in the Southern Casamance, Senegalese refugees living in Guinea-Bissau cross the green border to Senegal to take advantage of better health care, lower prices, and more advanced educational facilities. This flexible approach to citizenship is not restricted to the Casamançais: In the Karon region, in the northwest of the Casamance, many Gambians having their livelihood there send some of their children to local schools and let others cross the border to attend school in Senegal. In Ziguinchor, the capital of the Casamance, a whole neighbourhood (Tilene) is comprised mostly of people from nearby villages in northern Guinea-Bissau who continue to be socially involved in their home communities. Hence, people living in this area of the Upper Guinea Coast commute and communicate across borders in a truly transnational fashion and employ borders constructively rather than in a divisive fashion.

State and Non-state Actors in Nation-building and State Formation

Both state and non-state actors play significant roles in the process of nation-building and state formation in all countries of the Upper Guinea Coast. They are situated in different sets of relationships to one another and, depending on context and situation, state actors may rely on non-state agency and vice versa. State and non-state actors may exist side-by-side or clash and oppose each other.

Non-state and state agency are closely interlinked in Senegal where Islamic brotherhoods,¹³ dominated by the Wolof (like the state), function as the major pillars of the Senegalese state. With

¹³ These brotherhoods have both male and female members.

90 per cent of the Senegalese population being Muslim, and virtually all of them belonging to one of the two major Islamic brotherhoods, the Mourides or the Tijanis, the country is one of Marabouts.¹⁴ The brotherhoods' leaders are perceived as grey eminences behind the official political scenes and neither the president nor the national football team is believed to be able to succeed without their support. Being almost exclusively Senegalese, they are a bracket holding the nation together (O'Brien 2003).

Many Casamançais, however, neither support the brotherhoods nor appreciate their expansion into the Casamance, particularly into the once dominantly catholic city of Ziguinchor and the region south of the Casamance River. Just to give one example that may demonstrate the negative attitude towards Muslim brotherhoods in the Casamance: To ask for contributions for the *Magalin Touba*,¹⁵ members of the Baye Fall (Baay Faal in Wolof) branch of the Mouride brotherhood – being as typical for Senegal as begging monks in Buddhist countries – go around with calabashes shaking them rhythmically in front of people. Whereas in northern Senegal, most people will respond positively by giving them some money, doing the same in the Casamance may result in a rather resentful reaction. A Casamançais – for example a Diola woman – may react by saying something like “Aren't you, a young healthy man, ashamed of yourself? Go and work.” The Baye Fall's begging activities contradict the Diola resentment to ask for charity – “*Diola burok*” (“A Diola works”), hence, a Diola does not go around and beg.

In Guinea, officially promoted Islam was an important element in state- and nation-building. It was promoted as a key element for the modernisation and homogenisation of society (Højbjerg 2007; Sarró 2009). Today, remnants of the state-formation period can be seen in the close institutional ties between the government and Imams in Guinea. They were paid by the Ministry for Religious Affairs even in 2000s. During periods of crisis, political, usually calming messages for Friday prayers were centrally delivered to local imams, thus shaping national politics (Schroven 2010a: 201ff).

Local and international NGOs are the institutions that come closest to what one may call civil society in Guinea-Bissau. While guided by Western values of good governance, empowerment of minorities, transparency of action, rationality, and meritocracy, local NGOs on a daily base operate according to what characterises political culture in Guinea-Bissau, namely patrimonialism and the logic of belonging. People engaged in NGO activities see their work as a way to disentangle the difficulties they face in everyday life rather than a way to change political structures and cultural values.

The situation in Cape Verde is quite different. Civil society is a lot more organised and an intellectual elite and a free press give a voice to the interests of the people and analyse the state's action critically. The Cape Verdean diaspora is another important actor in nation-building and state formation. In fact, Cape Verdeans perceive themselves as a diasporic nation, and the diaspora is an important source of revenue for the state and for the general population alike (Trajano Filho 2005, cf. Kohl 2009a). Popular culture also plays a major role in the construction of nationhood. Early in the 20th century, Cape Verdean writers purported culture as an important vehicle for building a

¹⁴ A Marabout is a Muslim missionary, teacher, holy man, religious leader (mostly Sufis).

¹⁵ *Magal* (Wolof word for tribute/festivity) is the *hadj* to Touba. It is a substitute *hadj* for those who do not make it to Mekka. Approximately four million people pilgrimage there each year. Touba is the capital of the Mourides. It is located in the northwest of Dakar.

national, imagined community. Literature has meanwhile been replaced by popular music as the main source of national images. Popular music now conveys the major representations of Cape Verdean society, particularly for Cape Verdeans living in the diaspora.

Nationhood may sometimes be divided into an official sphere – represented by a state – and an unofficial nation ‘from below’ – represented by different non-state actors. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, secret societies situated at the social and spatial margins of urban society have taken on the character of micro-national arenas, which many people experience as more authentic than the official nation. Beyond their secretive and spiritual spheres of activity, these so-called *Odelays* function as vehicles for urban and national integration by providing social services and solidarity, spiritual and moral support and the opportunity for membership irrespective of social class and ethnic belonging. Despite the official government’s inattention at the social and spatial margins, these *Odelays* have not developed into organisations characterised primarily by acts of resistance but rather into alternative forms of national belonging that substitute the official nation represented by a state that is experienced as inattentive and dysfunctional (King 2011; cp. Scott 1990; Handelman 1997).

Historical Narratives and Travelling Models of Nationhood and Transnationalism

Historical narratives relate to different periods of time in the past, depending on present requirements. They are used to explain and justify particular interests of different groups and sections of the society which may be in line or contradict interests of others. They include retrospective interpretations of past events which may or may not reflect historical facts. People narrate history not to ensure historical factivity but to achieve certain goals today. Narratives of the past often serve as models for the future. They inhabit ideological discourses produced by state and non-state actors (in development plans, public policies, political speeches, etc.) and by people in everyday life (rumours, gossip, political criticism etc.). Hence, (historical) narratives and (travelling) models (of nation- and statehood) are closely related.

When dealing with (Western) models of nation- and statehood in Africa, one has to keep in mind that a) there has never been *one* homogeneous Western model of nation- and statehood and that b) the (various) models exported to Africa by the colonial powers and African returnees from Europe and the Americas were from the outset variations of their respective ‘original’ (variety). It is therefore important to investigate how these manifold variations affected nation-building and state formation processes in the different countries along the Upper Guinea Coast. The Upper Guinea Coast offers a particularly interesting case in this regard because, in spite of its relatively small territory, it was colonised by most major colonial powers while – at the same time – a lot of internal interaction occurred both within the different colonies and across colonial boundaries. The Upper Guinea Coast can therefore function as a comparative showcase of colonial and postcolonial interaction of social and political practices and models and ideologies related to them.

Since the end of the cold war, which effected processes of social, political, and economic liberalisation as well as an increase of internal conflicts within many nation-states around the world, increasingly interconnected and increasingly mobile transnational networks – social networks transcending nation-state boundaries – as well as globally circulating (‘travelling’) models of modern nation- and statehood – implying concepts of democracy, gender equality, political participation, and the decentralization of power – have had an important impact on

political attitudes and social relations in all countries of the Upper Guinea Coast region (and beyond).

In the case of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, the colonial empire ruling the territory was weak; and concerning Guinea-Bissau, the question whether the overwhelming French presence in the region and French colonial ‘style’ have (therefore) also influenced nation-building and state formation is still an issue that needs to be investigated in more depth. The Bissau-Guinean ties with socialist countries resulting from the latter’s support during the liberation war and early postcolonial times certainly effected that Amílcar Cabral’s¹⁶ project for nation- and statehood was influenced by socialist ideas not dissimilar to the case of Sékou Touré’s Guinea during the previous decade. Cabral’s “Return to the Source” narrative, which is a blend of socialist and panafricanist ideologies, on the one hand, and of an idealised version of Balanta society, on the other, proposes an egalitarian nation ruled by a horizontally structured state. However, even before the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, Cabral’s model had shown its flaws and had been replaced by a more neoliberal narrative that emphasises market forces, competition, and the state’s withdrawal from economic activities – again very similar to the development in neighbouring Guinea at the turn of the century. Hand in hand with economic liberalisation, political liberalisation was propagated, including a multiparty system, regular elections, and rotation in power. Neither of these two major narratives materialised to a degree that would have justified its survival. Nowadays, social actors discredit both, but so far have found none to replace them with. It seems that the long-lasting political crisis Bissau-Guineans have experienced is also linked to the lack of a new political narrative that could help frame prospects for the nation.

Outside the official domain, rumours and gossips are vehicles for conveying national images. These narratives – with different emphases in different contexts – creatively mix the neoliberal and Cabral’s narrative with a third one, namely the imperial narrative that stresses the inferiority of the Africans. This mixture produces an ironic and, at the same time, pessimistic self-image of Guinea-Bissau: a nation of *koitadis* (poor and humble people victimised by their external and internal rulers), a place where there is no future (*jitu ka ten*), where social rules do not function, and improvisation reigns (*dubria*). The circulation of these narratives shows that there are different projects of nationhood that compete with one another (Kohl 2009a; Trajano Filho 2002).

Western models of democratic nation- and statehood are popular in Guinea-Bissau, but patrimonial structures, the value attached to social dependencies, and the conception of a person as a relational being, impose a series of obstacles to their political implementation. As a result, Western and local models superimpose each other and in their interactions, social actors and groups resort to any of these models according to the given circumstantial needs. In dealing with international NGOs and multilateral agencies in international fora, for example, state actors will convey Western images, models, and meanings. When addressing a national audience, their speeches are likely to consist of a complex and sometimes contradictory bricolage of models of local and Western origins.

The situation is quite different in Cape Verde where the nation antecedes the state. As in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verdeans participate in the construction of nationhood to varying degrees. The first nationalists were mostly composed of men of letters (novelists, poets, journalists), who tried to

¹⁶ Amílcar Cabral led the nationalist movement of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde as well as the ensuing war of independence. He was assassinated in 1973 shortly before Guinea-Bissau declared its independence.

differentiate Cape Verde from Portugal and its other colonies by focusing on the harshness of the Cape Verdian social and physical environment and the resilience of the Cape Verdeans in facing the hardships it entailed. After independence, the nation was, so to speak, politicised and “Africanised”. The Cape Verdean nation was portrayed as part of the African heritage, with strong historical links with Guinea-Bissau. Implicit in this narrative is the (proud) assumption that the Cape Verdeans were the civilisers of Guinea-Bissau. With the establishment of the MpD – the *Movimento para a Democracia*/Movement for Democracy – which first took power in 1991, this Africanist narrative of the nation changed. Cape Verdeans living in the American (and, to a lesser degree, European) diaspora have since gained a more important voice, which emphasises the uniqueness of Cape Verde and downplays the nation’s ties with Africa. The Cape Verdean diaspora in the United States effected that elements of the American model of political culture were incorporated into Cape Verdean concepts and practices of nation- and statehood with an emphasis on democracy, development discourses, market forces, the multiparty system, etc. What this narrative represents is not so much a community of emotional belonging, namely the nation, but rather a political community, namely the nation-state (Trajano Filho 2010).

In Sierra Leone, which suffered a particularly violent civil war between 1991 and 2002, many traditional practices and institutions have come under severe attack as they are seen a) as having been among the root causes for the war due to the imbalanced distribution of resources and power they imply, and b) as having been unmasked as powerless and impotent in the face of war when they proved incapable of protecting people from violence and death (Knörr 2010a, 2012).

Hence, as one result of the war in Sierra Leone, the traditional system of mutual dependencies and obligations has been seriously undermined. ‘Patrons’ – whether politicians in Freetown, senior members of secret societies, or landlords – were not capable of protecting their dependents from terror, violence, and loss during the war. Both the patrimonial system as such and the social hierarchies and the traditional relationships it entails have failed in the eyes of many.¹⁷ The increased presence of international NGOs, Western models of democracy, freedom of speech, gender equality, and meritocracy serve as additional challenges to more established systems of social distribution and redistribution.

The indigenous models having lost both legitimacy and credibility, alternative social and political models from outside have gained acceptance and are enjoying growing support. However, this does not mean that (global) models of political thought and practice are implemented in their original – or globally abstract – form. Rather, meanings and practices are translated and transformed – often re-invented – in such a way that makes sense in the given local contexts. In connection to these developments, one of the major national narratives referring to the creole-native divide of the Sierra Leonean nation is challenged (see below/chapters on creole identities).

In the desire to separate Casamançais from Senegalese identity – and to shift loyalty of individuals away from the latter to the former – the Casamançais make use of the major Senegalese national narrative by turning its original (postcolonial/Senegalese) meaning around and against the Senegalese and their claim that the Casamance is part of their nation.¹⁸ This narrative emphasises

¹⁷ On the system of patrimonialism see Knörr and Trajano Filho 2010 (Introduction). See also Mouser 2010; Murphy 2010; cf. Brooks 1993; Dorjahn and Fyfe 1962.

¹⁸ The following paragraphs concerning Senegal and the Casamance are based on Rudolf’s data, which he will further elaborate in his PhD thesis.

that Senegal had been one of the very civilised colonies – a real showcase for the ideals of the Francophonie – those living in the “*quatre communes*”¹⁹ having been granted French citizenship. This narrative refers, amongst others, to the first black member of the French parliament, a Senegalese named Blaise Diagne. It refers to President Senghor, who was acknowledged as a French poet and accepted as a member of the Académie Française. It refers to the democratic values of the French revolution, the role of education to form good *citoyens*, and the separation of powers as elementary constituents of Senegalese nationhood.

The narratives focused on French traditions also resonate in the Senegalese army, which regards itself as modern, democratic, and professional and emphasises its being part of the Western world. The army is also perceived as integrative in that it is truly multiethnic and even has senior Diola officers (despite the fact that these are often discriminated against as potential Casamançais rebels). As the army is one of the pillars of the modern Senegalese state, it serves as a showcase of civilisation and modernity.

Among the Senegalese, French values are internalised to such an extent that the Casamance national discourse is based on the paradox argumentation that the Casamance has a) never been colonised during French rule and has b) not been integrated into the Senegalese state according to modern (=French modelled) standards. The lack of integration is pinned down to exactly the aforementioned inherited values of “*fraternité, liberté et égalité*”: These are regarded a sine qua non of nationhood and are considered not to be provided to the citizens of the Casamance. It hence follows that the Casamançais cannot be regarded as a part of the Senegal nation.

The narratives of the Casamançais diasporas today – be they in Europe, the USA, or in neighbouring African countries – have become largely detached from the ones in their homeland, the Casamance. Narratives are primarily anti-Senegalese, rejecting Wolof dominance in society and politics in Senegal. They tend to resemble speeches of the rebel leader Abbé Diamacoune thirty years ago.

Nationhood versus Statehood

It seems that in much of the Upper Guinea Coast region there is a pronounced discrepancy between national identities, on the one hand, and the identification of the nation with the state (its representatives, institutions, and borders), on the other. It is not the national identity that is weak – though it is not equally strong everywhere – but rather the identification of the nation with its respective state.

The nation and the state are more or less coeval in Guinea-Bissau where one cannot talk about nationalism or nationhood before the war of liberation and the achievement of independence (Trajano Filho 2005, 2010). During the first years after independence, the Bissau-Guinean nation was basically constituted by creole society and people who had actively taken part in the liberation war against the Portuguese, namely the Balanta youth. Most of these young fighters were then in the process of being incorporated into creole society, which was the major “author” of nationalism

¹⁹ The “*quatre communes*” of Senegal were the four oldest colonial towns in the French colonies of West Africa (Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque). In a progressive process starting in 1789 and rendered complete in 1916 all of the inhabitants of these towns were given full French citizenship – not least due to the efforts of Blaise Diagne.

in Guinea-Bissau. After the fall of Luís Cabral's²⁰ regime, the elite core of creole society increasingly lost its prominence in the state machinery (including the security forces). Its place was occupied by the newly-arrived into the creole world, a new creole elite that, through different means, had established strategic ties with the old creole elite. Currently, despite the long series of political crises, it seems that the idea of the nation is no longer restricted to the creole world, but is being shared/experienced in almost all sectors of the society (Kohl 2009a; cf. Trajano Filho 2005, 2010).

The people of Guinea-Bissau tend to have an ambivalent relationship to their (state's) history. On the one hand, they are proud of their successful struggle for independence, on the other, they are nostalgic about the colonial period. Kohl (2009a, 2011a, forthcoming a) addresses the tensions between the state, citizenship, and nation in Guinea-Bissau and analyses the nation's reaction to the dysfunction of the state. The nation's desire for a "functioning" state has been disappointed by the political elite – a disappointment that is expressed in a narrative of suffering and a longing for the past. In this regard, the people of Guinea-Bissau only disagree as to which time in the past was better: While some see the colonial era as the "golden days", others pinpoint the government of Luís Cabral. In both cases the negative aspects of past regimes are repressed. Parallel to their sense of 'suffering', people experience fear: the colonial state, the one party state of 1974, as well as the current state apparatus of Guinea-Bissau have all been autocratic and oppressive.

In Senegal, President Wade tries to establish a direct patronage linking the president (and his family) directly to the people: for example the pre-kindergarten ("*case de tout-petits*") is financed by the President's family directly. Furthermore, rice and support is given to communities directly from the President for their traditional rituals. Cultural activities are directly sponsored by ministers (exclusively as subordinate representatives of the President) and the President or his son, Karim Wade. The latter, who in 2007 had no political position, patronised the national youth festival on national Independence Day, which was attended by thousands in Dakar. The funeral for his wife was documented on TV like a state affair. The patronage system is currently further endorsed as the incumbent President is running for a disputed extra-constitutional third term ignoring popular protest.

The celebration of national Independence Day provides another interesting example of how the state represents itself vis-à-vis the nation. It officially takes place largely as a military parade in Dakar. Uniforms are either modern or resemble historical colonial ones. The march parades fire-fighters, youth organisations, and sanitation brigades, exhibiting their modern technical equipment in a militaristic fashion. Traditional hunter uniforms or other attires referring to ancient African kingdoms – as they are worn in such parades in Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, for example – are absent. The state in its representation vis-à-vis the nation links modern Senegal to the Francophonie rather than to African tradition.

In a village occupied by the army in Casamance, Independence Day is organised rather differently. The military organises food, music, a football tournament, etc. Contrary to the parade in Dakar, where civilians behave and march like soldiers, the Senegalese army represents itself as citizens in uniforms in this specific village. They share and intermingle with locals and there are no

²⁰ Luís Cabral was the first President of Guinea-Bissau (1974–1980). He was a half-brother of Amílcar Cabral. The two brothers were the most prominent founders of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde – the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) – in 1956.

official parades or exhibitions of power in any way similar to those in Dakar. The state thereby also portrays the Casamançais separatists as a primarily ethnic (Diola) (rather than regional) rebellion directed against the Senegalese state.

The state border between Guinea and Sierra Leone is similarly perceived as the one between the Casamance and Guinea-Bissau. Guineans helped their ‘brothers and sisters’ from Sierra Leone, when they fled to Guinea to escape the bloody civil war in their own country (cf. van Damme 1999). Anyhow, in the border region of Forécariah, negative experiences with some of the refugees and raids resulting from the Sierra Leonean civil war during the 1990s have also increased the awareness concerning national differences between Sierra Leoneans and Guineans. People from Sierra Leone are different, people say; they are not as disciplined or ‘republican’. The latter statement in particular points to the fact that Guineans understand themselves as a nation based on solidarity that does not battle its own citizens – unlike Sierra Leoneans, who allegedly suffer from a severe lack of national unity. This assessment is also widespread among Sierra Leoneans. Further comparative research could contribute to a better understanding of how the relationship between the attachment to (one’s) ‘own’ and ‘other’ nation(s) relates to (one’s) ‘own’ and ‘other’ identification with the state.

In Forécariah, the state is viewed by the majority of the population as a despotic power characterised by corruption and theft. The personification of the state is seen in soldiers and the police, but also in (older) members of government, who seek personal gains and ignore their responsibilities toward the people – the ‘nation’, that is. The destruction (not plundering) of public buildings and the (sometimes deadly) attacks on policemen, soldiers, high officials, and functionaries in the context of the recent conflicts are violent expressions of the population’s growing aversion to the state. These conflicts have also demonstrated – not only to the population but also to the government and the outside world – that the ‘people of Guinea’, i.e. the Guinean nation, are capable of opposing the Guinean state. In public demonstrations and protests, increasing emphasis has been placed on Guinean identity and the nation’s role as a victim of the government in place. The government, according to its opponents, has betrayed the nation and therefore the nation must reconstitute ‘its state’ (Schroven 2010a).

The question of local representation of the state is a complex issue. On the micro-level of everyday interaction, the state officials serving at the local level work closely with the local elites, given that the latter may otherwise refuse to cooperate with local projects. Vice versa, the local elites depend on constructive cooperation with the state administration, because they rely on central funding to be able to serve their clientele. In conflict situations, however, they present themselves as legitimate representatives of the local population and as the natural opponents to the ‘predatory state’. Public servants, who identify with the state as part of their professional history, having been instrumental for nation-building after independence and an integrated part of the one-party-system, nevertheless share the criticism towards the national government, particularly in times of crisis. Although they participate in everyday patronage, corruption, and appropriation of public funds, they are also citizens who feel removed from the national government to whose powers they feel exposed (Schroven 2010b).

Political decentralisation has been a prominent reform programme in many countries on the African continent. In some cases, it has been an instrument to reform local-level administration and politics, in some cases, like in Sierra Leone, the implicit aim is to move away from chiefly-dominated politics and allow for popular representation. In Guinea, however, the result of the first

rounds of local election was ambiguous. Many councillors are direct descendents of (colonial) chiefs who have been systematically discredited during the independence period. Today, they experience a renaissance to formal political power. They can mobilise the constituency with their historical claim to leadership positions. From the perspective of the electorate, these individuals represent good candidates due to their personal connections to regional and national centres of governance, which raise hopes for public funding and NGO projects being channelled towards the village or town in question (Schroven 2010a).

Creole Identities: ethnic and transethnic dimensions

As pointed out already, social and cultural interaction has been extensive in the Upper Guinea Coast region for hundreds of years and has not only led to a mixture of social and cultural forms but also to new social formations. These included creole and settler groups – such as the creole society of Luso-African ancestry in Guinea-Bissau, the Krio of Sierra Leone, and the Americo-Liberians in Liberia. Interaction and mixture often engendered identities characterised by fluidity, ambiguous means of self-ascription and assigning identity to others as well as to varying intensities of ethnicisation (Knörr 2010b; Trajano Filho 1998).²¹ The negotiation of one's identity according to situation, context, and individual preference is particularly common, and the criteria for (ethnic) membership may include categories such as descent, language, religion, and shared historical memories.²²

Concerning Guinea-Bissau, Kohl (2009a) has shown that creole identities are ethnicised to varying degrees. One variety consists of Bissau-Guinean Cape Verdeans, whose identity is strongly ethnicised. They originated from Cape Verde and migrated to colonial Guinea-Bissau. Their heterogeneous European and African ancestry continues to be memorised by both the Bissau-Guinean Cape Verdeans and by many other Bissau-Guineans. Cape Verdeans, particularly those of middle and upper class origin, maintain a distinct identity and distinguish themselves from other creole and non-creole groups of lower social status mostly by portraying themselves as more 'civilised' and 'European'. Cape Verdean identity today appears to be quite uniform, and differences related to origins are neglected. In the course of migration to Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verdean identity has been transformed from a national identity (related to the Cape Verdean nation-state) into an ethnic identity within Guinea-Bissau and only few Bissau-Guinean Cape Verdeans maintain links to Cape Verde.

By contrast, Kriston²³ identity emerged in former Portuguese trade settlements scattered along littoral and riverine Upper Guinea in the 16th century. Kriston identity has always encompassed a plurality of ethnic identities, such as Pepel, Manjaco, Mancanha, Beafada, and Balanta. Descendants of the early Kriston communities in different towns in Guinea-Bissau – such as the Kristons de Geba, Kristons de Cacheu, and the Kristons de Bissau – trace their origins back to former trading posts and live in various parts of Guinea-Bissau today (Kohl 2009a, b, 2011b). They are also highly ethnicised, and their heterogeneous ethnic ancestries continue to be part of their

²¹ See also Knörr (2007b) and the articles in Stewart (2007) for comparative perspectives on creolisation and creole identity.

²² See Sarró (2010) on Baga identity, Fairhead (2010) and Højbjerg (2010) on the Mandingo in Liberia.

²³ Kriston: from *cristão* (Portuguese) = Christian

collective memory. In the past, anyone could become a Kriston, regardless of his or her ethnic identity, by joining a creole community in any of the trading posts, converting to (Catholic) Christianity, and learning the luso-creole language Kriol. Over the course of time, Christianity has been transformed from a merely religious category of identification into a transethnic marker among early Kriston communities and into an ethnic marker among the various Kriston categories later on. It is often associated with social attributes such as being urban, civilised, literate, and smart (*jiru*). However, religious affiliation does not imply exclusivity with regard to its social practice, which tends to be rather syncretic. It is common for someone to voice Christian faith while also consulting specialists from other religions (*jambacoses*, *pauterus*, *morus*, etc.) and relying on the forces of the ancestors and local deities should the need arise, like in times of crisis.

The Kriol language also serves as an ethnic marker, and enabled the Kristons de Geba to align themselves with Kristons living in other trade settlements as well as with Europeans and Cape Verdeans. Religion and language thus served both as an integrative mechanism as well as a way to differentiate one's group from the majority of non-Christians (Muslims) and those speaking Niger-Congo languages in Geba's neighbourhood.

The third, only weakly ethnicised, creole identity consists of people who have either never become fully integrated into one of the two afore-mentioned creole varieties or have de-creolised by either declaring themselves as "mixed" or "Bissau-Guinean" or by acquiring a 'native' ethnic identity without fully abandoning creole attachments. Be(com)ing "mixed" and "Bissau-Guinean" can also be attributed to the colonial state in the 20th century, which sought to 'detrribalise' people of mixed and African descent and turn them into national citizens instead. The ancestors of those, who have (meanwhile) acquired a native ethnic identity, had usually been Kristons of heterogeneous origins. Subsequent social and political developments – promoted and accelerated by the colonial state – led to the gradual de-ethnicisation of their Kriston identity and led them to re-approximate one of the various ancestral ethnic identities (such as Pepel, Manjaco, or Mancanha, for example) that had constituted the creole group when it came into existence. This process can be understood as cultural de-creolisation, which also serves to demonstrate that creolisation does not necessarily constitute a one-way street. However, those who have de-creolised and 'gone native' nevertheless have not been fully incorporated into a given ethnic group but still maintain a creole connection by distinguishing themselves from other 'ordinary' identities by pointing to their and their ancestors' urban residence, Christian faith, non-practicing of "native" customary practices, and their inability to speak the language of 'their' ethnic group. The Krio²⁴ of Sierra Leone are clearly considered and consider themselves an ethnic group.

Between the end of the 18th and the early 19th century, their ancestors arrived in what had been established by British philanthropists as the Province of Freedom and which was declared a British crown colony in 1808. This area covers today's Freetown Peninsula. They consisted of different groups of former slaves, who had been freed from slavery in America, and of so-called Liberated Slaves, who were rescued from slave ships bound for the Americas. These people were put in

²⁴ On the history, cultural particularities, social status, and interethnic relations among the Krio, see Cohen 1981; Goerg 1995; Hargreaves 1982; Knörr 1995; Porter 1963; Spitzer 1974; Wyse 1991. New perspectives on the Krio can be found in the articles in Dixon-Fyle 2006. For a more general history of Sierra Leone, see Alie 1990; Fyfe 1962. Concerning interethnic relations in Freetown before and after independence, see Banton 1957 and Harrel-Bond, Howard and Skinner 1978.

charge as missionaries, teachers, and civil servants by the British to Christianise and ‘civilise’ the local population.

These disparate groups of people from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds passed through a process of creolisation, developing an increasingly exclusive identity as Krio. The Krio were inclusive insofar as they included local people – and they had to in order to survive. However, they often classified them as a lower class of assimilated Krio, as “mixianies” (Knörr 1995). They were exclusive in that they excluded – or rather tried to exclude – the culture and identity of those whom they incorporated into their group. Thus, the Krio set themselves apart from others by cultivating a non-indigenous lifestyle, differentiating among themselves by ascribing different degrees of purity to members of their community, with maximum purity related to a lack in local influence, thus being “Krio-Krio”.

Up to the present day, internal differentiations among the Krio are related to the different categories of origin. On top of that there are distinctions made with regard to age and political attitudes concerning the Krio’s relation to ‘the natives’. Those Krio tracing their ancestors to Nova Scotia and Jamaica often consider themselves to be situated at the upper end of Krio society. Connecting to those in Jamaica and Nova Scotia serves as a means of linking to the ancestral past (which only in few cases can actually be historically documented) while affirming an elite status. In their account of the Krio’s historical origins, the Krio Descendants Union (KDU – successor of the Settlers Union) stresses the importance of the relatively small groups of first-comers, who came to Freetown from the Americas, by classifying them into three groups (Black Poor, Nova Scotians, and Maroons) while considering the relatively large group of Liberated Africans as only one such group of descendants. Referring to the latter, one relatively exogenous, namely Yoruba, influence is emphasised, thereby highlighting the African – yet non-Sierra Leonean – regional and cultural background of the Liberated Africans and, hence, the Krio (Knörr 2010a, 2012).²⁵ By stressing the Yoruba impact on Krio culture and identity, the KDU manages to Africanise the Krio heritage without fully indigenising it in Sierra Leonean terms. The Yoruba enjoy a particularly high reputation in West Africa (and beyond), and by connecting to them in particular, the Krio identity is Africanised and at the same time retains its superior status.

Whenever indigenisation is sought in terms of Sierra Leonean identity, it is often the Sherbro-Krio-connection that is emphasised – instead of or in addition to the Yoruba connection. The Sherbro, like the Krio, had early ties with Europeans and are considered closest to the Krio in terms of their degree of education and ‘Westernisation’. There has always been a lot of contact between the two groups and intermarriage was quite common even during times when intermarriage between Krio and other ‘natives’ was rare. Many Krio have Sherbro relatives and ancestors, and vice-versa, and whether one’s Krio or one’s Shebro identity is accentuated often depends on situational and contextual factors. When being Sierra Leonean and native is the order of the day, Sherbro identity will be emphasised whereas among Krio, Krio identity is likely to be underscored.

²⁵ On the Yoruba dimension of Krio society, see also Fyle 2004.

Creole Identity, Interethnic Relations, and Postcolonial Nation-building

Creole groups and creole culture and identity have often played an important role in postcolonial nation-building and in the (re-)construction of national identity in the Upper Guinea Coast region (and beyond) – and they continue to do so. Whether their role has been a supportive or obstructive one in this regard largely depends on their position and function in society at large, on their interaction with indigenous groups and with the given colonial powers, and on whether they are perceived – and perceive themselves – as members of the society they live in.

Creole groups may symbolise ‘unity in diversity’, i.e. the ability to forge a new common identity on the background of heterogeneous backgrounds (Knörr 2007a, 2007b, 2010b²⁶). This model in many cases proved to have more binding power for populations struggling to overcome colonial rule than the European model of nationhood (alone), which understands the emergence of a nation as a process of homogenisation. Creole identities can be employed to advance the social integration of an ethnically heterogeneous society. Creoles and creoleness in the region also played and still play an important role in postcolonial nation-building because they symbolise modernity, civilisation and education – all of which are conceptually linked to national identity.

Guinea-Bissau is an interesting case for comparing the role of creole groups in nation-building in the region (and beyond). Creole group identity was less exclusive here than, for example, among the creoles of Sierra Leone, and nation-building was not obstructed by divisions between native populations, on the one hand, and creole elites, whose indigeneity was contested, on the other. In Guinea-Bissau, creole society has been the main actor in the process of nation-building since the protonationalist movements developed at the beginning of the 20th century. They imagined creole society as the entity that would encompass regional, ethnic, historical, linguistic, and social differences. Creoles indigenised to a high degree and are up to date considered first-comers and landlords in the former trading posts. This claim is corroborated by many Bissau-Guineans of all descents, who allude to Geba’s Church or Cacheu’s Chapel as the country’s first church and chapel and who conceive of the town of Geba as Guinea-Bissau’s first capital although the modern state only came into existence centuries after Geba had been founded in the 16th century. Christianity, which is strongly associated with creole culture, continues to retain high national significance in postcolonial Bissau-Guinean society (Kohl 2009, forthcoming a, b, c). Due to the association of Christianity with nationhood, the latter even encompasses Islam in a “hierarchical opposition” (Dumont 1980) and the Portuguese and Kriol terms *igreja* (church) and *capela* (chapel) refer not only to Christian churches or chapels but also to Muslim mosques.

The occupation of the colonial territory by creole traders and their interactions with the rural population since the late 19th century created a vivid field of interaction that preceded Bissau-Guinean nationhood. Creole groups interacted with indigenous groups and incorporated outsiders into their group as a means to reproduce themselves.

The role of intermediaries and brokers played by creole groups has been strategic to the Bissau-Guinean nation-building process. The relationships between creole and indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and between the creole elite and the newly-arrived into the creole world, on the other,

²⁶ Here you will find detailed explanations of the terms related to ‘creoleness’ and the theory of creoleness in the postcolonial context; see also Knörr 1995.

have been ambivalent, sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting. During the liberation war and the first years after independence, this conflict was expressed by the cleavage between Cape Verdeans (*burmejus*) and Bissau-Guinean creoles. Later on, relations between the traditional creole elite and the new elite coming from the hinterland have been a source of tension.

The relationship between creoles and indigenous populations has shaped interethnic relations more generally, and processes of nation-building in particular. While the creoles were a rather closed group at first, they became increasingly open to other groups (cf. Cardoso 2002), particularly after the colonial rulers' policy of stratifying the society into the categories of 'civilised' and 'indigenous' had officially been introduced in 1917, breaking with the previous (unofficial) differentiation between the '(creole) Christians' and the 'indigenous'. Thus, 'creoles' and 'civilised' were no longer one category of people since the new colonial stratification recognised both 'uncivilised' creoles and 'civilised' natives.

The concept of the postcolonial nation is directly related to the mechanisms of social reproduction employed by the creole society in Guinea-Bissau, and to their idea of nationhood (Trajano Filho 1998, 2003, 2005). Since Guinea-Bissau attained independence from Cape Verde in 1879, the promotion of a "Guinean" (or Bissau-Guinean) national identity has largely been a 'creole project' from which the independence movements emerged in the second half of the 20th century. The national idea developed by the creoles during the struggle for independence had its origins primarily in the creoles' desire to belong to an independent nation, which they imagined should be governed by a creole-headed state in which the creoles would integrate the indigenous population without colonial pressure. Trade and mid-level colonial administration had been the main professional fields for the creoles in Guinea-Bissau since the end of the 19th century. The essence of this idea of 'nation' was deeply creole in the sense that its goal was to incorporate to the furthest extent possible other peoples – and their cultures – into their own 'creole universe'.

The most important symbol of national identity in Guinea-Bissau up to date is Amílcar Cabral – a creole – and his ideology of national unity. When addressing and explaining their national identity, Bissau-Guineans to date refer to Amílcar Cabral, his writings, and the fight for independence led by him (see Lopes 2006; Fundação Amílcar Cabral 2005). The dominant narrative is that of Cabral as the founder of the modern Bissau-Guinean nation, which put an end to the "divide and rule" policy of colonial rule and united the creoles with the indigenous population in the struggle for independence (Chabal 2004; Duarte 1997; Lopes 1987; Kohl 2009a, 2011a, 2011b). Bissau-Guineans still refer to Cabral's call to overcome class differences, ethnic divisions, and explain the relationship between ethnic and national identity as "unity in diversity". Thus, in part, the Portuguese colonial ideology of "Lusotropicalism"²⁷ (cf. Kohl forthcoming c) and Cabral's ideology of national unity have been unexpectedly interlocked. Bissau-Guineans often represent themselves as a peace-loving nation in which skin colour and ethnic categories play no role and where tribalism is an evil associated with ambitious, corrupt politicians rather than with ordinary people.

To construct an integrated nationhood, the early postcolonial state did not rely on words alone. Rather, it took a leading role in initiating and promoting the nationwide spread of creole representations to construct a nation *after* independent statehood had been achieved – like many

²⁷ Lusotropicalism is based on the idea of a tolerant hybrid nationalism that binds the Lusophone nations, irrespective of the phenotypical characteristics of the people, see Castelo 1999.

other African countries, Guinea-Bissau differed from Europe, where nation-building had preceded the formation of states. Creole manifestations served to create an integrated national culture “from below” by means of cultural pidginisation (Knörr 2010b).

During the war of independence, the PAIGC employed Kriol language as a means of popular mobilisation. It was used as the language of army training, of instruction in schools, and of radio programmes. That way, Kriol rapidly gained ground as an interethnic means of communication. The indigenisation of creoles and creole culture is most evident up to the present day in the *Manjuandadi*, primarily female associations of solidarity whose membership used to be composed of Christian creoles only during colonial time, but which have since opened up to all groups, playing an important role in the construction of transethnic solidarity and, hence, Bissau-Guinean nationhood at the grassroot level (see also Kohl 2009a, forthcoming b; Trajano Filho 1998, 2005, 2010).

The celebration of Carnival also used to be restricted to the former trade settlements. After independence, however, it was appropriated by the single-party’s youth organisation, which started organising it on a nation-wide level to mobilise particularly the country’s children and teenagers irrespective of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Ministry of Culture later took over, marketing carnival as a popular annual event, thereby also promoting tourism next to nationalism. Today, Bissau-Guineans proudly refer to carnival as a national festival reportedly unique in the subregion.

As already mentioned, some creoles openly reject any ethnic affiliation and portray themselves as “Guineense”, thus ascribing to themselves an identity that differentiates them from other ‘ordinary’ (ethnic) groups. Hence, creole identity both represents and transcends the state-official and popular “unity-in-diversity” model of the nation that conceives the nation as an umbrella encompassing various ethnic groups (cf. Kohl 2009a).

An interesting (comparative) case is the Krio population in Sierra Leone. The Krio are the descendants of different groups of liberated slaves in Sierra Leone who, on the background of heterogeneous origins, developed and maintained a new common ethnic identity, and distinguished themselves from others by cultivating a rather non-indigenous attitude. Despite the lofty reputation of the Krio lifestyle and ‘civilisation’, being perceived as separate from and superior to the majority of Sierra Leoneans, and as not really native, the norms and values they represented raised mixed feelings. The Krio have had a disintegrating effect on Sierra Leonean society in that they emphasised the differences rather than the similarities between themselves and the indigenous population. Whereas in many other colonial and postcolonial contexts, creole populations have often had unifying effects across ethnic boundaries and played an important role in the struggle for independence, most Krio were opposed to independence. They founded the Settlers Union in the 1950s to unite the descendants of those settled in Sierra Leone at the end of the 18th through the middle of the 19th century. The Settlers Union was the first organisation, which united the Krio as a politically active force that advocated an independent state in Freetown until coming to realise that this was a hopeless undertaking. After independence had been achieved, the Krio were perceived as a colonial remnant rather than a symbol of postcolonial nationhood in Sierra Leone. The gap between Freetown and the Krio, on the one hand, and the Provinces and the indigenous people, on the other, was broadened rather than narrowed in postcolonial times.

Due to their minority status – the Krio represent a minority both on the national level (1–2 per cent of the population) and in Freetown (10–20 per cent) – and the ambivalence concerning their

heterogeneous background and contested indigeneity, the Krio themselves usually avoided becoming engaged in national politics beyond Freetown and were seldom considered for political office beyond the local level after independence had been achieved. They have, however, always played an important role in the judicature and the education sector and have therefore exerted considerable influence over the more formal and institutional dimensions of the postcolonial order.

In recent years, since the end of the civil war, an increasing number of Krio have become more engaged in public discourse and involved in political activities (and parties) on the national level, a process which is largely the result of their being situated – and situating themselves – in the national context in different and new ways. Even those Krio known for their reverence for tradition and customs – like the members of the “Krio Descendants Union” – seem to be going through a process of politicisation.

The Krio’s increased political engagement evokes ambivalent reactions. Being somewhat less ‘one’s own’ and somewhat less ‘native’ brings to bear ‘old’ negative connotations. Some (both Krio and others) reject their political involvement because of their minority status and contested indigeneity. Yet, ‘new’ positive meanings have emerged from the decline in reputation that tradition and indigeneity have suffered as a result of the war. There is a lot of frustration with “old” politicians – including those of the post-war period. The Krio are largely considered to have been less involved in Sierra Leone’s civil war than other groups. This may primarily be so because they live almost exclusively in Freetown and the surrounding areas, i.e. the region that was less directly affected by the war than other parts of the country. However, there are people who believe that the Krio are likely to contribute to a new and better political culture, also because they are associated with values related to modernity: being educated and meritocratic (rather than nepotistic and tribalist). The recent war – in which it was largely the ‘natives’ who engaged in mutual violence and damaged Sierra Leone’s reputation – has also contributed to a lack of trust in one’s ‘own’ people. It seems that in this post-war context of contested loyalties and identifications, the Krio are increasingly discovering and making use of the potentials of transethnic connectivity that lie in their creole heritage.

The comparison between Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone shows that creole culture and identity manages to serve (national) integration where it allows for (selective) transethnic identification as a result of creole groups communicating their ‘being different from others’ as ‘being more like *different* others’ due to their heterogeneous origins. The integrative potential of creole identity seems to be high where its different roots are conceptualised and communicated as connections to different ‘others’ within a given society and locality, connecting creole specificity with transethnic commonality. The integrative potential of creole identity tends to be low where a creole population seeks distance and exclusiveness, where its ‘being different from’ is seen as a result of its ‘being better (off) than’ others. In such cases, the heterogeneous roots of creole groups are conceptualised and represented as paths leading away from the different non-creole groups in a given society and locality, thereby disconnecting creole identity from the society within which it is situated (Knörr 2010b).

Historical Narratives and Creole Authenticity

Historical narratives are employed to (re-)construct the (different) origins of creole groups in specific ways inasmuch as they are used to foster and legitimate specific practices of inclusion and exclusion.

In Guinea-Bissau, historical narratives represent creoles either as traders and owners of commercial factories in rural areas, living in close contact with the indigenous population, or as low and mid-rank public servants. The histories of the creole families tend to stress their role as civilisers. Creoles are portrayed as the people who brought merchandise, technologies, and proper modes of action to their indigenous counterparts with whom they were associated through marriage and naming practices, the adoption of indigenous children, and client-patron relations. They are also depicted as “civilisers” of the Portuguese who came to Guinea-Bissau, helping them to adapt to the hardships of colonial life. In general, such narratives are nostalgic stories that refer to a time when life was predictable and orderly. They often imply a note of bitterness towards the Portuguese. Mention is often made to the unfairness that characterised the way colonial government dealt with creole entrepreneurs: how they were overtaxed and forbidden to produce firewater (an important product in local trade), and how their small business activities were suffocated by the large Portuguese companies. Some of these family histories emphasise an ambivalent proximity with the Portuguese. Taken as a whole, historical narratives portray Guinea-Bissau as the place of the creoles, and the same narratives function as a symbolic way to create and maintain the fluid boundaries that separate creoles from others. The nostalgic tone referring to an orderly past, in which the creoles had a distinct, albeit ambivalent place, helps us understand the self-image of being fragile and hopeless that characterises contemporary creole identity.

Only very limited research has so far been conducted on luso-creole culture and identity in the city of Ziguinchor, the administrative centre of the Casamance. Formerly a Portuguese trade settlement like Bissau, Cacheu, and Geba, the town was handed over to French rule upon conclusion of a treaty between Portugal and France in the 1880s. The creoles (“les créoles”), who are descendants of relationships between (autochthonous) Bainouk and (lusophone) Africans are perceived as the founders of the town. Despite the fact that they operate in all social, political, and economic straits from Ziguinchor to Dakar, they are less visible than i.e. the Krio in Sierra Leone. Alkmin (1983) reported that old-established families, locally known as Portuguese (“Portugais”), trace their origins back to Portuguese times, but apart from this note little is known about how the creoles today construct their identity and relate to other groups. They speak Kriol, which used to be a lingua franca in Ziguinchor and a marker of Ziguinchor identity, but which is nowadays a language only spoken at home (Juillard 1995; Chataigner 1963). Due to the increasing immigration of Wolof, the Wolof language is the lingua franca in Ziguinchor today. Kriol is mainly spoken by Bissau-Guineans, many of whom are refugees. People say that the old Ziguinchorian variety of Kriol used to be “plus pure” before being influenced by Bissau-Guinean Kriol, which resembles modern Portuguese more closely. This is interesting also in comparison to Sierra Leone, where it is the Krio spoken by the so-called “pure” Krio, the “Krio-Krio”, that is considered “pure”, “undiluted”, and “uncorrupted” (Knörr 1995, 2010a, 2012). Whereas such ‘purity’ is associated with a lack of local influence in Sierra Leone, it is associated with a lack of Bissau-Guinean and Portuguese influence in Ziguinchor.

It would be interesting to know how the ‘old’ creoles in particular situate themselves and are situated by others vis-à-vis the Senegalese nation-state, on the one hand, and the Casamance, on the other. It is particularly interesting also because the creoles are not, like elsewhere, situated in a nation-state context but in a context of a region that aims at a separation from the nation-state it is formally part of but which it opposes. The creoles of Ziguinchor and those of Bissau-Guinean origin frequently intermarry. The question remains open how this exchange affects patterns of identification among them. There may be a process of mutual incorporation taking place, which may lead to a new (creole) group and identity. Processes of internal differentiation may also be taking place as part of this process in that specificities of origin become more pronounced as a result of the desire to maintain some distinctness within a wider frame of creoleness. Differentiations may relate to differences in (contexts of) origin, language varieties, and identifications with particular local, regional, and national categories. We know little about if and what role the creole identity plays in the Casamance and if and what role it plays in the conflict that has been going on there for decades. How do the creoles situate themselves vis-à-vis the Casamançais and the separatist rebels, and how are they perceived by them? Under which circumstances do they identify as Casamançais, Bissau-Guineans, or transnational creoles? People do not terminologically differentiate between the “indigenous” creoles, who are descendants of old Ziguinchor creole families, and creoles from Guinea-Bissau. They are all labelled as Bissau-Guineans – hence, it seems that the ‘old’, ‘first-coming’ creoles are somewhat ‘exogenised’. It still needs to be investigated how these ascriptions affect ethnic, regional, and national identifications and loyalties. It may be that the creoles in Ziguinchor – in contrast to those in Sierra Leone – are regarded and appreciated as indigenous due to the fact that they came into existence as a result of interethnic encounters in the region where they still live today. Their heritage includes Portuguese, hence colonial, ancestors, a factor which in many postcolonial contexts would raise mixed feelings. It seems likely that in the Casamance this ‘black spot’ on creole identity is a little ‘whitewashed’ because the Portuguese heritage can be employed as a means to set the Casamance apart from Senegal with its French colonial heritage. As part of this strategy, the creoles may be used as evidence of differences vis-à-vis the Senegal.

The (comparative) case of creole identity and language in the Casamance stands out in that it offers an unusual case in manifold ways: a) there are different “sorts” of creoles in one place, who are b) connected to different national contexts, d) among which one is considered indigenous and one exogenous and e) one of them (the original Ziguinchorian creoles) is situated in a region, which seeks to be separate from the nation-state it is formally part of. Possibly a process of creolisation is going on in the Casamance, which may offer new insights into long-term effects of colonial encounters and exchanges concerning the social formations which were generated in the context of colonialism as well as the societies in which they are situated and charged with (changing) meanings. The contemporary transformations of social formations and identifications, which originally emerged as a result of the colonial encounter and which have changed during postcolonial times, have a lot to tell us about the post-post-colony. Revelations concerning such transformations of creole identities also contribute in substantial ways to the understanding of processes of social and cultural interaction in contexts of ethnic diversity within postcolonial nation-states and to theories of social and cultural interaction more generally.

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