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‘A Commanding Commercial Position’: The African Settlement of Bolama Island and Anglo-Portuguese Rivalry (1830–1870)

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IN HIS FASCINATING seventeenth-century narrative, a trader who spent many years in the region, Lemos Coelho, discusses the island of Bolama, adding what with hindsight would prove to be a particularly poignant note:

This island is located in the middle of the Guinea coast: close to Sierra Leone, (and) the Geba settlement for the trade in kola close to home; the Bijagós islands to the West, and the voyage to the Coast (Petite Côte) and the Gambia can be done in one and same sortie, with fewer risks of encountering sandbanks; the neighbours, the Biafares, are the best one can find in Guinea; and above all free of the dangers that the access to the port of Cacheu implies. *Here, residents would be the lords of the land and could establish great plantations.*¹

Coelho’s remarks about the island neatly place it in a regional context while already foreseeing its promising future as a site for commercial exploration and agricultural ventures.² In this chapter I wish to explore the theme beyond what George Brooks called the ‘cynosure’ or centre of attraction of (African, Europeans, Eurafican, and American) ‘imperialisms’ and focus on parallel strategies pursued by the different actors involved—individually or

¹ Francisco de Lemos Coelho, *Duas Descrições Seiscentistas da Guiné*, ed. Damião Peres (Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa de História, 1990). The same passage is also quoted by George E. Brooks, ‘Bolama: Cynosure of African, European, Eurafican and American imperialisms’, in Carlos Cardoso (ed.), *Bolama Caminho Longe* (Bissau: Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa [INEP], 1996), 135–74, 141, and by Jean Michel Massa, *À la recherche de l’identité de Bolama: Images de la Capital d’Après les Récits des Voyageurs Européens*, in Cardoso, *Bolama Caminho Longe*, 41–66, 48, 49 (Bissau: INEP, 1996). All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated. Author’s emphasis.

² See the map on page xv for Bolama Island. It should be noted here that the Ilha das Cobras (about 3 km long), much smaller than Bolama (20 km long) which lies immediately north of the latter, and separated from the latter by the narrow *Passagem do Furinho*, is usually omitted from secondary accounts.

data show, these women were not only fundamental for managing the factories, plantations, and transactions, but also brokered relations with neighbouring communities, convincing them to cede usufruct rights to the locations in question while resolving any conflicts that arose.¹¹

The case of Bolama is particularly relevant for an understanding of settlement patterns in an insular context: the cases of McCarthy Island in the Gambia or Bunce Island in Sierra Leone on Africa's west coast may serve as regional comparisons.¹² The fact that Bolama itself was subject of dispute between rival ethnic groups both claiming ancestral rights to the territory, adds to the significance and the complexities of the case. This, and the circumstance that the island, until its settlement in the 1830s, had not—mainly as a result of the said dispute—been permanently inhabited for centuries renders the use of the landlord-strangers approach proposed by Dorjahn and Fyfe and widely applied to the Upper Guinea coast somewhat problematic.¹³ Indeed, the complex dynamics of its settlement in the 1800s are embedded in mechanisms associated with the distinct dynamics of the slave and the crop export trade, but also with strategies of engagement pursued by a multitude of actors, that is, African dignitaries, trader-planters, sharecroppers, migrants, and local communities, which all tend to overlap.

By considering Bolama as a site for strategic engagement between these local, regional, and global actors and their respective interests, I intend to fill a number of lacunae regarding these processes that have, so far, largely been neglected. The period upon which I focus runs from the cession of usufruct and settlement rights by members of ruling Bijagó matrilineages on a neighbouring island, to a Portuguese trader-official in 1828 to the decades following the decision by the US president, Ulysses Grant, in favour of Portugal in

¹¹ On the role of African women in relation to trade and agriculture in the 1800s, see the cases of Júlia da Silva Cardoso and Aurélia Correia discussed below; for further details, also see Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes*, 255–310; idem, 'From Pariahs to Patriots'.

¹² See Patrick Webb, 'Guests of the Crown: Convicts and Liberated Slaves on McCarthy Island, The Gambia', *The Geographical Journal* 160 (1994): 136–42. Bunce island, twenty miles upriver from Freetown, was settled and fortified by the British in the 1670s, and served as a port for the transatlantic slave trade until 1807; for a background on insular settlements in Sierra Leone, see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), and Alexander P. Kup, *A History of Sierra Leone: 1400–1787* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 62–119; also see Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), and George E. Brooks, *Euro-Africans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

¹³ Vernon R. Dorjahn and Christopher Fyfe, 'Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone', *Journal of African History* 3/3 (1962): 391–7. See also Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast*; Brooks, *Euro-Africans in Western Africa*; idem, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000–1630* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

its dispute with Great Britain in 1870. The various threads that emerged from archival research into documentation in archives in the UK, Portugal, Cape Verde, and Guinea Bissau, will be joined and interwoven below.

Prologue

This chapter intends to demonstrate that a consensus on Bolama's strategic importance and suitability for settlement was not only hard to come by in terms of the Anglo-Portuguese dispute referred above, but also in the case of other interested parties operating in the region. This was largely due to the greatly differing motivations that propelled the actors involved, which included metropolitan and colonial governments, abolitionists, slave traffickers, planters, African dignitaries and their communities, and free migrants from different areas in the region. The motivations of European designs on West Africa ranged from Wadstrom's romantic philanthropical ideas about colonization to hard-nosed commercial interests represented by slave traffickers or the Manchester Cotton Association. The aims that inspired the attempt by the Bulama Island Association, formed in 1791, to establish a settlement there 'proposed and undertaken by a few gentlemen' were similarly qualified as philanthropic ('cultivation as the means that might lead to the civilization of the Africans and eventually put an end to their slavery'), but also as mercantile ('that they will conduct themselves in making the intended purchase and in their traffic with the natives in a just and orderly manner'), but then again as imperialist ('to establish a commerce on honourable and advantageous terms for the British nation'), as well as an example of self-interest and personal ambition ('I may be accused of egotism in the narrative of the expedition. But alas! of whom else had I to speak!').¹⁴ A number of articles have focused on the period previous to 1830, above all on Philip Beaver's expedition and its failure, so that a few aspects relevant for Bolama as a site for international and local encounters for the period from 1752 to 1828 will be discussed below.¹⁵

The first signs of the interest shown by Portuguese authorities already established on the Upper Guinea coast regarding Bolama as a site for settlement are given by Francisco Roque de Souto Mayor, the commander

¹⁴ See Philip Beaver, *African Memoranda Relative to an Attempt to Establish a British Settlement on the Island of Bulama on the Western Coast of Africa in the Year 1792 with a Brief Notice of the Neighbouring Tribes (...)* (London: Baldwin, 1805), i, 3, 14, vii; Philip Beaver, Hew Dalrymple, and other military officers had recently been decommissioned and sought new employment and projects; see Galli, 'Eighteenth Century Images of Bolama', 111.

¹⁵ Brooks, 'Bolama'; Hair, 'Beaver on Bulama'; idem, 'Some references to Bolama'; Galli, 'Eighteenth Century Images of Bolama'.

(*capitão-mor*) of the Bissau garrison in 1752.¹⁶ In his dispatches to Lisbon he reports on the successful palavers with the Pepel 'king' of Inte (on the island of Bissau, and the subsequent repossession of the port of Bissau, which had been lost to the French fifty years earlier, in 1703, see the map on page xv).

Significantly, the commander proposes to

settle the island of Bissau in order to establish a big colony with 400 families from the Cape Verde islands.¹⁷

The advantages of such a colony were manifold in view of the crop harvests, which would provide their sustenance and supply the ships that anchored there, while the good fertile soils and the increment of the colony would also save the Crown's (costly) investments in a (trading) company, and allow it to gain control of the Rio Nunez 'where many Portuguese Christians lived' (*ibid.*). The same commander was to place a wooden landmark (P: *padrão*) on Bolama in order to establish Portuguese rights to it in the following year. At the same time, Sierra Leone also comes into the picture in the person of a Christianized African, Joseph Lopes de Moura, who claimed Portuguese descent and proposed the building of a fort at the port of Tamba while inciting the Portuguese to explore these 'rich lands'.¹⁸ The presence of Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders and missionaries in the Sierra Leone region from the second half of the 1400s resulted in processes of acculturation and assimilation; this mixed ancestry was later invoked by descendants when seeking allies in their struggle against rival forces.¹⁹ The arrival of French, British, and Dutch outsiders on the West African coast from the late 1500s reinforced this dynamic, giving rise to new rivalries and claims.

Thus, Bissau, Bolama, the *Rivières du Sud*, and Sierra Leone all form part of a complex puzzle of competing interests that would gradually fall into place during the 1800s. Rather than merely considering the building of fortifications, officials were actually pondering colonization as a realistic option in the 1750s. In his dispatch, the Portuguese commander also mentions French expeditions to Bolama and the fact these had produced a map of the

¹⁶ Brooks, 'Bolama', 105; Leopoldo Amado, 'Bolama e a Formação de um Sentimento Nacional: os dois pólos protótipos', in Cardoso (ed.), *Bolama Caminho Longe*, 305–24, 309.

¹⁷ Francisco Roque de Souto Mayor, Bissau (12 March 1752); Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Guiné, Cx. 8.

¹⁸ Joseph Lopes de Moura (4 July 1752); AHU, Conselho Ultramarino (hereafter: CU), Guiné, Cx. 8.

¹⁹ At the time Lopes de Moura claimed Portuguese descent but also kinship relations with Mane kings; he destroyed the fort of the Royal Africa Company on Bunce island in 1727. Curiously, but by no means incidentally, the said correspondence was abundantly quoted by Portuguese diplomats in the 1860s in order to sustain their claims to the sovereignty over Bolama, erroneously stating that Lopes de Moura had originally ceded the Portuguese settlement rights to the island of Bolama.

island.²⁰ Indeed, the French had considered colonizing the island in the 1720s and planting sugar cane, cotton, indigo, cacao, tobacco, and staple crops such as maize, sweet potato, and beans.²¹ Taking the island of Bissau as an example, settlement was only contemplated after the Portuguese built fortifications there, which were in place by 1776. Despite the fact that Bissau became the main port for slave exports with the establishment of the Portuguese trading company, the *Companhia Grão Pará e Maranhão* in 1755:

nobody living in the [Bissau] stronghold, white or black, can leave its perimeter further than a gunshot's distance without being made prisoner ...²²

Obviously that was bad news for prospective settlers. In fact, little changed in territorial terms after the completion of the fort there, owing to the opposition of the Pepel to the extension of the settlement. Indeed, the situation did not fundamentally change until 1915, when the latter were defeated during the military campaigns led by Portuguese troops and African mercenaries.²³ Seeking alternatives to the cramped settlement at Bissau was an obvious strategy and a serious concern for Portuguese as well as local actors; it remained so for the next 150 years.

Any doubts as to why the Portuguese commander of Bissau—who never intervened—was somewhat concerned about the Beaver expedition to Bolama in 1792 in his dispatch to Lisbon in June 1792,²⁴ soon dissipates upon reading the following lines:

[if] the British parliament sent them to settle and cultivate the land with the order not to buy slaves, but only beeswax and ivory, then trade in this garrison town [Bissau] will be completely lost.²⁵

However, the dispatches sent by this commander and his successor to Lisbon, asking for instructions, remained unanswered. Interestingly, these requests for advice and assistance are marked by a rather laconic tone: if disease would not reduce their number, or the warlike Bijagós living on the islands, 'then taxes would have to be levied'.²⁶ Traditionally, being active slave traffickers themselves who tried to monopolize the market, commanders were somewhat nonplussed by such naive 'philanthropic' initiatives, but nonetheless allowed them

²⁰ Francisco Roque de Souto Mayor, Bissau (2 June 1752); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 8; see also Boulègue, 'Un Projet d'Établissement Français'.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

²² Francisco Roque de Souto Mayor, Bissau (12 March 1752); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 8.

²³ On Portugal's military campaigns in the region from the mid-1800s to 1936, see Pélissier, *Naissance de la Guinée*.

²⁴ On the Beaver expedition and settlement, see Galli, 'Eighteenth Century Images of Bolama'.

²⁵ Domingos de Veiga Escorcio, Bissau (24 June 1792); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 14.

²⁶ José António Pinto (22 May 1793); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 14.

to proceed. Interestingly, however, none of these officials ever confronted the settlers with the issue of sovereignty, and were eventually reprimanded for not doing so by Lisbon.

As we will see below, there were contacts at the time between the Bijagó of the neighbouring island of Kañabak and traders in Bissau, who traded slaves in the archipelago. In fact, as we know from Beaver's account, influential Bissau-based traders like José da Silva Cardozo²⁷—who like many of his colleagues based in Bissau originated from the Cape Verde Islands—provided Beaver and his company with basic supplies as well as recruiting farm hands, that is, *grumetes* or Christianized Africans also called Kriston in Guinean Creole (Kriol; Kr) for the settlers. The said trader, who lived beyond Bissau's town walls, was regularly accused of openly dealing, and therefore siding, with the Pepel while maintaining excellent relations with the Bijagós of Kañabak—which were in all likelihood reinforced by concubinage, intermarriage, and/or inlawship.²⁸ Most of the officials and traders—or rather trader-officials—married or lived with local women *à la mode du pays*, who managed relations with their (co-ethnic) countryfolk and dealt directly with African suppliers.

The circumstances that contributed to the failure of Beaver's expedition were widely known at the time; official Portuguese correspondence refers to the attacks by the Bijagós and the rapid decimation as a result of illness, but also to the fact that the Pepel of Inte understood that—in contrast to the island of Bissau—any settlement on Bolama lacked subsistence.²⁹ The bad timing of the expedition, arriving after the beginning of the rainy season (June 1792), also impacted upon its problematic start.³⁰ Despite attempts to cultivate crops in small vegetable gardens (with yams, cassava, Guinea corn, and cotton) and orchards (with lemon, orange, and mango trees), none of the seeds the settlers

²⁷ Also see Brooks, 'Bolama'; idem, 'Bolama as a Prospective Site for American Colonization'.

²⁸ See Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes*, 258.

²⁹ José António Pinto, 1795; quoted in António Carreira, *Documentos para a História das Ilhas de Cabo Verde e 'Rios de Guiné'* (Lisbon: Author's Edition, 1983), 165. Upon their arrival, the colonists were immediately attacked by a party of Bijagó from the neighbouring island of Kañabak (Roxa) who killed and wounded several members of the expedition and took other prisoners for ransom, thereby weakening the colonists' resolve and prompting many to leave. Those who remained were commanded by Beaver until the colony was abandoned in November 1793; see Philip Beaver, *African Memoranda*, Galli, 'Eighteenth Century Images of Bolama', and Brooks, 'Bolama', for further details.

³⁰ See the report by Samuel Hodges, acting as American Consul in the Cape Verde islands, on the reasons for Beaver's failure, which was 'not owing to the climate' but to the doubtful quality of the settlers—a set of idle lazy drunkards—and the disastrous timing of the venture—'arriving at the commencement of the rainy season (...) Settlers at that Island should arrive in December and gradually become accustomed to the African climate (...) in Brooks, 'Bolama', as a 'Prospective Site for American Colonization', 15, 16.

brought from Europe matured.³¹ Indeed, it is clear from Beaver's account that the colony never managed to feed itself, let alone spread civilization by means of 'tropical productions'.³² Therefore, in a letter to one of Beaver's associates, Henry Hew Dalrymple, the 'king of the Pepels' (i.e. the *djagra* of Inté) offered to accommodate the settlers and suggested holding a palaver to negotiate an agreement with regard to a British settlement of the island of Bissau. However, the former turned this down, reluctant to 'offend their friends, the Portuguese'.³³

But the issue of settlement would soon surface again, for example in the writings of Bernardino Álvares de Andrade, a military officer involved in the building of the fort at Bissau, who laments the fact that the town's inhabitants were not accustomed to grow any crops even though the land was fertile.³⁴ The said official was also the first to recognize the commercial value of indigenous plant species such as rice, maize, indigo, pepper, ginger, saffron, cotton, and gum arabic.³⁵ Other high-ranking officials followed suit, referring to the existence of good conditions for the cultivation of cotton, coffee, maize, beans, and rice.³⁶ A high-ranking (military) officer and wealthy merchant held that as the slave trade would soon diminish on account of international pressures towards its abolition, alternatives had to be sought, such as rice, maize, cotton, and coffee. Indeed, the official in question, Joaquim António de Mattos (1788–1843), who had held several posts in the Bissau administration since becoming treasurer there in 1806, would become one of the earliest advocates of plantation agriculture in the region on the island of Gallinhas.³⁷ The way in which the concession was obtained from Bijagós *oloño* or chiefs/elders serves to illustrate the complexities of settlement in the region—complexities that were completely ignored, to their peril, by Captain Beaver and the British settlers.³⁸ Mattos' partner, Júlia da Silva Cardozo, would prove to be a key intermediary who paved the way for the settlement and export crop cultivation in the region. Being the cousin of one of the principal *oloño* of the

³¹ Philip Beaver, Letter to Trustees of Bulam Association (24 July 1793); in Galli, 'Eighteenth Century Images of Bolama', 132.

³² Beaver, *African Memoranda*, 303.

³³ King of the Pepels to Henry Hew Dalrymple, Bissau (10 June 1792 and 11 June 1792); Public Record Office (PRO)/National Archives (NA), Foreign Office (FO), 97/305B.

³⁴ Bernardino Álvares de Andrade, *Planta da Praça de Bissau e Suas Adjacentes* (Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, [1796] 1990), 49.

³⁵ Bernardino Álvares de Andrade, Lisbon (31 August 1802); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 16.

³⁶ José Joaquim Rebello de Figueiredo e Goiz, Cacheu (20 March 1812); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 21.

³⁷ The island of Gallinhas lies approx. 10 kms to the south-west of the westernmost point—Ponta Oeste—of Bolama; see the map on page xv.

³⁸ Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 115.

island of Kañabak, she had privileged access to Bijagó elders from the ruling matrilineage of the village of Inorei and negotiated settlement rights in the case of the island of Bolama (1828) and Gallinhas Island (1830). Both treaties were negotiated with the same *oloño*, that is, her uncle (Nhacté), and confirmed a few years later with his successor (Damião), upon the condition that the Bijagós retained the right to continue the cultivation of rice there.³⁹ In the case of Bolama, within a month of the official request made by the Portuguese authorities in Cape Verde to *Mãe Júlia*, the (con)cession was concluded.⁴⁰

Slaves, crops, and raids

The timing of the Bolama deal is clearly related to the visit made in June 1827 by the governor of Sierra Leone, Neil Campbell, who signed treaties with Biafada 'kings' (Agai of Bolola and Benagne of Guinala) in order to guarantee British settlement rights and the subsequent (failed) venture by the governor of Sierra Leone to occupy it in 1828. This was the third British attempt at securing settlement rights, after Joseph Scott's aborted mission to the island in 1815; he reportedly confirmed the 'grant' made to Philip Beaver by the Kañabak 'kings' in 1792, but was attacked by Pepel from Biombo who killed most of his party. None of these treaties or the subsequent ventures were, however, based upon or in any way secured by means of kinship relations with Bijagó *oloño*: in fact, diplomatic correspondence between Britain and Portugal demonstrates a particular ignorance on the part of British officials with regard to local custom and land usufruct rights. Despite the conclusion of successive treaties with Bijagó and Biafada 'kings', British authorities never checked or questioned the authority of the said dignitaries to cede settlement rights or the validity in terms of customary law of any titles British citizens or authorities derived from these written documents. In the meantime, the governor general

³⁹ The first recorded moves towards obtaining land concessions for cultivation in the region already demonstrate the crucial importance of kinship relations. In the 1780s, a Cape Verdean official bought a tract (i.e. *Fá*) along the upper reaches of the Geba River from a Biafada 'noble woman' (the *Fidalga de Fá*) (see José Conrad C. de Chelmicki and F. A. Varnhagen, *Corografia Cabo Verdiana ou Descrição Geographo-Histórica da Provincia das Ilhas de Cabo Verde e Guiné*, 2 vols (Lisbon: Typographia C.C. da Cunha, 1841), 134. In the 1820s it was resettled and used as a source of supply for passing ships and canoes, such as fruit and yams, as well as sugar cane, for the production of rum, that is, *kana* or *grogue* (F. Travassos Valdez, *África Occidental: noticias e considerações* [Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional; 1864], 360), which was widely used in transactions and palavers.

⁴⁰ Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes*, 261, 262; see also George E. Brooks, *Western Africa and Cabo Verde, 1790s-1830s: Symbiosis of Slave and Legitimate Trades* (Bloomington: Author House, 2010), 220-1.

of Cape Verde urged his subordinate in Bissau to improve the Portuguese establishments on the Senegambian coast, including Bolama, and listed the arguments in defence of Portuguese sovereignty. He ordered the authorities in Bissau to assign the task to Joaquim António de Mattos, commander of Bissau at the time, on account of 'the influence he had over the Kings of Canhabaque'. He was expected to

immediately build storehouses and send troops there in order to demonstrate the security of [Portugal's] possession until it was transformed into a presidio [(i.e. fortified garrison town)].⁴¹

The latter's response to the claims made by the Sierra Leone government ridicules the document in the possession of the Biafada 'king' of the Rio Grande, stating that they never understood what it was about, not least for it being written in English (without any explanation or translation), but also because the Biafada were not the *dunus di tchon* (literally: the landlords, i.e. those possessing ancestral rights to a certain area) of Bolama and it therefore was not theirs to give.⁴² The date of the letter is revealing: it was sent two weeks after the successful conclusion of the palaver with Nhacté (9 May 1830). In it Mattos also refers to Gallinhas as 'minha ilha Gallinha', that is, 'my island of Gallinhas', in order to drive home his point.⁴³ Once the barracks and cannons had been put in place on Bolama, he reiterated that no attacks were expected from the Bijagó: 'we have only to fear European enemies'.⁴⁴ Indeed, he added that the Bijagó were impatiently waiting to pay a visit to the Biafada of the Rio Grande—an encounter that he had managed to prevent—in order to 'enquire' about the cession of their own islands.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Governor General of Cape Verde, Praia (20 May 1828); Arquivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Praia, Secretaria do Governador-Geral, A2/17.

⁴² Joaquim António de Mattos to Caetano Procópio Godinho de Vasconcellos, governor general of Cape Verde (23 May 1830); PRO, FO97, 305A.

⁴³ Mattos' claim is, however, doubtful, in legal terms, given the fact that he donated the island to the Portuguese Crown in 1830, receiving an honorific title to it, a kind of life tenancy valid until 1841; see Conselho Ultramarino, Lisbon (24 November 1830); AHU, Cape Verde, P. 75. In the course of the 1800s this claim would be the subject of a legal battle between Mattos' descendants and the Portuguese Crown.

⁴⁴ Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau (17 November 1834); PRO, FO97, 305A. Brooks ('Bolama', 166) suggests that Mattos and his allies had in all likelihood encouraged the Bijagó of Kañabak to attack rival foreign interests.

⁴⁵ Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau (23 May 1830); PRO, FO97, 305A. He added significantly that he had kept the Bijagós at bay, because the Biafada feared they would one day—again—be enslaved by the Bijagó. The question of the claims and counter claims by Bijagó and Biafada were related to the island as a whole but also to certain parts of it: while Ponta Oeste, where Beaver first landed and Auréllia Correia kept her *ponta*, was claimed by the Bijagó of Kañabak, the area now occupied by the

Over the next decades Bolama was to become a preferential target for British patrols roaming the coast for traffickers, owing to the presence of the 'notorious slave trader Kyetan', a reference to the Cape Verdean slave trader Caetano José Nozolini, who was based in the port of Bissau.⁴⁶ The delay of the actual settlement of the island, which was eventually carried out by the aforesaid Nozolini (1799–1850) and his female partner Aurélia Correia (18??–75?), was actually the result of conflicts between rival Guinean trade lineages or *gan*, as we will demonstrate below.⁴⁷ Bolama quickly became the focus of these 'local' tensions as a result of the attempts by slave traders to find convenient hideouts for continuing their trafficking far from the prying eyes of British cruisers and the courts of the Mixed Commission—or so they thought—while seeking footholds for the cultivation of export crops.⁴⁸

The long-standing relations between Bissau-based traders and ruling matrilineages of the islands of Kañabak, Soga, and Orango would largely determine the manner in which the *mise en valeur* of Bolama—and other islands like Gallinhas—would take place. In addition, the emergence of the Rio Grande (see the map, p. xv) as an alternative to insular plantations in the 1850s, was also influenced by these relationships, above all by those with Kañabak elders. But inter-ethnic tensions would also play a role, that is, between the Biafada of the neighbouring region of Guinala/Quínara (see the map, p. xv) and the Bijagó. According to oral tradition, after the Bijagó were chased by the Biafada off the mainland, that is, before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1440s, the Bijagó first settled the island of Kañabak or Roxa, which therefore enjoys a special reputation amongst the population of the archipelago.⁴⁹ Once the Bijagó were

town of Bolama opposite to the mainland, was regarded as pertaining to the Biafada (Oral data, Guinea Bissau, 1988–1992).

⁴⁶ Caetano José Nozolini (CJN) was born on the island of Fogo in the Cape Verde archipelago in 1799, and was the second son of André Nozolini, native of the island of Tenerife in approx. 1770, and Gertudes do Livramento Henriques, of the wealthy landowning family that formed part of the social stratum 'brancos di Fogo' (the Fogo whites). His elder brother, José Marcelino (b. 1792), would inherit the family's latifundio, or *morgado*, rather than the couple's eldest sibling, Maria Soldadeada (b. 1791), while CJN was to make a rapid rise through the military ranks in the archipelago and in mainland Guinea. See the Henriques genealogy: <http://henriques.netii.net/nozolini.html> (accessed 1 January 2012) and Brooks ('Western Africa', 212–13).

⁴⁷ On the partnership between Aurélia Correia and Caetano José Nozolini, see Brooks, ('Bolama', 66–9, and idem, 'A Nhara of the Guinea-Bissau region') and Havik (*Silences and Soundbytes*, 267–88, and idem, 'From Pariahs to Patriots').

⁴⁸ On the mixed commissions which were established as a result of British pressures on and treaties with Portugal with a view to abolishing the transatlantic slave trade, see Leslie Bethell, 'The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History* 7/1 (1966): 79–93.

⁴⁹ Coelho, *Duas Descrições Seiscentistas da Guiné*, 175–6.

established on other islands, Kañabak thus became the main 'front-line' base for coastal raids against the Biafada, who were killed or kidnapped and sold to the Portuguese slave traders, from the second half of the 1400s.⁵⁰ Uninhabited islands such as Bolama and Gallinhas—which, in a way, formed a buffer zone between the rival groups—were claimed by Kañabak matrilineages as forming part of their ancestral territory or *tchon*, and were used as convenient sites for rice cultivation and hunting.

The protracted conflict between the Biafada and the Bijagó,⁵¹ which was the cause of considerable confusion on the part of British officials and settlers, was to gain complementary dynamics with regard to the expansion of export crops such as peanuts. Given that Kañabak matrilineages claimed usufruct rights to the banks of the Rio Grande the first plantations or *pontas* were located in the mouth of the inlet (on the right bank). For example, the *pontas* Gam Major, Catraia, and Boa Esperança on the right bank of the Rio Grande claimed by the Bijagó of Kañabak were all settled by members of the Nozolini–Correia trading lineage. When visiting the town of Bissau soon after the deal was struck with his elders, the 'king' of Kañabak commented that 'he only wanted Portuguese to settle the island because he was related to them', adding significantly that 'he would never sell or concede any parcel of land to the Portuguese or any other nation'.⁵² The said chief or *oloño* had in fact negotiated an understanding through his niece, Júlia da Silva Cardozo, also known as Mãe Julia, to the effect that the rights pertaining to the *dunus di tchon* would be respected. When asked whether they had 'ever sold Bolama to British settlers', Damião of Kañabak responded that they had never done so, but merely allowed 'Mr. Bivar' to establish a trading house on the island 'with the prior agreement of the then governor of Bissau and the [principal] traders of the town'.⁵³

⁵⁰ While Beaver (*African Memoranda*, 337) reports that the Biafada eventually withdrew from Bolama after sustained attacks by the Bijagó, another version of their quarrels is reproduced by a Guinean-born Catholic missionary, suggesting that the Bijagó were initially forced back to the island of Orango further west, and only thereafter succeeded in repelling their Biafada persecutors; see Marcelino Marques de Barros, 'Guiné Portuguesa ou Breve Notícia sobre alguns dos seus Usos, Costumes, língua origens de seus povos', *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, 3ª série 12, 1882: 707–31, 721.

⁵¹ On the background for the dispute that opposed the Biafada and the Bijagó, see Charles Lespinay, 'Baynunk et Biafad dans l'ensemble Guinéen: parentés et alliances anciennes (15e–20e siècle)', in Cardoso (ed.), *Bolama Caminho Longe*, 67–89, 72.

⁵² Nhacté, Bissau (28 July 1828); AHU, CU, Guiné.

⁵³ Damião (oloño of Kañabak), Bissau (12 July 1828); in Enquiry Report into British raid on Bolama, Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau, 1839, to Governor General of Cape Verde, Joaquim Pereira Marinho; AHN, SGG, A1, C/41.

A British travel account dated 1832 (and another from 1834) provides information both on the island of Kañabak and its population. Captain Belcher's report on the reconnaissance voyage of HMS *Etna* along the Guinea coast, shows that the Kañabak population recalled Beaver but that the mention of his name—pronounced 'Bèbere' by the locals—caused some stir, especially in the case of one elder whose father had allegedly been killed by the head of the settlement.⁵⁴ Enjoying a reputation of being 'warlike and treacherous', the population of Kañabak was well armed with muskets—mostly of British but also of French and Spanish manufacture—and visitors received repeated requests for firearms and gunpowder ('arma e polvere'). Interestingly, the account makes no particular mention of Bolama as a site for settlement, which may be explained by the attitude of the Bijagó islanders, but also by the author's clear preference for Bathurst as the most favourable location on the coast:

The Gambia, considered in a mercantile point of view, and as regards supplies, appears to me to offer more decided advantages than any of our possessions on the coast of Africa; and may, indeed, be said to be the only point where anything approaching to trade can be satisfactorily pursued.⁵⁵

Indeed, even Nozolini himself was, at least initially, far from convinced about Bolama's suitability. Despite the lack of weapons in Bissau, he argued that:

[The expedition] cannot leave [for Bolama] without firearms and bullets to that very deserted place where one always fears attacks on account of the inhabitants being very ferocious.⁵⁶

Therefore, in the view of Nozolini, then interim-commander of Bissau, Bolama was a 'very risky location'. His rival, Joaquim António de Mattos, who would take over as commander of Bissau soon after the stationing of the first garrison on Bolama, in 1830, had already warned that

the bad people of Bissau are not suited for the settlement of the island on account of their lack of education, respect, discipline, religion, as well as being alcoholics and lazy; without persons who have faith, are industrious, active and disciplined, such an establishment will fail. The island of Bolama is suited for growing a wide range of crops and would require [hard working] good people and supplies which will last a year, together with [agricultural] tools. In addition to people from Portugal, those from the Capeverdean

archipelago would also do [...] Farmers and farm hands come first, as well as some artisans, *but always married couples with family*; and no criminals or murderers [i.e. the *degradados* or criminals condemned into forced exile] with whom the island will not prosper [...] and without gentile heathen, in order not to be disturbed and insulted or be beholding to them as happened in the town of Bissau and other garrison towns.⁵⁷

The officer stationed at Bolama, José Correia da Veiga, who gave his name to the town (and later capital, from 1879 to 1941)—'a Bolama do Veiga'—amongst complaints about Nozolini's constant meddling and obstruction, relates that the soldiers sent to the island—in actual fact the first 'Portuguese' settlers after Beaver and his company—suffered from indiscipline, while also lacking 'manioc, cus-cus, bananas, and ... women, which was what they all aspired to (...)'.⁵⁸ He added that the only aim of the settlement was cultivation, therefore labourers were necessary; the question was whether the latter should be Cape Verdeans, condemned criminals, or *filhos de Guiné* (that is, locally born Portuguese mulattoes).⁵⁹ Official records show that the spending associated with the settlement not only went towards the soldiers' pay and upkeep, but above all to the canoes that were hired in order to ship supplies to the island and the *grumetes* that piloted them, as well as stonemasons (also from the Kriston community) from Bissau. But, soon, news from Bolama showed that many of the soldiers sent there had deserted to Nalú territory further south, and that the natives were demanding a ransom, that is, one slave for every soldier.⁶⁰

Over the following years, little information is forthcoming about Bolama other than reports from the small garrison stationed there;⁶¹ in 1834, the Portuguese presence on the island was limited to twelve soldiers and three officers while fortifications had been built there.⁶² The then governor of Bissau, Mattos (who had in the meantime replaced Nozolini), considered in his annual report that

this island could be a big thing [enterprise] if one pays closer attention to it, and *send couples there from the [Cape Verde] islands* who do not suffer from illness on the coast; the nation will not however give anything necessary to

⁵⁷ Joaquim António de Mattos (17 May 1830); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 24.

⁵⁸ José Correia da Veiga, Bolama (25 October 1830); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 24.

⁵⁹ José Correia da Veiga, Bolama (24 September 1830); AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 24.

⁶⁰ Governor-General of Cape Verde, to Governor in Bissau, Praia (10 April 1832); AHN, SGG, A2/17.

⁶¹ See for example, Bissau (16 January 1834), Dispatches Bolama, 1833; AHU, FGG, L. 59.

⁶² Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau, to Manuel António Martins, prefect of Province of Cape Verde and Guiné (26 March 1834); AHU, FGG, L. 59.

⁵⁴ Belcher, 'Extracts from Observations on Various Points of the West Coast of Africa, Surveyed by His Majesty's Ship *Aetna* in 1830–32', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 2 (1832): 278–304, 293.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁵⁶ Caetano José Nozolini, Bissau (27 April 1830), to JAM; AHU, CU, Guiné, Cx. 24.

them for nothing, but lend them so that they repay and reap the produce of the island, so the costs would be limited (...).⁶³

Apart from Bolama, the governor of Bissau also proposed the fortification, settlement, and cultivation of the Ilhéu do Rei (approximately a mile off the coast, facing the Bissau port) using the same method, given that all European traders would be prepared to invest in the enterprise and dispense with the island of Bissau.⁶⁴ The prefect who superintended affairs from Cape Verde, concurs: the inhabitants of Bissau should all be moved to the island.⁶⁵ Thus, while Bolama and other islands emerge as objects of colonial desire, local trader-officials held that they could and should be settled without government intervention; in short, they treated these sites as their hunting ground. The commander in Bissau shared his superior's concerns about the rumour that the French intended to establish themselves on Bolama and that the English were trading at Bandim Island in sight of Bissau's port. However, at the same time he requested assistance from the governor in Bathurst and in St. Louis in order to end the 'anarchy' that reigned in Bissau, which clearly demonstrates a lack of confidence in the Portuguese capacity to do so as it expressed his pessimism about the future of Portuguese possessions in the region.⁶⁶ Stepping down from his post and withdrawing to the island of Gallinhas with his partner Mãe Julia and their siblings, Mattos handed over to his successor, Honório Pereira Barreto. Barreto, from a Cacheu-based trading lineage, imprinted a new momentum upon the question of settlement. His dispatches were filled with strong and repeated appeals about the need for gaining new footholds in a region besieged by foreign interests and native communities: 'if nothing is done, we will suffer the sad loss of these colonies'.⁶⁷ During his successive periods in office, the latter would also feel obliged to request assistance from the French in neighbouring Senegal.

Amidst these rather alarmist reports, the speech made by a member of the Portuguese judiciary pertaining to the district of Cape Verde and Guinea, put a more optimistic, imperial gloss on the issue by stating that

a New Brazil could be made out of Guinea, which sounds like a paradox to anyone who does not know or who has never travelled there (...) the

⁶³ Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau, to Manuel António Martins, prefect of Province of Cape Verde and Guinea (26 March 1834); AHU, FGG, L. 59.

⁶⁴ Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau, to Manuel António Martins, Cape Verde (28 April 1834); AHU, FGG, L. 59.

⁶⁵ Manuel António Martins, Praia, to JAM, Bissau (22 May 1834); AHN, SGG, A2/17.

⁶⁶ Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau (5 June 1836 and 28 November 1836), to GG in CV; AHU, FGG, L. 59.

⁶⁷ Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau, to GG of CV (27 March 1837); AHU, FGG, L. 59.

insalubrity of Guinea's climate does not emanate from its malignancy, but from its abandonment and the terror that its name provokes amongst the Portuguese (...) The Portuguese have failed to take advantage of Guinea (...) if they conquered Bissau and expelled the heathen who can move to the continent, *the island could be colonised by families from [Cape Verde]* and given that the climate is almost identical, the settlers would not suffer while cultivating rice, coffee, sugar cane, indigo, and cotton, which grows spontaneously there.⁶⁸

Curiously, the said official never mentioned Bolama in his address to the Junta Geral de Cabo Verde. On a (rare) visit to the islands by the governor general of Cape Verde in 1837, Gallinhas is thought to be well suited to agriculture whilst Bolama is merely regarded as a good source for timber. Indeed, since officially taking possession of it in 1830, both authorities and traders had been cutting trees for that purpose and shipping logs to Bissau and from there to the naval shipyards in Lisbon. British reports show that they too were interested in Bolama's natural resources, 'once timber would become scarce in Sierra Leone it would be most valuable to the merchants engaged in that trade'.⁶⁹ A British trader reported that 'the Portuguese are carrying off [timber] fast', adding that in view of 'the richness of its soil and easy cultivation [...] a considerable number of liberated Africans might be located with great advantage'.⁷⁰ For example, Bolama would be able to supply the colony and settlement of the Gambia 'with any quantity of rice', an idea possibly based upon information on the Bijagós' cultivation of the crop there.

The attack by the British cruiser *Brisk*, commanded by Arthur Kellett, on the factory at Novo Mindelo on Bolama in December 1838, would again focus attention on the island. The move by Nozolini and his partner Aurélia Correia, also known as Mãe Aurélia, to Bolama in January 1838, and their establishment of Novo Mindelo was prompted by a series of events in Bissau that challenged the former's position. Already one of the wealthiest slave traders in the region, Nozolini's prestige had suffered a blow by his direct involvement in the assassination of a French trader, Dumaige, in Bissau, on account of which he was imprisoned and forced to relinquish his position as governor of Bissau in 1835 to his arch-rival Joaquim António de Mattos.⁷¹ The latter reported that Caetano José Nozolini owed large sums to French traders and to the heirs of Dumaige, without apparently having the money or assets to foot

⁶⁸ João José António Frederico (6 March 1835); AHU, Cape Verde, P. 2.

⁶⁹ William Rendall, British High Commission, Cape Verde islands, to Governor of the Gambia, Bathurst (1 July 1830); PRO/NA, FO 97, 305A.

⁷⁰ Goddard, Bathurst (6 April 1832); *ibid.*

⁷¹ For the Dumaige case, see Brooks, 'Bolama', 166, 167.

the bills.⁷² Nozolini had also incurred the wrath of the *grumetes* or Kriston in Bissau for having tried to bypass them as intermediaries in the riverine relay trade. In order to do so, he had employed Manjacos from the Costa de Baixo, north of Bissau, as pilots and rowers, and, on a number of occasions, using them to put down rebellions by the Kriston of Bissau (e.g. in May 1835).

Well known to British authorities and the Mixed Commission in Freetown for trafficking slaves during his period in office as commander of Bissau (e.g. the schooner *Felicidade* was caught with slaves on board, said to pertain to Nozolini, in Cape Verde in 1835), Nozolini spent some time in the Cape Verde Islands and was also called to Lisbon for questioning. The conflict between Nozolini and the Kriston would eventually culminate in the expulsion of the *grumetes* and their families from Bissau in 1844. Under British pressure, Portugal had passed a decree (10 December 1836) prohibiting the trafficking of slaves from its possessions, while still permitting internal transactions to that effect. In the meantime, British cruisers were actively patrolling the Atlantic and the seas off the (Upper) Guinea coast in search of vessels carrying slaves. Kellett's raid on Bolama is preceded by a report from the Mixed Commission in Freetown, which refers to information provided by a mulatto trader from the Caribbean, Bicaise, who owned a factory on the Nunez River, and who maintained close relations with Belgian interests. He had visited Bolama only to find

between 200 to 300 slaves there prepared for shipment by Don Cayetano, the notorious Kyetan, formerly governor of the neighbouring Portuguese settlement of Bissau. [He] described the island as completely occupied by slave traders, and as always containing a large or smaller number of slaves in barracoons.⁷³

⁷² Joaquim António de Mattos, to Governor General in the Cape Verde islands, Bissau (19 March 1836 and 16 December 1836); AHU, FGG, L. 59). Apparently, most of Nozolini's assets were registered in the name of his relatives and associates.

⁷³ Jean (John Nelson) Bicaise to Macaulay, Mixed Commission, Freetown (26 November 1838); PRO/NA, 97, 305B. Originating from Trinidad, Bicaise's factory was called 'Rapass' ('Ropass' in British sources), meaning 'boy'. The word 'rapace' (P: rapaz; Guinean Creole: *rapás*) was at the time commonly used along the coast for boy servants and slaves. The said Bicaise who also had factories on the Rio Nunez at Boké and Kissassi, married a well-known slave trader, Eliza(beth) Procter based on the Rio Nunez, after the death of her husband, Michael Procter, a British trader operating from the Iles de Los, for whom he worked as a clerk; see Bruce L. Mouser, 'The Nunez Affair', in *Bulletin des Scéances, Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre Mer*, 1973–4, 697–742; and also Chris de Wilde, John Nelson Bicaise: slave trader, in A. de Verteuil and C. de Wilde, *The Black Earth of South Naparima* (Port of Spain: Litho Press, 2009), 209–61, 249–50. On the Anglo-French rivalry in the area, and Franco-Belgian interventions in the area, see Roderick Braithwaite, 'The Rio Nunez Affair: New Perspectives on a Significant Event in Nineteenth-Century Franco-British Colonial Rivalry', in: *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre Mer*, 83, 311, 1996: 25–45.

Acting upon orders from the governor of Sierra Leone (Doherty), Kellett reports that after seizing a vessel (the *Aurélia Feliz*) pertaining to the Nozolini–Correia partnership with slaves on board, he burnt the barracoons or slave quarters on Bolama and liberated 211 slaves, which were thereupon taken to Freetown and handed over to the Liberated Africans Department.⁷⁴ After a second raid on Bolama a few months later, the governor at Bissau, Honório Pereira Barreto, voiced vehement protests, arguing that not only was Bolama Portuguese territory but that 'the slaves seized were employed in agriculture' ('domestic servants' and free persons were also allegedly carried off). He demanded compensation for the crops that were lost as a result. In a letter to the governor of Bissau, Nozolini then claimed that he had begun clearing and cultivating a parcel of land on Bolama soon after it had been ceded 'to the Portuguese nation' and once appointed head of the establishment of the Bijagós, 'he moved [with his household] to the island and employed all of his slaves in its cultivation from which he already gained profit (...)'.⁷⁵

Settlement: 'national' and 'local' perspectives

Whereas before the raid references to Bolama had been largely circumstantial, thereafter the claims by either side centered upon an increasingly assertive discourse based upon claims of sovereignty over the island. The language used in the elaborate report of the enquiry headed by the governor of Bissau, who had originally appointed Nozolini as the director of the Bolama settlement, is particularly revealing in this respect.⁷⁶ The references to the sovereign rights of the Portuguese vs British nation and the repeated taking down and hoisting of Portuguese and British flags were symptomatic of the intense intra-European rivalry on the coast.

However, in the process a novel thread emerged, that is, of property claims by trader–planters to estates on the island, which from then on became a key vector of the dispute over Bolama. Despite the fact that the Portuguese authorities never submitted any demands for damages resulting from the invasion of what they regarded as Portuguese territory, the demands for compensation by planter-traders for the losses incurred, transmitted by the Portuguese authorities to their British counterparts, argued their legal title to the land in

⁷⁴ Curiously, Kellett's action was condemned by the Court of the Vice Admiralty sitting in Freetown on account of the fact that once the slaves set foot on the island of Bolama they were free, and therefore could not be liberated or seized.

⁷⁵ Cactano José Nozolini, to Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (20 January 1839); PRO/NA, FO97/305A.

⁷⁶ Honório Pereira Barreto, Novo Mindelo, Bolama (15 April 1839); AHN, A1 (R), C/41.

question. Other Bissau-based traders, whose thirty-eight slaves working plots on the island (whom they described as 'ladinos bem vestidos', that is, well-dressed slaves with some education) had been transported to Sierra Leone, also demanded damages from the British government. Thus, the British raid was seen as an opportunity for Guinea's mercantile lineages—including the then governor of Bissau, who headed the enquiry and was himself a wealthy trader from Cacheu, to firmly establish their rights to the island and its natural resources under the cover of Portuguese sovereignty. The public statement by the then governor of Bissau confirms this ambivalent approach: 'Comrades! A British force has landed on *our island* of Bolama (...)'.⁷⁷ The discourse underlying the reaffirmation of Portuguese sovereignty over the island centres on the property rights to slaves, land, and crops pertaining to traders and planters: 'violations of their [private] estates'; 'the attack on *the right to property*'; 'attacks on *the property belonging to* Major Nozolini and Aurélia Correia',⁷⁸ 'the security of *my property and family*', 'the greater part of *my property*', and so on. When handing in his resignation, Nozolini's acrimonious letter is particularly critical of the 'tiny garrison' stationed there; such a serious lack of adequate defences would, he said, 'one day allow for him to be assassinated by the crew of that English warship'.⁷⁹

On the British side, Kellett's action with the support of the governor of Sierra Leone caused authorities to depict Bolama as 'this rich and most productive island', which now was now hailed as 'one of the most important positions on the whole coast of Africa'.⁸⁰ The same source added that

A multitude of *coloured people* both at Sierra Leone and the Gambia are eager to emigrate the instant British protection is assured to them and are anxiously awaiting the decision of the question whether it belongs to Portugal or England.

One may conclude from this remark that Britain did not see the island as a destination for European colonization on account of the tropical climate, and held the view that the Upper Guinea coast was the 'white man's tomb', a view reinforced by the failure of the Beaver expedition.⁸¹

⁷⁷ 'Camaradas! Uma força Inglesa desembarcou na nossa Ilha de Bolama (...)'; Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (20 June 1838); Enquiry Report into British raid on Bolama.

⁷⁸ In the case of the settlement at Novo Mindelo, it was regarded as a 'joint venture'; see testimony of Manuel Correia de Oliveira, Bernardino José de Oliveira e Crispim Moniz, António Lopes, and José Gonçalves (28 July 1839); PRO/NA, FO97/305A.

⁷⁹ Or rather 'pirate-ship' as he called it; Caetano José Nozolini, Bissau (17 April 1839); *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Denman, Sloop Wanderer, to Captain Nourse (28 April 1841); PRO/NA, 97, 305B.

⁸¹ On the Beaver expedition, see Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 110–19. The dispatch by the then governor of Sierra Leone, Norman MacDonald, sheds more light on local colonial interests in occupying the island of Bolama; Island of Bulama, Freetown, 4-4-1850; PRO/NA, CO 879, 1, 27.

The testimonies taken from freed slaves in Freetown who formerly pertained to Nozolini and Aurélia Correia, confirm the use of the island as a relay port for slave trafficking to Havana, but also confirm that

the soil of Bolama is so rich that everything will grow there, and if taken possession of by the English I am confident that more than a thousand people would immediately go there *from this place* to settle and I would be the first to go (...)⁸²

Ongoing trafficking prompted the raid by Captain Blount of HSS *Pluto* in March 1842, which led to the 'total destruction of slave factories at Gallinhas and Bulama',⁸³ and was followed by the formal taking possession of Bolama by Lieutenant Lapidge of HMS *Pantaloön* in the month of May of the same year.⁸⁴ On his exploratory visit to Bolama, where he only met 'two of the principal inhabitants, former Portuguese (or rather Cape Verdean) soldiers and seven others', Lapidge surveyed the area from Ponta Oeste—the westernmost point of Bolama where a small village was located, which had formed round the Novo Mindelo factory—to Port Beaver or Bolama town located on the east of the island opposite to the mainland, which he regarded as the best landing place. He also noted the settlement at Three Springs (locally called Fonte Grande) on the mainland across the straits. Subsequent reports tended to focus on the need to colonize Bolama 'from Sierra Leone' in order to end slave trafficking from the Rio Nunez and Pongo to Bolama (by canoe) and on to Havana.⁸⁵ But in a letter to Viscount Palmerston, the British Honorary Consul in the Cape Verde Islands also proposed an alternative, that is, recruiting Christianized Africans from Bissau:

a free, and hardy race of people called *grumettes*—they are civil, hard working, and tolerably civilised.—I have every reason to believe that these people will avail themselves of the protection of the English flag, the moment one

⁸² Peter Lender, Joliffé, Freetown (1 April 1841); PRO/NA, FO 97, 305B.

⁸³ The report refers here to the settlements at Casadia on Gallinhas and Novo Mindelo on Bolama pertaining to the partnerships between Joaquim António de Mattos and Julia da Silva Cardozo, and Caetano José Nozolini and Aurélia Correia, respectively.

⁸⁴ Lieut. Lapidge's actions caused a considerable stir, eliciting vexed reactions from Caetano Nozolini and other planter-traders on the Bolama. Nozolini argued that he should not only be compensated for the premises that were burnt and the crops that were lost for lack of hands to harvest them, but also for having been obliged to hire free men to replace his slaves; see letter Nozolini to Governor of Cape Verde, Bissau (16 April 1842). Official protests also based their complaints on the losses suffered from the rude interruption of (rice) cultivation on the island; letter António José de Torres, Governor to Lisbon, Bissau (6 November 1842); AHU, SEMU/DGU, 782. Besides soldiers, the only other inhabitants of the island at the time were some of Nozolini's former slaves who lived in the ruins of his former estate.

⁸⁵ William Rendall, British High Commission, Cape Verde, to British members of Mixed Commission in Freetown (24 September 1846); PRO/NA, 97/317.

is hoisted at Bolama and a government established there. The place is very unhealthy, yet more healthy than Bissau.⁸⁶

He underlined that Bolama was well suited to for agriculture, by adding that 'Signor Kytano Nozollino, the noted slave dealer, suggested it was eligible for cultivation and I learn that he employs a large number of people there in the growth of the groundnut and Indian corn.' In his opinion, the British occupation of the island merely required 'an active coloured gentleman in command [who] with a few soldiers would in a short time be able to expose such transactions that I feel convinced the export slave trade would not long exist in that neighbourhood.'⁸⁷

While the tenor of British correspondence from the Admiralty in London became more appeasing, proposing 'a friendly intercourse with the governor in Bissau', the tone of naval officers patrolling the area became increasingly 'hostile', as the island was again the target of British raids in 1847 and in 1850. Then again, the particular deference shown towards Honório Pereira Barreto (in the Snowball affair),⁸⁸ depicted as a 'man of colour' whose 'high education and superior character' are praised, is accompanied by an appeasing, diplomatic tone.

In his long report, Commander West of HMS *Pluto*, who had paid a visit to the island in 1852, provides ample information of the situation regarding its settlement and cultivation. Whereas two years earlier there were a few soldiers on the island 'who had nothing to do and [whose] ostensible employment was the cultivation of cassava for their own use' none were to be seen in 1852 (other than the Portuguese garrison commander, José Correia da Veiga).⁸⁹ But by that time, the island was already cultivated by a number of planters such as João Marques Barros and Ferreira, who cultivated 'groundnuts, rice and maize'.⁹⁰ Together they exported about 20–25,000 bushels of peanuts annually on Portuguese, American, and French vessels.⁹¹ Barros employed eighty

⁸⁶ William Rendall, British consul (1 March 1847), on Cape Verde islands to Viscount Palmerston.

⁸⁷ William Rendall, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ The Snowball affair was the result of a complaint made to British authorities by Mary Snowball, resident in the colony of Sierra Leone, about the alleged enslavement of one of her sons, David, in Cacheu. In the end, following the mediation of Barreto, it turned out that her son, who had been detained for 'gross misconduct' was the 'prime mover' in the case and that the Portuguese were very glad to see him leave; Thomas Miller to Frederick Patten, Cacheu (19 December 1850); PRO/NA, 97/317.

⁸⁹ Captain Miller (7 December 1850); PRO/NA, FO 97/317.

⁹⁰ The person in question could have been either António Joaquim Ferreira, a civil surgeon who married one of the daughters of Caetano José Nozolini and Aurélia Correia, i.e. Eugénia Nozolini, or José Ferreira, a former cashier/clerk for the Nozolini trading house.

⁹¹ At a rate of four a year; Avery West to Admiral Bruce (22 December 1852), CIC, London; PRO/NA, FO 97/317.

to a hundred farm workers there, the greater part of which were presented as 'domestic slaves': they were largely of Pepel and Manjaco origin as well as some *grumetes* from Bissau. Also, the figure of David (James) Lawrence, an African-born trader of mixed British and African descent (possibly Seruá or Sosso), who acquired British citizenship in 1859,⁹² emerges in his report for having a 'small farm' or *ponta* on the left bank of the Rio Grande inlet at Bissassema where he produced 'rice and groundnuts' for which he paid an annual lump sum (i.e. rent or *lua*) to the *oloño* of Kañabak who claimed the territory from the Biafada.⁹³ Employing ninety slaves on his *ponta* he exported 6–7,000 bushels of peanuts and four bushels of rice annually.⁹⁴ A visit to Kañabak made the commander realize that the consent from the islanders would be hard to come by given that 'the island is divided among at least twenty petty kings' and that Orango, where 'the king (...) has sole jurisdiction over the island', would therefore be a better option. Thereupon the Foreign Office proposed to send 'an intelligent man as a resident to Bolama with a few Africans as constables'.⁹⁵ The geographical mission carried out by Colonel Smyth O'Connor, governor of Sierra Leone, to the Bijagós islands in 1855 would reinforce future prospects for 'the civilization of West Africa', in aid of which 'a chain of [British] settlements must be established along the coast'.⁹⁶ One such location was Bolama, owing to its 'central position', its 'proximity to the Gambia, Geba, Rio Grande, Nunez Rivers, Bijagó islands (...)', its 'rich' soils 'capable of yielding every kind of tropical production', and its timber.⁹⁷ According to O'Connor, the Bijagó did not pose a threat anymore: 'they only require a market to get rid of their superfluous productions in exchange for the common necessities of European existence (...)'.⁹⁸

⁹² See also Brooks, 'Bolama', 170.

⁹³ Bissassema here refers to the village of Bissassema de Baixo, close to the Ponta Tombali on the left bank of the Rio Grande inlet, rather than the Bissassema de Cima in the region of Quinara, east of Bolama.

⁹⁴ Although no information is forthcoming on the subject, this probably refers to Gambian rice (*Oryza sativa*), which was imported into the region from Asia in the 1820s–30s, rather than the local 'red rice' variety (*Oryza Glauaberrima*). See Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes*, 229.

⁹⁵ Norman Merivale Esq. to Colonial Office (11 February 1853); PRO/NA, FO 97/317.

⁹⁶ L. Smyth O'Connor, 'Notes on an Expedition down the Western Coast of Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 3 (1858–59): 379–85, 384.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 385. French officials also visited the island of Kañabak in November 1854 after a failed expedition in March 1853—when one of the *oloño* was killed—in order to conclude a treaty of friendship (Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau [7 May 1856]); in Jaime Walter, *Honório Pereira Barreto: Biografia, Documentos, Memória sobre o Estado Actual da Senegambia Portuguesa* (Bissau: Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa, 1947), 118–30.

The authorities in Cape Verde and Bissau were quick to react: while the governor general of Cape Verde toured the region in May of 1856, the governor of Bissau visited the Bijagós Islands and the banks of the Rio Grande concluding several treaties with local dignitaries. The short visit of the governor general of Cape Verde to Bolama—against the advice of the Bissau governor as it could provoke a diplomatic incident—confirmed British reports revealing that the island was already ‘quite populated by Portuguese in the locations where it is “habitable”’ (some parts were marshland).

The soldiers who were given sick-leave in Guinea [mostly from Cape Verde] are settling the island and have established an important colony which they baptised Grande Crioula. It is very important to resolve the dispute over Bolama, for us to abandon it or colonise it with people from the Cape Verde islands.⁹⁹

Bolama was said to be ‘very fertile’ and already exported large quantities of rice and peanuts, had good timber, was accessible for (seagoing) vessels, and was well situated, close to Bissau, the Rio Grande, the Cassini and Nunez rivers, as well as Sierra Leone. His remarks are almost a carbon copy of Smyth O’Connor’s words:

The banks of the Rio Grande, Bissassema, Tombali, Bolama and the Gallinhas offer us great riches and a good future. *Guinea could become another Brazil.*¹⁰⁰

Contemporaries confirm that the island was indeed ‘very fertile’ and that it produced ‘maize, manioc, beans and fruit, but mainly peanuts’.¹⁰¹ The report of the then governor of Bissau, who visited the Bijagó islands and the Rio Grande holding palavers with the Bijagó and Biafada in the same year, is particularly eloquent about the strategy pursued, that is, the need ‘to cultivate political and friendly relations with natives that trade with the Portuguese’, which had in his opinion long been neglected. In fact he argued that rather than requesting foreign help, it would be better to rely on native support. But while visiting Gallinhas and the Rio Grande, he observed that (in January, the dry season) ‘agriculture is a rather primitive affair, and that much better results could be obtained on such fertile soil (...)’.¹⁰² Fifteen years earlier, the governor general of Cape Verde had proposed to conclude a (mutual defence)

treaty with the Bijagós of Kañabak who agreed to come to the aid of Bissau whenever it was attacked by the Pepel or other natives.¹⁰³

His visit to the island of Kañabak reveals that rather than having one ‘king’, the island was divided into seventeen *regulados* or chiefdoms; one of the *olôno* (i.e. of the Ilha dos Cavalos, south of Kañabak) treated him, *o filho de Cacheu* (or child of Cacheu) as ‘uncle’ or *nhô* (his full Creole nickname was therefore *Nhô Nô*)—while the *oloño*’s mother presented herself as Barreto’s cousin, concluding that the governor ‘*therefore did not need a treaty in order take that which was his by right*’.¹⁰⁴ Such strategies of forging relations based upon fictive kin are common to African communities in the region and beyond, and an effective means of gaining mutual trust and understanding, while subjecting outsiders to certain rules of conduct. He commented that the people of Kañabak were ‘truly free, and do not permit their sale; the chiefs are mere chairmen of their deliberative assemblies, which are only held when issues affected the islanders as a whole’.¹⁰⁵ The treaties concluded with the Bijagós (e.g. of Kañabak and Orango) and the Biafada (e.g. of Bolola and Guinala) with regard to settlement rights also included the site called Bissassema (de Cima) on the right bank of the Rio Grande claimed by one of the Kañabak *oloño* (i.e. Macadata), where a number of unidentified French, Cape Verdean, and British citizens kept *pontas*. The treaty with the *olôno* of Kañabak stipulated that ‘they would never refuse the inhabitants of Bissau, where the chief António has relatives, to come to this island (K) [and its dependencies]’.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the said chiefs recognized the titles to private property conceded by them ‘to certain individuals to establish farms on Bolama’, which suggests that each planter was obliged to negotiate their rights with them, and presumably pay them some form of annual rent (Kr: *lua*) and tribute (Kr: *daxa*), usually paid as a lump sum in kind (imported commodities such as rum, gunpowder, firearms, and iron bars). The previous year, the first government-funded ‘agricultural colony’—which was originally proposed by the governor general of Cape Verde during his visit to the Guinea coast—had been established on the mainland across from Bolama at a site called Colónia (just south of the current village of São João; see map, p. xv) with eight

⁹⁹ Francisco Paula Bastos, Governor General, Cape Verde, Boa Vista (23 December 1842); AHU, CV, P. 6/58.

¹⁰⁰ Walter, *Honório Pereira Barreto*.

¹⁰¹ Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (7 May 1856); in Walter, *Honório Pereira Barreto*, 124.

¹⁰² Treaty between the governor of Bissau and the chiefs of Kañabak, Inorei (15 January 1856); AHU, CV, P. 24/77. During the palaver which preceded the signing of the treaty, the ten *oloño* of the island presented the agreement signed with the British on 26 January 1847 and with the French on 28 November 1854, commenting that they were unaware of what was written in them.

⁹⁹ Governor General of Cape Verde, Arrobos (4 September 1856); AHU, CV, P. 21/73.

¹⁰⁰ Governor General of Cape Verde, Arrobos (4 September 1856); AHU, CV, P. 21/73.

¹⁰¹ António Afonso Mendes Coutinho, *Apontamentos sobre a Praça de São José de Bissau e Suas Imediatas Dependências* (Lisbon: Imprensa J.J.A. Silva, 1853), 15.

¹⁰² Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (7 May 1856); in Walter, *Honório Pereira Barreto*, 123.

families from Cape Verde.¹⁰⁷ The choice of Colónia—where a Portuguese customs post was set up—was by no means accidental, given that it controlled the entrance to the channel between Bolama and the mainland and could therefore ‘strangle Beaver’s Point’ (i.e. Bolama town).

Export crops: cotton vs peanuts

The Memorandum drawn up by the Bulama Association for the British government had already mentioned its intention to cultivate ‘sugar, cotton, indigo and other productions of the torrid zone’.¹⁰⁸ In his account, Beaver repeatedly mentioned cotton trees, which he believed could be planted all over the island as well as in the settlement’s garden: ‘tropical fruits, esculent vegetables and cotton trees’.¹⁰⁹ In his proposal for a settlement at Bolama and on the Rio Grande, he included cotton as the main crop for any future project:

In this colony I should propose the culture of cotton, coffee, tobacco and indigo as the staple commodities, but chiefly the first.¹¹⁰

Given that the demand for cotton from British manufacturers far outstripped supply, he considered that ‘it cannot be doubted that cultivation of it (...) would be highly profitable’.¹¹¹ He then proceeds to argue his case with reference to Jamaican cotton plantations and the expected returns to be obtained from planting the crop on Bolama.¹¹²

More than sixty years on, British reports on the prospects for Bolama and the surrounding area rekindled the idea of growing cotton. One of the planters or *ponteiros* in the region was David Lawrence,¹¹³ ‘a mulatto, whose grandfather was an Englishman’. Due to his ancestry, the British tried to gain leverage in the dispute, while at the same time promoting cotton as an export crop in order to supply raw material for British industry, that is, the Manchester cotton mills. Lawrence had been expelled by the Biafada from Bolola for having come to the aid of British and French traders in a quarrel with the Biafada,

¹⁰⁷ Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau to Governor General of Cape Verde (3 January 1857); AHU, CV, P. 24/77. Barreto’s report lists a total of forty-seven persons. The settlement at Colónia (formerly Ambana) was preceded by a treaty with the Biafada of Guinala (16 June 1856). The settlement was, however, fraught with problems owing to quarrels between the settlers. A passing reference to the colony is made by Amado, ‘Bolama e a Formação de um Sentimento Nacional’, 311.

¹⁰⁸ Beaver, *African Memoranda*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 375–81.

¹¹³ Also see Brooks, ‘Bolama’, 170, 171.

after having previously run a *ponta* on the Cassini River in Nalú territory.¹¹⁴ He had acquired a *ponta* at Bissassema (de Cima), on the left bank of the Rio Grande, where other *ponteiros* such as Martinho da Silva Cardozo (one of the biggest factories, employing 400 farm workers) and Henry Heartheaux (Lawrence’s brother-in-law) also had (larger) farms. In 1858 when Commander Close of HMS *Trident* visited Bolama and the Rio Grande, he reported on ‘the cotton farm which Mr. David Lawrence has planted in compliance with the wish of the British Government’, and mentioned that it was worked by slaves, who are now apparently paid wages.¹¹⁵

From the mid-1850s, Foreign Office (FO) and Colonial Office (CO) correspondence already referred to the need to plant cotton as an alternative to groundnuts after a failed crop harvest in the Gambia in 1854.¹¹⁶ In addition, cotton was seen as a ‘British’ crop, which would stimulate British industry, trade, and shipping, as opposed to the trade in groundnuts from which the French were reaping the major benefits. Finally, policymakers had a high regard for cotton’s potential for ‘civilising the natives and teaching them settled and industrious habits’. At the time, the Manchester Cotton Association was ‘using every exertion to obtain supplies of cotton from Africa’. Contacts between the FO and the Association during the second half of the 1850s show to what extent cotton played a key role in the British strategy towards the Guinea Bissau region and to Bolama in particular, and how the FO took the initiative in this respect. A high-ranking FO official, Charles Wise, reports in 1859:

I would suggest that the fitness of Bulama and the neighbouring coast for the production of *cotton* should be represented to the merchants of Manchester

¹¹⁴ In Portuguese reports, David Lawrence is described as originating from Sierra Leone, and as being a slave trader ‘who recently enslaved Nalú natives’; João José Corsino Peres, governador interino, Bissau (1 September 1858); AHU, CV, P. 25/78. Another—unlikely—British ally and informant was Adolphe Demay, a Senegalese trader from Gorée who had a *ponta*, Monte Napoleão, on the Rio Grande inlet, and was married to one of the daughters (Leopoldina) of Caetano Nozolini and Aurélia Correia.

¹¹⁵ Commander Close, August–September, 1858; PRO/NA, FO97/317.

¹¹⁶ Memoranda on British settlements on the West Coast of Africa, Gambia, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, London, Colonial Office (15 March 1856); PRO/NA, FO 879/1. But interest in cotton cultivation was also forthcoming from Belgian quarters, and above all by cotton manufacturers in Flanders. Abraham Cohen, a French trader from Marseille and an important intermediary for Belgian trade in West Africa, declared his interest in establishing cotton and tobacco plantations in West Africa; Letter, Brussels, to Belgian foreign minister, Constant d’Hoffschmidt-de Resteigne (11 November 1851). Gand-based traders also maintained contacts with traders on the Guinea coast, including Nozolini himself, António Joaquim Ferreira, a government surgeon and Nozolini’s son-in-law (married to his daughter Eugénia), and with Honório Pereira Barreto. Personal communication, Chris de Wilde (4 April 2011). See J. Everaert & C. de Wilde, ‘Pindanoten voor de ontluikende industriële revolutie: een alternatieve kijk op de Belgische commerciële expansie in West Afrika (1844–1861)’, in: *Bulletin des Sciences, Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre Mer*, 37, 3, 1992: 317–48.

in order that they may be induced to send agents with good seeds to form plantations; the annual produce would be large as in this country the *cotton* returns three good crops in the year. It would be necessary to send machines for clearing and preparing the pods for shipment.¹¹⁷

The report confirms Lawrence's availability to play the role of an advanced pawn with regard to Bolama while acting as an agent for the abolitionist cause and the diffusion of cotton in the region:

Mr. David Lawrence [...] would gladly form a *cotton farm* at Bulama if provided with good seed and assured that the produce would be purchased. Mr. Lawrence has liberated 92 slaves on the island since Commander Close's visit, and expects to emancipate 200 more when then present crops of groundnuts is collected.¹¹⁸

The sense of urgency in the more recent dispatches from the Foreign Office, which is also notable in the aforesaid report, clearly indicate that the pieces of the puzzle are falling into place with regard to Bolama, which was the subject of discussion at high levels in London.

Bolama is the most fertile and best cultivate island I have yet seen on the coast; it is level and open, entirely devoid of marsh and rank vegetation, and consequently healthy for Europeans. The groundnut of the best quality is the chief produce and on every side annexes to the well built houses of the natives is to be seen their storehouses for this article. Indigo, sugar cane, and cotton grow spontaneously. The soil is said to be admirably adapted for *cotton* and the pods of the plants growing wild are large and of good quality.¹¹⁹

The role of cotton in this decision-making process, which was rapidly moving towards the occupation of the island, was decisive. In the minds of British officials, settlement was justified by the future revenue obtained from the island's production and export. The cost/benefit analysis made by the authorities in London (i.e. the FO and the CO) was based upon the perceived need to proceed with the annexation of Bolama 'as a dependency of Sierra Leone'. Despite 'the already great costs of the Sierra Leone colony', it was assumed that the views based upon Bolama's capabilities for the 'growth and supply of cotton' warranted its occupation.¹²⁰ Given that the local resources of Sierra Leone showed a surplus, the 'annexation of Bolama' could, it was argued, be paid out of its own budget, that is, the government in London would not have to provide extra funding.

¹¹⁷ Charles Wise, Foreign Office, to Hon. Sir Grey, CIC (8 March 1859); PRO/NA, FO97/317.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Lord Carnarvon at CO to V.S. Fitzgerald Esq at FO (5 May 1859); PRO/NA, FO97/317.

However, what is at first sight rather surprising is that once occupied by the British through Sierra Leone in December 1860, cotton rarely surfaces as an issue or as export produce in British sources. The reasons why Bolama failed to match the high expectations originally vested in it are directly related to the incapacity of the British authorities on the island to control the *ponteiros* and challenge the dominant position of French interests along the Upper Guinea coast. Thus groundnuts and not cotton would continue to determine the momentum of the settlement and *mise en valeur* of Bolama. By the late 1850s, not only Bolama and Gallinhas but also the banks of the Rio Grande were settled and cultivated by *ponteiros*, many originating from the Cape Verde Islands, which had been severely affected by drought and famines. By 1856 traders based in Bissau had already established more than thirty factories along the Rio Grande, which mainly produced rice, maize, and groundnuts.¹²¹ With profit margins up to about 400–500 per cent, groundnuts were a much more attractive proposition than cotton, requiring little investment, being less labour-intensive, and having a shorter cycle.¹²² Given that most trader-planters in the region depended on credit provided by French trade houses based in Bordeaux and Marseille, the British efforts to reap the benefits of Bolama would have required a much greater investment than the government in Sierra Leone and its limited budget alone could handle.

British sources show that in 1858, two years before the British occupation

The island produces about 60,000 bushels of groundnuts annually and its considered the most fertile island of the group, and nearly the whole of it under cultivation.¹²³

Portuguese estimates in 1852 suggest that the total exports of peanuts amounted to 100,000 bushels. This figure was, however, based upon Bissau customs statistics, which were notoriously unreliable owing to large-scale smuggling; at the time export duties stood at 10 per cent.¹²⁴ In 1856 the governor in Bissau stated that the island produced a lot of peanuts and that many have settled there—without, however, providing any figures. He adds that 'nobody constructs good buildings because they fear British raids'.¹²⁵ And in view of

¹²¹ António Maria Barreiros Arrobas, Governor General of Cape Verde to Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (11 May 1856); AHU, CV, P. 19/71.

¹²² The seasonal production cycle is between sixty-five and 150 days for peanuts—June/July to September—and 180 days for cotton—June to November through to January. It should be added here that all the projects for the cultivation of cotton on a large scale in the Guinea Bissau region, also ended in failure during the colonial period (1915–74). The small scale cultivation of cotton is associated with that of sorghum, while peanuts are generally grown in a rotative cycle with rice and maize.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, August–September, 1858.

¹²⁴ Manuel d'Araujo Azevedo, Bissau (9 June 1852); AHU, CV, P. 19/71.

¹²⁵ Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (19 January 1857); AHU, CV, P. 24/77.

British interventions against the slave trade, some planter-traders argued that they were 'unable to work the land without slave labour; if so, they would lose the harvests'.¹²⁶ Amongst the *pontas* on the island was 'a vast estate and extensive stores owned by a native woman called 'Madame Oralia' (i.e. Aurélia Correia, Nozolini's widow) and cultivated by about 300 slaves'.¹²⁷ Another planter was João Marques Barros, born on the island of Fogo in the Cape Verde archipelago and called 'John Dobar' in British dispatches, who stated that he arrived there in 1846—a time when a number of traders based in Bissau established themselves on the island—

for the purpose of legitimate commerce [and] possessed a farm on which he employs 80 to 100 persons chiefly engaged in cultivating groundnuts, rice, maize and the greater part of these appear to be domestic slaves receiving food as their pay, and are expected to bring at least a bushel of nuts daily, the rest are hired during the working season as from two to three dollars a day.¹²⁸

In 1859 he had the largest *ponta* on Bolama, which was 'in a high state of cultivation', while 'Madame Aralia' (i.e. Aurélia Correia) had 'a very large farm on the South side of the island'.¹²⁹ Interestingly, João Marques Barros—who registered 197 slaves in the slave census of Bissau in 1856—like his compatriot Caetano Nozolini, lived in concubinage with and set up partnerships with women of Bijagó origin.¹³⁰ At the time, according to a British source, there were about 5,000 inhabitants on Bolama—clearly such estimates were far from accurate and varied with the flux of seasonal labour and a total of 70,000 bushels of groundnuts were exported from the island over a twelve-month period (from March 1858 to March 1859).¹³¹ Indeed, British authorities claimed that both the population and the production of peanuts had markedly increased under their control, mainly as a result of the influx of fugitive slaves from Bissau, and also through the presence of three hundred free labourers: 'there is no limit to the population'.¹³² British reports conclude that customs

¹²⁶ Summary of dispatches, Confidential, Honório Pereira Barreto (1 October 1858); AHU, CV, P. 24/77.

¹²⁷ Aurélia Correia had mediated the case of the British officer who was killed by Bijagó from Kañabak in 1854, negotiating the handover of the two assassins to the British authorities.

¹²⁸ Commander Avery West, HMS *Pluto*, to Admiral Bruce, CIC (22 December 1852).

¹²⁹ Charles Wise, Foreign Office, to Hon. Sir Grey, CIC (8 March 1859); PRO/FO, FO97/317.

¹³⁰ The women in question were liberated slaves, Libania, Martinha, and Paschoa, with whom João Marques Barros had nine children.

¹³¹ Despite the ongoing dispute over Bolama, the authorities in Bissau continued to approve land concessions on Bolama; see for example HPB, Bissau, to José Correia da Veiga, Garrison Commander, Bolama (4 March 1858); AHU, FGG, L. 61.

¹³² Commander Close to acting governor of Sierra Leone (Bolama, 21 May 1859). He stated that over a period of six months since the British flag flew on the island, the (expected) peanut harvest was then estimated at 180.00 bushells.

duties and the charging of rent for Portuguese residents holding plantations would provide 'a considerable revenue';¹³³ indeed, they tried by increasing customs duties to control or 'restrain' the peanut trade, while 'a considerable extent of land is [still] unoccupied'.¹³⁴ They also envisaged obtaining revenue from the profitable 'palm nuts' trade on the neighbouring Bijagós islands, which enable a palm oil factory on Bolama to operate continually.¹³⁵ Thereupon, in February 1859, David Lawrence was given the command of the island, while receiving a grant of land from the British authorities for services rendered. Besides having resisted the Portuguese occupation of the island, one of the reasons for Lawrence's appointment was also that he was expected to supply rice to the hundreds of fugitive slaves who arrived on the island 'naked and starving'. The strongly worded protests by the governor general in Cape Verde described Lawrence as a

miserable and abject native (...) who is the owner of many slaves (...) is insolvent and deeply in debt to the Portuguese landowners and merchants on Bolama but nevertheless has been placed in command at Bolama by the governor of Sierra Leone, the debtor being thus made the master of his creditor's property.¹³⁶

Free farming vs *ponta* agriculture

Amidst attempts by the Portuguese authorities to cut supplies of rice to the island, a rapidly growing number of slaves fled the port town of Bissau on stolen boats, seeking refuge on Bolama under the British flag,¹³⁷ thereby increasing the need for food imports. Portuguese reports indicate that slaves were also fleeing to Bolama from the establishment run by Nozolini's trading house on the Ilhéu do Rei.¹³⁸ Over the next few years Bolama would face

¹³³ Charles Wise, Foreign Office, to Hon. Sir Grey, CIC (8 March 1859); PRO/FO, FO97/317.

¹³⁴ Lord Carnarvon, CO, to V.S. Fitzgerald Esq at Foreign Office (5 May 1859).

¹³⁵ Charles Wise, Foreign Office, to Hon. Sir Grey, CIC (8 March 1859); PRO/FO, FO97/317. This was quite a prophetic statement, given that from 1911 a group of British merchants traders from Sierra Leone and Portugal began to explore palm trees by extracting kernels on land concessions in the Bijagós isles, establishing an oil factory on the island of Bubaque, which was taken over by German interests after the First World War, and operated until the early 1940s.

¹³⁶ Arrobas, Governor General, Cape Verde (11 April 1859); PRO/NA, 97/317.

¹³⁷ According to the slave census of 1856, the total number of registered slaves in the town of Bissau and the Ilhéu do Rei was 1,069. However, our own calculations based upon the data collected from different sources, suggests that it was higher, that is, 1,334. See Fundo do Governo da Guiné, L. 10 and 34, Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau (1856); AHU, Lisbon and Havik (*Silences and Soundbytes*: table 7). Adolphe Demay informed the British that there was considerable agitation in Bissau amongst the 800 slaves that were still left there, and that he expected most of them to 'find their way to Bolama over the next three months' (Commander Close, HMS *Trident*, n.d.).

¹³⁸ Honório Pereira Barreto, Ilhéu do Rei (21 March 1859); AHU, CV, P. 27/79.

several food shortages, particularly during the rainy season, as slaves flocked in and British ships were prohibited from trading with natives along the Geba River. Alarmist reports suggest that 'the situation at Bolama can become embarrassing owing to the fact that food supplies are controlled by the Portuguese', just like at the time of Beaver's expedition in 1792.¹³⁹ As a result, claims to the south bank of the Geba River 'up to Golo or Goby' (i.e. Goly, which is located on the north bank), which was allegedly ceded to the British Crown in 1792 resurfaced;¹⁴⁰ this was also a ploy used to get the Portuguese to refrain from retaliatory measures against the British occupation. The issue would become a source of tension between the governor in Sierra Leone and the Foreign Office and Colonial Office in London, which refused to back up the claim.¹⁴¹

In a letter to Commander Close of HMS *Trident*, João Marques Barros, who was at some point taken prisoner by the British when trying to stop slaves from fleeing,¹⁴² explains that the slaves working for him on his farms were paying their debts and therefore contributing towards their manumission by way of the amount of groundnuts harvested, whilst receiving seeds, tools, and daily rations.¹⁴³ The Bissau authorities, however, received complaints about the sharecropper's obligation to sell all the harvested crops to Barros, which 'implies the enslavement of his workers'.¹⁴⁴ He was told to protect his workers, taking into account their 'native ignorance'; the authorities made known to the *ponteiros* in the region (including the Rio Grande) that the workers were free to sell their produce where and to whom they wanted. Not surprisingly, British authorities took a dim view of the coercive practices exacted by *ponteiros* on 'their' workers:

¹³⁹ CO to FO (13 August 1859); PRO/NA, FO 97/317. A similar situation had occurred a few decades earlier further North when slaves fled the island of Gorée to the Gambia.

¹⁴⁰ FO/PM, Hammond Esq. at CO (16 September 1859); PRO/NA, FO 97/317.

¹⁴¹ In a letter to the British plenipotentiary in Lisbon (24 April 1860), the FO stated that 'the governor of SL (...) under a misapprehension of the views of this government took upon himself to notify to the governor of Bissau his intention to take possession of the territories on the mainland included in the act of cession of 1792.' The FO in London cautioned against any further adventures concerned as it was about the 'additional responsibility and expenditure, (...) and also of the discussions with foreign powers' while the governor of SL argued in favour of the occupation of the left bank of the Geba River, in order to secure the British foothold in the region and guarantee basic supplies to the colony (Also see Olaniyan, 'The Anglo-Portuguese Dispute', ch. II). Edged on by Sierra Leone's bold claims, David Lawrence's brother-in-law, together with José Valério, a Guinean with a history of problems with the authorities in Bissau, were chased by João Marques Barros for having planted the British flag at Fá and Bambadinca (at the time Biafada-controlled territory).

¹⁴² Commander Close, HMS *Trident*, August/September 1858.

¹⁴³ João Marques Barros, Bissau (16 May 1859); AHU, CV, P. 27/79.

¹⁴⁴ De Azevedo, Secretary Government of Portuguese Guiné to João Marques Barros (11 February 1863); AHU, FGG, L. 71.

A Portuguese merchant or trader, plants himself on a certain point and he at once considers all the natives therein as part and parcel of his private property, he will not allow the produce to go but where he thinks proper and he will only give for it what he likes, no one must come there to buy or sell produce, he says the land is my own and drives the intruder off (...).¹⁴⁵

This regime—which would continue well into the twentieth century—provoked much tension and conflict, not only between Portuguese and British authorities, but also between planters and sharecroppers.¹⁴⁶ Accusations of slavery were a constant concern for the former, as voiced by the British command on Bolama:

I am certain and it's a well known fact that they (i.e. the merchant-planters) are slave traders. If the mainland opposite here is Port territory they will have the half of the water and what is there to prevent canoe loads of slaves passing on their water.¹⁴⁷

The arrival of freed slaves on the island (approximately 250 by 1860) but also of 300 free labourers who had 'made their farms on the island where they are safe from the peculations of the Portuguese and of African chiefs' created a new momentum for smallholder 'family farms', which developed alongside the *pontas*. According to a British estimate, in 1858 the island's population totalled

about 2000 individuals about 600 of which are slaves, the rest are (...) [free] labourers viz. Brams, Peppels and Manjargos, who are too warlike to be made slaves.¹⁴⁸

Portuguese reports refer to the fact that the island produced 'a lot of peanuts and has a considerable number of inhabitants, but that nobody dares to build good houses because they are afraid that the English would take them'.¹⁴⁹ This increase in the island's population would intensify over the next decades with the large-scale migration of mainly Mancanhe (Brame)—but also of farmers of Manjaco, Pepel, and Mandinga origin—from the area north of the island of Bissau. However, what appears to be an attempt at a population census of the

¹⁴⁵ J. Craig Loggie Bolama to Colonial Secretary, London (8 September 1868); PRO, FO63/987, Island Of Bulama, 1866–68.

¹⁴⁶ On the issue see the report by Caetano Filipe de Souza, Bolama (4 May 1883), in Carreira, *Os Portugueses nos Rios da Guiné 1500-1900* (Lisbon: Author's Edition, 1984): 183–7. Peanut production, which strongly decreased after the end of the peanut boom, mainly owing to inter-ethnic conflict and the price dip on the world market, would pick up again after the military occupation of Portuguese Guinea in 1915, reaching its peak in the 1950s.

¹⁴⁷ J. Craig Loggie Bolama (8 September 1868).

¹⁴⁸ Commander Close, August/September, 1858.

¹⁴⁹ Honório Pereira Barreto, Bissau, to Conselho Ultramarino in Lisbon (19 January 1857); AHU, Cabo Verde, P. 24/77.

island, indicates that in 1860 the island's population, totaled 714 inhabitants (a lot lower than the previous estimates of between 2,000–5,000 inhabitants, which were probably wild guesses). It included a vague estimate of between 150–340 'djintis de bandêra' (people of the flag, or liberated Africans), 500 Brame or Mancanhe, twenty Pepel, ten Manjaco, three Mandinga and twenty *grumetes* and eleven Creoles, mainly from Cape Verde.¹⁵⁰ At the time there were no Europeans living on the island, a circumstance which the British authorities conveniently used as an argument against Portuguese claims.

At the time, the island imported groundnuts (*Voandzeia subterranean*, locally called *mankara bijagó*), which constituted an important dietary supplement in times of scarcity, and palm oil (and hides and ivory) from the Bijagós, as well as rice, hogs, and calabashes from Bissau. But, significantly, the Pepel of Biombo and the Balanta supplied rice, while the Mandinga from the upper Geba River traded groundnuts, beeswax, and hides at Bissau, on the *pontas* of the Rio Grande, and also on Bolama. The Bijagó of Kañabak exchanged oxen for firearms and gunpowder. Once occupied, the British assistant police magistrate on Bolama, using reports by local informants, lists the amount of groundnuts purchased from and exported by planters on the island: João Marques Barros alone accounted for almost 70 per cent of the total of 88,000 bushels. With regard to the production of maize, Barros produced about 40 per cent of the total output, estimated at 600 bushels.¹⁵¹ There is no mention here of cotton; clearly groundnuts were—and would remain—a monoculture on the island.

Most revealing is the list of the 'principal inhabitants' of the island: seven out of ten came from the island of Fogo, just like Caetano José Nozolini, who was the first Cape Verdean planter to establish himself there. Overall, all but one of them came from the Cape Verde Islands (including two from Santiago Island); the odd one out was a Kriston of Pepel origin (Theofilio Semedo), a former *juiz do povo* or people's judge from Bissau, pertaining to the local Kriston stratum. None originated from Portugal. From 1859 onwards, no reference is made to Aurélia Correia, who, as far as we have been able to ascertain, probably moved temporarily to the Ilhéu do Rei (in approximately 1859) and, thereafter in the early 1860s, to Gam Major de Baixo, a *ponta* on the right bank of the Rio Grande (Ponta Campito), across from the *ponta* Boa

¹⁵⁰ Report by McCormack, assistant police magistrate on Bolama; PRO/NA, FO63/985.

¹⁵¹ McCormack, Bolama, to Gov. Hill in SL (6 December 1860); PRO/NA, FO, 63/985. In comparison, at the peak of the peanut boom in the mid-1870s, the 112 *pontas* on the Rio Grande area produced approx. 300,000 bushels for export. Although a rather conservative estimate, the export levels give some idea of the intensity of peanut farming on the relatively small island of Bolama, which is about 20 kms in length and almost 4 kms at its widest point.

Esperança owned by her daughter Eugénia (now called Ponta Gam-Génia). Of this group, Barros (from the island of Fogo) was the first (of the second wave of trader-planters) to establish himself there (in 1846) together with Filipe Pereira Semedo Cardozo (from Santiago). They were followed by Júlio Madina (from Fogo) in 1849; another group of *ponteiros* arrived from 1856–57. Across from Bolama, at Fonte Grande (now São João Velho), Barros and Semedo also held properties, as did a few fellow Cape Verdeans and two Portuguese traders, one of whom headed the settlement. The farms were mainly worked by Mancanhe, Manjaco, and Pepel, as well as liberated Africans, totalling about 6–700 individuals.

The settlement of free Africans on the island also expanded informal trade networks between it and the mainland that authorities were unable to curb and, in fact, positively increased by the levying of (high) customs duties on peanuts and imported goods. The case of an Aku trader from the Gambia, Thomas Lattin, who was married to a 'Brame woman' and filed a complaint against the Portuguese customs illustrates the *modus operandi* of these networks. When three canoes laden with goods—one of which was owned by Lattin with his Mancanhe wife in charge—were seized by the Bissau customs on the River Cumeré (most probably the Canal do Impenal, which separates the island of Bissau from the mainland) they were found to be filled with (sixty-three demi-johns of) rum, (sixty-five) barrels of gunpowder, (twelve) guns, swords, (thirty-two) cutlasses, (six) iron bars, and this was only the tip of the iceberg. Portuguese authorities had introduced customs duties on all trade on the River Geba, in order to obstruct and control trade with Bolama, ordering all vessels to pass between the Ilhéu do Rei and the port of Bissau. In a letter to the British commandant at Bolama, Lattin states that 'I sent my wife by way of canoes for a visit to Braam country she herself being a Bram woman and has parents and relatives in the said country.'¹⁵² Again it becomes clear from this case that the same kind of strategy followed by the De Mattos/Mãe Julia and Nozolini/Mãe Aurélia partnerships was also pursued by other settlers in order to gain privileged access to Atlantic commodities and African produce.

By the mid-1860s, a roll for house and land tax levied by the British authorities on Bolama accounted for 267 houses and farms; based upon an average of five per persons per dwelling, the total number of inhabitants would amount to over 1,800, more than double the figure quoted in 1859.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Lieut. J.A. Smith, commandant of Bolama (23 May 1867; PRO, FO, 63/987).

¹⁵³ Brownlow Layard, 1866, former resident commander of military detachment on island; PRO/NA, FO 63/989.

However, once the island was handed over to the Portuguese, its population was estimated to be 'about 700 persons'.¹⁵⁴ Apparently, far from having grown as the British had expected, the population had remained more or less stable during the ten years of its government. This may have been due to the attempt by Portuguese authorities to boycott Bolama and cut off its food supplies from the mainland.

Immediately after the handover in 1870, following US President Ulysses Grant's decision on the dispute over the island in favour of Portugal, Bolama became the seat of a new district, which extended eastwards along the Rio Grande and the area south of the Geba River. It would turn out to be fastest growing area compared to the struggling districts of Bissau (including the Ilhéu do Rei and the port of Geba) and Cacheu (including Ziguinchor and Farim) on account of the groundnut boom that swept the region and the whole Senegambia. By 1874 censuses indicated that the population of the Bolama district was 4,466 (3,112 male and 1,354 female; of a total of 5,009 excluding Cacheu), an increase from 1873, when 3,371 persons were registered (of a total of 6,154). The particularly unbalanced sex ratio in favour of men (a male surplus) contrary to the female surpluses in the old riverine trading towns shows that commercial crop cultivation had largely replaced an economy based exclusively upon domestic slavery and trafficking. By the mid-1870s there were already over fifty *feitorias* or factories along the banks of the Rio Grande.¹⁵⁵

Ponta agriculture had also provoked the large-scale migration of contract labour working as sharecroppers, mainly motivated by the need to gather resources to pay the bride price. In 1872, Bolama town only boasted a few brick houses owned by four trade houses pertaining to French companies and Cape Verdeans, and nine shops, six run by French and three by Cape Verdeans. The rest of the town was composed of a large number of wooden huts 'very similar to those common on the island of Fogo'.¹⁵⁶ Its population mainly consisted of Mancanhe, Pepel, Manjaco, Fula, and Mandinga. The Bijagó who came to cultivate rice fields were only seasonal migrants, while also bartering their produce (rice, palm oil, palm kernels, fruit) in exchange for tobacco, gunpowder, cotton cloth, and rum. Bolama was a busy port; however, there also was a lively parallel trade—already referred to in a number

of sources—given that many ships and canoes first passed by Ponta Oeste on the southern tip of the island, avoiding the town and sailing directly to the Rio Grande (e.g. Ponta Bambaia on south bank of Rio Grande).

The census carried out by Portuguese authorities in 1873 shows that the total population of the *freguesia* or parish of São José de Bolama (excluding that of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Rio Grande de Bolola on the mainland) consisted of 3,009 individuals, 1,988 male and 1,021 female.¹⁵⁷ One third of the population was aged between 15 and 25 (total: 1,071), and almost 60 per cent were under 25 (total: 1,867). Amongst the 983 households, more than 90 per cent were Guinea born (total: 2,746; 1,765 male and 981 female), leaving a small minority of Cape Verdeans (approximately 179) including thirty-four soldiers and some foreigners (total: twenty-seven, mostly French).¹⁵⁸ More than 600 were registered as 'Christians', which means that the island housed a considerable number of Kriston/*grumetes* from Bissau, but only 105 individuals were regarded as literate (in Portuguese). Of the total population, 44 per cent were classified as farmers (*agricultores*), here defined as farm workers or sharecroppers (*jornaleiros empregados na mesma*). Other occupations were traders (*negociantes*; three); clerks and cashiers (*guarda livros e caixeiros*; sixty-nine), sailors (eighty-five), fishermen (six), blacksmiths (three), stonemasons (three), tailors (three), carpenters (two), and bakers (two). However, the census roll excludes more than 1,600 Manjacos and 965 Mandingas who outmigrated to the island and the Rio Grande, as well as a number of Wolof (150–200). This meant that, in season, Bolama's population would increase significantly, or even double according to some other sources.¹⁵⁹ In 1884 Bolama town was said to have a population of a thousand individuals, of which fifty were 'white', most of them French traders, and a few Portuguese *degradados*, that is, criminals sent into exile.¹⁶⁰

Another contemporary Portuguese source provides additional insight into settlement patterns on the island:

The interior of Bolama is occupied by Brahmes (Mancanhe) and some Fula families who dedicate themselves to agriculture; others come to Bolama town to work in menial jobs while their wives pound rice, sell water and wild fruit.

¹⁵⁴ Auto de Posse (18 October 1870); AHU, CV, P. 49/101.

¹⁵⁵ Petition, Planter-traders, Bolama (7 June 1874); AHU, CV, P. 56/108. In 1879 there were twenty-three *pontas* on the right bank of the Rio Grande, and thirty-six on the left bank (see Aleixo Justiniano Sócrates da Costa, 'Provincia da Guiné Portuguesa', *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*; 4^a Série 2, 1883: 94–112; 3: 149–60; 4: 188–203, 103.

¹⁵⁶ Domingos Joaquim de Menezes, delegado de saúde, Bolama (6 March 1872); AHU, CV, P. 133.

¹⁵⁷ Secretary General's Office, Bolama (2 January 1873); AHN, SGG, A6/19, Cx. 350.

¹⁵⁸ Frederico de Barros, *Senegambia Portuguesa ou Nota Descritiva das Diferentes Tribus que Habitam a Senegambia Meridional* (Lisbon: Matos Moreira, 1878), 64. In 1878, agents of the French trading houses Pastré, Itier and Blanchard, Rives, Audibert and Martel were all established at Bolama.

¹⁵⁹ Max Astrié, 'Bolama (Guinée Portugaise)', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Marseille*, 16 (1892): 132–9, 135.

¹⁶⁰ C. Dochter, *Ueber die Kapverden nach dem Rio Grande und Futah-Djallon* (Leipzig: Paul Troberg Verlag, 1884), 70.

The island produces millet, and maize, peanuts, beans, sweet potato and during the dry season all kinds of vegetables (...).¹⁶¹

By the early 1890s, a French trader estimated that besides the 3,000 inhabitants of Bolama town,¹⁶² 6,000 individuals lived in villages or *tabankas* in the interior of the island.¹⁶³ The latter were mainly of Mancanhe (or Brame), Manjaco, Mandinga, and Pepel origin. By the early 1900s, sources confirmed that the interior was largely settled by Mancanhe, who exclusively grew peanuts in and around their villages.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Bolama was identified as Mancanhe territory: 'Les Mankayes habitent l'île de Boulam' (ibid.);¹⁶⁵ the largest settlement being Gam-Brame, in the vicinity (two kilometres) of the town of Bolama. Other settlements that still survive to the present day (see the map, p. xv), some of which include ethnic denominations, also include Biafada (e.g. Gam Biafada), Balanta (e.g. Uato Balanta), Fula (Uato Fula), Mandinga (Uato Mandinga), and Bijagó (Canema Bijagó).

Such comments testify to the momentum of the settlement of Bolama Island by different 'ethnic' communities—but also demonstrate to what extent the island harboured and incorporated a considerable cultural diversity. By the 1870s, patterns of settlement and migration had been established that were to indissolubly link it to the mainland while also giving it a set of unique insular characteristics. A British officer reporting back to his superiors in London provides some insight into the nature of local culture, illustrating the dynamics of cultural interaction between different African traditions.

A knowledge, however slight, of French, is invaluable, nearly the whole trade being in the hands of the French, and many of the cases in court being French. A knowledge of Creole Portuguese will be useful, as nearly all the poorer population understand it.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ F.A. Marques Galdes, 'Guiné Portuguesa: Comunicação à Sociedade de Geografia Sobre esta Província e suas Condições Actuais', *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* 8 (1887): 465–522, 469. A contemporary observer noted that on Bolama island the cultivation of peanuts differed somewhat from that of the Rio Grande, in that they were grown on 'free', that is, family, plots and then sold to traders and trade houses in Bolama town (Costa, 'Província da Guiné Portuguesa', 110).

¹⁶² The aforementioned 1,030 inhabitants included white Portuguese and mulatto (1,030), French (30), English (15) while the African population was composed of Pepel (400), Mandinga (500), Biafada (250), Fula (95), Brame (75), Manjaco (585), Futa-Fula (10), and Bijagós (10).

¹⁶³ Astric, 'Bolama', 135.

¹⁶⁴ M.J. Etienne-Giraud, 'La Guinée Portugaise', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Marseille* 29/2 (1905): 214–31, 219.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Brownlow Layard, 1866, former resident commander of military detachment on island; PRO/NA. FO 63/989.

Almost twenty years later, when the island was already under Portuguese control and despite the fact that the town of Bolama had become the administrative and political centre of its presence in the region, a European traveller remarked that the *lingua francas* of the capital of 'Portuguese Guinea' rather than being Portuguese were in actual fact French and (Guinean) Creole.¹⁶⁷

Epilogue

The case of Bolama presented here serves as a telling example of how the notable shift in trading and crop cultivation patterns, which took place in West Africa during the 1800s, impacted on the settlement of an insular location. Viewed against the background of the gradual transition from slave trafficking to 'legitimate' commerce and the increasing mobility of local populations, the settlement of Bolama Island was a long-drawn-out and complex affair with a particularly troubled history. While the island was the subject of intense international sabre-rattling between Portugal and Britain it was also the disputed territory of two opposing native groups, that is, the Biafada and Bijagó. Therefore, one could surmise that Bolama was probably the worst possible choice for a settlement given that it had long been contested terrain. Indeed, the name Bolama is of Biafada origin and means '[the place] where we will die' or 'death' for short (Biafada: *bulama*). The meaning and implications of its name are still known to the Biafada of the Quinara region (on the mainland) although the problems associated with it have long been overcome given their resettlement of the island in the course of the 1800s. The symbolic significance of the cutting down of two large baobab trees (P: *poilões*; Kr: *poilón*) that flanked the pier in the port of Bolama in 1941, coinciding with the transfer of the capital of the then Portuguese Guinea to Bissau, did not escape the Biafada either at the time. The fact that the ferrymen who took travellers in their canoes across the narrow straits that separate the island from the mainland (i.e. Quinara) were—and still are—of Biafada origin, illustrates the relations of continuity between the latter and the island.

European colonial settlement, which had already begun to decline with the gradual transfer of government services to the rapidly expanding town of Bissau, left its mark in the form of colonial buildings and a rectangle of streets in the town centre that still survive today. After 1941, the island was thus reduced to a 'mere' holiday resort where officials and their families would spend a few weeks, for example at the modern hotel on the picturesque Ofir

¹⁶⁷ Doelter, *Ueber die Kapverden*, 70.

Beach on the western side of the island.¹⁶⁸ Efforts, with UNESCO in the late 1980s or through its pairing with European sister-cities, to restore the town's colonial buildings and turn Bolama into a historical site and tourist attraction have recently been revived.¹⁶⁹

Another implication of Bolama's chequered history from the 1830s to the 1870s is the radical transformation of the island's flora and fauna as a result of settlement, cultivation, and trade, by which it has lost much of its original lush vegetation and variety of animal species. In fact, Bolama is a prime and unfortunate example of an ecological nightmare, one that also affected and still affects many other tropical regions. The legacy of cash crop agriculture is the low and sparse, almost savannah-like vegetation, mere remnants of Bolama's erstwhile abundant flora, a consequence of the indiscriminate cutting down of trees for timber and of extensive slash and burn cultivation. The ferruginous soils, exhausted in many places after 150 years of incessant planting of poor crops like peanuts, constantly meet the gaze of travellers on their tours. There are, however, a few places, such as the characteristic paddy fields or *bolanhas* which blend in with the dark, muddy coastline lined by mangroves and denote a different kind of human activity. Although little or nothing is left of the large *pontas* that once dotted the island, the locations and layout of villages are reminiscent of settlement patterns induced by the former.

As a result of having served as the location for Guinea's capital during half a century (1879–1941), the island's African heritage and culture has been largely overshadowed by the perspective of colonial modernity in historical writing. From the 1870s, the construction of a new town where Beaver once set foot, with wide avenues, squares, and stately buildings was to set a standard for a future colony. Thus, the Beaver expedition in 1792, despite its failure, was a prelude in more sense than one to Bolama's future as a prospective site for European settlement. However, although the different treaties that were concluded to that effect (1792, 1827, 1828, and 1855) were all sealed between European officials and African dignitaries, the actual settlement of the island was undertaken by Africans, mainly Guineans and Cape Verdeans, but also to a lesser degree by Aku from the Gambia, Krio from Sierra Leone, and Kru from Liberia. Besides a few, mainly Cape Verdean, planters, slaves from the mainland and soldiers from the Cape Verde archipelago, at least initially, appear to have been the principal actors involved in the process. The soldiers of the (small) Bolama garrison stationed there in 1830 growing maize

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Daniel Motta, former manager of the Ofir Beach hotel, in Bolama (January 1989).

¹⁶⁹ The Bijagó archipelago was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1996. Plans are currently underway to extend the reserve to Bolama and for the approval of the island's candidacy as a World Heritage Site.

and sweet potatoes for their own subsistence, and the slaves who produced peanuts at Novo Mindelo, were the first outsiders to settle the island and cultivate it permanently in the 1830s. Previously, it had long been visited in season by the Bijagó from Kañabak, who planted rice on its southern shore, a crop which was also planted by incoming settlers in the course of the 1800s. Rather than simply reducing Bolama to a site for cash or export crops, the growing of staple crops such as rice, millet and maize, sweet potatoes and beans, as well as fruit trees, indicates the existence of patterns of subsistence agriculture that were present since early settlement and were essential to sustain a permanent human presence there.

Similar patterns can be observed at other insular locations that emerged at the time as sites of settlement, such as the island of Gallinhas (to the south of Bolama) and the Ilhéu do Rei, located in the River Geba off the port of Bissau, further north. Planter-traders' negotiated contracts with local dignitaries who ceded usufructural rights but not without preserving their own, that is, the rice fields on the Bijagó island of Gallinhas worked by inhabitants of Kañabak and a sacred site on the Ilhéu do Rei reserved for exclusive use by the Pepel of Inté on the island of Bissau. Given the nature of the *ponta* system, which was based upon sharecropping—and on the influx of slaves and free migrants equipped with seeds and tools—those working the land were in actual fact farmers rather than workers/peasants. Rather than being plantations in the strict sense of the term, *pontas* were trading posts located on river banks with a small port or mooring, and with a constantly expanding surface area in order to accommodate people and plots. Like some—but not all—*pontas* on the mainland (e.g. on the shores of the Rio Grande) sharecropping on Bolama was not just built round seasonal migration but of a sedentary nature; sharecroppers therefore organized themselves in village communities, reproducing their own 'ethnic' customs and practices. Kinship relations with communities on the mainland served as transmission belts for the recruitment of additional hands, thus leading to the growth of compounds and villages.

From the outset, key ethnographic data were ignored or neglected by international actors. Amongst these, the failed attempts by Beaver and other British settlers stand out for their disregard of local custom and practices.¹⁷⁰ The lack of understanding of the value of ethnographic information in these colonization projects 'buried under largely imaginative concepts of man-in-general' equated 'a lack of civilization with a lack of culture. African

¹⁷⁰ Beaver (*African Memoranda*, vii) asserted that he had '(...) studiously avoided reading any work or report whatever on the subject of Africa, and the slavery of its natives, lest I might have biased and led away by others' arguments (...).'

society therefore lay there, a tabula rasa ready and waiting for the utopian inscription'.¹⁷¹ The mere conclusion of treaties was seen as a valid claim to territory, which, like Bolama, was seen as *terra nullius* or no man's land, thereby justifying its inclusion into empire. But, notably, local actors aware of the intricacies of African custom and skillfully exploiting the diplomatic conflict over land and trade to their own advantage, proceeded to negotiate their own way while gaining leverage in the process. The fact that, on both sides, colonial governments attempted to employ the services of local intermediaries (from the Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Cape Verde Islands) in order to state claims and gain footholds is significant. However, rather than seeing the land as pertaining to their respective governments, planters and free persons regarded it as their own property, acting as 'landlords' in disputed territory.

Motivated by the attempt to carry on trafficking despite Anglo-Portuguese treaties and British patrols, wily planter-traders sought hideaways to export slaves and employ slave labour to grow commercial crops on their factories or *pontas*. They were only able to do so through the mediation and protection provided by their female Guinean partners, who were related to ruling Bijagó matrilineages and became planters in their own rights, actually running the farms.¹⁷² Some of these well-connected planters remained on the island despite the conflict, and even during the period of British control. However, the repeated raids by British patrols from 1838 onwards and the British administration in the 1850s successfully challenged planters' control over their 'croppers', thereby changing as well as eroding the *ponta* system. Thus British intervention actually triggered and accelerated the arrival of settlers on the island, including manumitted and refugee slaves as well as free persons of different ethnic communities from the mainland who subsequently settled areas beyond planters' control. The flight of slaves from Bissau during the 1850s as the British took possession of the island, decisively contributed to the establishment of free farmers and to that of 'family farms', that is, residential households or *moranças*, forming villages or *tabankas*. While leading to the expansion of peanut production, this new pattern of free settlement also induced the growth of a staple crop economy geared to subsistence farming,

¹⁷¹ Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 115.

¹⁷² On this issue see Brooks ('Bolama'; idem, *Eur-Africans in Western Africa*, 22–60) and Havik (*Silences and Soundbytes*, 255–310). On the importance of Bijagó women for *ponta* agriculture on Bolama, also see Henrique Dias de Carvalho, *Guiné: Apontamentos Inéditos* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1944), 49.

and, importantly, to a diversification of crops and of farmers' diets.¹⁷³ The Mancanhe were to permanently settle and cultivate large parts of the island from the 1850s as free farmers, and not as sharecroppers, as was the case on the *pontas* of the Rio Grande. Therefore, Bolama figures as the beginning of parallel patterns of cultivation based upon indigenous farming by populations attracted to the island.

At the same time a crop market developed on the island based not only upon cash crops such as peanuts but also on food crops, in order to feed an increasing population. Upland and rice paddies emerged along the island's muddy banks, while peanuts were cyclically intercropped and alternated with maize in its interior. And in and around the compounds, in the gardens and fields, nutritious crops such as sweet potatoes, beans, eggplant, cassava, rosella, and okra were planted. Mancanhe farmers were seen as best suited to growing peanuts on account of their itinerant, rotative agriculture (in conjunction with maize), which contributed to the rapid expansion of settlements. The emergence of a peanut monoculture, despite attempts by the British to introduce cotton as an export crop, was the result of a combination of indigenous farming techniques and the logic of the sharecropping system on the one hand, but also of the dependence of local planters and trade houses in the region on French credit and on French demand for the crop on the other. Both Portuguese and British authorities on the island were unable to restrict the informal trade ('smuggling') of peanuts and exchange goods between Bolama and the Rio Grande, and in fact rather contributed to its increase by introducing high duties. The period of British administration would also contribute to the diversification of the trading community of the island, which was composed of immigrants from the Gambia (Aku), Sierra Leone (Krio), and Liberia (Krumen), as well as 'British' and 'French' traders (thirty by 1868)—generally of African origin—who acted as agents for trading houses in Europe. Indeed, it becomes clear from both Portuguese and British reports that the main players are all Africans. The commandant of Bolama at the time, exclaimed that 'I have been the only white man here who has stayed through the rains and at present there is only another white face on the island, a French man.'¹⁷⁴

The British acceptance of international arbitration in the dispute with Portugal was fundamentally motivated by the failure of its administration, which

¹⁷³ Interestingly, a Portuguese source (Costa, 'Provincia da Guiné Portuguesa', 102/3) maintained that the period of British administration had laid the foundations for the island's modern prosperity, and opposed the peanut monoculture, favouring the diversification of agriculture to include cotton, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, and sugar cane (Bowman, *Legitimate Commerce*, 109).

¹⁷⁴ J. Craig Loggie, Bolama, to Colonial Secretary, London (8 September 1868); PRO, FO63/987, Island Of Bulama (1866–68).

responded to the governor of Sierra Leone. Inept management, the lack of investment, the disappointing financial returns, the ignorance of Afro-Atlantic and African traditions in the region, and the lack of reliable channels of communication with Sierra Leone all played a role. In the words of a governor of Sierra Leone: '(...) I regret to say that the local administration at Bulama is in a most unsatisfactory condition arising from the employment of insufficient and dishonest officers. I am taking steps to correct these evils (...)'.¹⁷⁵ While still kindling hopes of a promising future, by stating that 'there are no less than 30 European traders resident on the island which is highly productive and is a commanding commercial position', by that time the momentum had been lost. Despite attempts to introduce and indigenize cotton as a viable export crop—already mentioned by Beaver together with coffee, indigo, and tobacco—which had been one of the key motivations for British claims and actions, British rule had actually reinforced French interests in the region, on whom the *ponteiros* depended. In the end Bolama was regarded as a liability by the British authorities (both by the Foreign and Colonial offices) in London who proposed to exchange it with the French for other, less cumbersome, territories. Indeed, British officers were aware of French intrigue and their close relations with Portuguese authorities and with local traders, and J. Craig Loggie, commandant of Bolama, concluded that 'the feeling is against the English'.¹⁷⁶ He added that: 'The Portuguese influence is great in the Rio Grande and as all the points are almost in the hands of Portuguese traders, it's in their interest to spread among the people that it's not an English river.'

Mounting population pressures, resulting from the peanut boom from the 1860s until the 1880s, attracted new *ponteiros* as commercial transactions, and those of food crops, also increased. Rotative cropping schemes (based upon fallow periods) were increasingly abandoned for straightforward slash and burn techniques to the detriment of soil conservation.¹⁷⁷ It is particularly striking in this respect that certain communities, such as the Mancanha, known for their itinerant agriculture based upon intensive lowland cultivation while safeguarding the quality of the soil by means of crop rotation, fallow periods, and

the use of natural fertilizer, ended up contributing to large-scale soil erosion on the island, which also devastated other areas such as the Cubisseco region in neighbouring Quinara region and the banks of the Rio Grande (see the map on p. xv).¹⁷⁸ This devastation was mainly the result of pressures intrinsic to the *ponta* system and the peanut monoculture, which was pioneered on Bolama and thereafter spread to neighbouring areas. As a result most of the island's dense forests, as witnessed by Beaver in the 1790s, were destroyed, leaving small crops of trees on its northern tip, the Ilha das Cobras.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, towards the end of British rule in the 1860s, it became clear to an informed local observer that the island's future had been compromised. 'Bolama itself does not produce much—all the African produce is from the mainland (...)'.¹⁸⁰ The end of the groundnut boom in the early 1880s accelerated Bolama's Africanization despite the fact it had become the site of Guinea's new capital a few years earlier in 1879. Thus Bolama remained an African island with a superimposed European capital, lacking the means to develop its depleted resources. Beaver's fantasy of an African utopia based upon industrious natives learning to produce and trade export crops—that is, the three c's: commerce, cultivation, and civilization—while providing them with new opportunities and livelihoods under European supervision, turned out to be an unsustainable mirage after a century of settlement schemes.

¹⁷⁵ Sir A. Kennedy, governor of Sierra Leone, Freetown, to Duke of Buckingham in London (27 May 1868); PRO, FO63/987, Island Of Bulama, 1866–68. The governor's report is based upon a visit to the islands of Sherbro and Bulama.

¹⁷⁶ J. Craig Loggie, commandant of Bolama, to governor of Sierra Leone (24 July 1868); PRO, FO63/987, Island of Bulama (1866–68). For a discussion of the disagreements between FO and CO and the shift in positions over Bolama, see Olaniyan, 'The Anglo-Portuguese Dispute', chs II and III.

¹⁷⁷ On this issue see A. Teixeira da Mota, 'O Povoamento e a Agricultura Indígena da Guiné', *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* 23 (1951): 657–80, 659–61, on Mancanha (Brame) lowland, rainfed agriculture.

¹⁷⁸ On the environmental impact of Mancanha migration, see Manuel Martins Baptista, 'Problemas Agrícolas Coloniais: A Guiné Desconhecida', *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* 12 (1948): 881–924, 897–9. Teixeira da Mota ('O Povoamento e a Agricultura Indígena da Guiné', 659–60) reports that the Mancanha themselves were aware of the disappearance of forests in the Guinea Bissau region.

¹⁷⁹ A. Teixeira da Mota, 'A Agricultura de Brame e Balantas vista através da fotografia aérea', *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* 18 (1950): 131–72, 146–7.

¹⁸⁰ J. Craig Loggie, Bolama, to Colonial Secretary, London (8 September 1868); PRO, FO63/987, Island Of Bulama (1866–68).