Traders, Planters and Go-betweens: The Kriston in Portuguese Guinea

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1. Introduction

A number of scholars since the 1950s have focused on the issue of mediation, or brokerage, in the broadest sense of the term in different geographical and social contexts, particularly anthropologists who applied it to plantation societies in Latin America, the Caribbean, and South-East Asia.\(^1\)

Since the 1960s, the study of brokerage has become an integral part of anthropology, and the concept also came to be used in sociology, history, economics and political science. The *modus operandi* attributed to cultural brokers was their capacity to cross cultural divides, to assume different identities to blend in with varied surroundings, to negotiate understandings among unrelated parties, to be flexible and to improvise, to gain the trust of others, and to manipulate and to make themselves indispensable.\(^2\)

In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, much of the literature on brokers has focused on the area between Senegal and the Bight of Benin, as well as on the Swahili coast. Since Dorjahn and Fyfe\(^3\) proposed the “landlord-stranger” approach in the case of Sierra Leone, many scholars have applied it to the relations between incoming traders and settlers, Africans and Europeans, on the one hand, and to local populations on the other. Incoming groups or individuals negotiated with landlords, i.e. members of ruling lineages, with regard to settlement and usufruct rights to land as well as trade. Broadly


speaking, this perspective has typically dealt with the social and cultural aspects of trader-client relations in the context of rural and urban migration and long-distance overland and maritime trade. It emphasizes relatively reified, though complementing, cultural differences.

A contrasting approach to cross-cultural interaction, including brokerage, based on synthesis and integration is that of miscegenation and creolization, i.e. between non-African outsiders and native Africans, and the new institutions that resulted from this blending. Taking its cue from the Caribbean dynamic, initially limited to insular contexts where creolization advanced rapidly (e.g. Cape Verde and São Tomé), scholarly attentions focused also upon coastal areas and even locations in the continent’s interior. Sierra Leone, which boasts a creolized culture, figures prominently in this respect, but other regions such as Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and the Gold Coast also attracted scholarly attention. Documenting such continuous processes in the longue durée, whether through conflict or fusion, creolized (Eur-African, Afro-European, Afro-Atlantic) cultures and identities were recognized to have moments of their own, while at the same time being influenced by external imperialisms and colonialisms.


A third approach to cross-cultural change is concerned with African communities that built cross-cultural networks in the contexts of these commercial contacts between Africans and Europeans. They played key roles in the slave and commodity trades, whether as slaves, indentured workers, free laborers, or petty traders and entrepreneurs. Rather than engaging in landlord-stranger accommodations or creolization, these groups created Afro-Atlantic identities directly associated with riverine and coastal navigation. They constructed networks over extensive geographical areas by employing navigational, bargaining, and linguistic skills and relying on kin and client networks they controlled. Owing to the dependence of European, here Portuguese, influence, on coastal and riverine trade, certain well-placed brokerage groups gained key positions in these exchanges. Over time, they developed their own habitus, institutions, and cultures. Examples of these “workers of the trade” are found in the Afro-Atlantic networks that emerged along the West African coast and rivers, such as in St. Louis and Gorée and along the Senegambia River, in Cacheu, Bissau, and Geba in the Guinea Bissau region, from the Sine River to Cape Palmas, in Ouidah on the Slave Coast, at Elmina fort on the Gold Coast, in Brass/Calabar in the Niger Delta, and at Cape Cameroon and the Wuri estuary.

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ena also occurred in the African interior where caravans maintained commercial exchange across large distances, i.e. led by *djilas* in Mandé controlled areas inland from Senegambia, but also further south in Dahomey/Benin, Oyo, and Angola.

The present paper will concern itself with this last perspective, which stood at the centre of Jill Dias’ work on Angola. Distinct from processes of creolization, it serves to recognize the autochthonous dynamic that accompanied the impact of Afro-Atlantic trade and interaction upon African populations, triggering new forms of interactions among local groups, often over considerable distances. The main focus here is on a social stratum in


West Africa that, despite its important role in the trade networks of the Upper Guinea region, has been largely neglected, i.e. the Christianised Africans locally called Kriston. Austin coined the term “ethnic relays” to refer to the social formations associated with the great diversity of intermediaries servicing the networks of Afro-Atlantic exchange.19 These groups pertain to a universe of what has been termed “canoe-men” or “workers of the African trade”, with their own specific practices geared to negotiation, flexibility, and itinerancy.20 Over a period of four centuries, the Kriston created autonomous social, cultural, and political institutions, thus allowing them to achieve a notable measure of political, economic, and cultural influence and authority. From the 19th century onwards, their involvement shifted from the slave and commodity trades to legitimate commerce, i.e. the export trade in agricultural commodities, assuming a prominent role in the mediation between “landlords and strangers”.21 In the process of mobilizing native labour for production of staple and cash crops they turned into planters—and even “landlords”—themselves. European military occupation and colonial administration circumscribed their brokerage role, but they would soon adapt to the new conditions, seeking to exploit the available opportunities that the new overlords left open to them. The present paper intends to contribute to the debate on these intermediary groups focusing on their unique position in between “ethnic” African and “colonial” European worlds and on the opportunism and creativity with which those in the Portuguese regions of Upper Guinea adapted to changing circumstances during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

2. Trade networks: the relay trade.

Literature on the Kriston is sparse, although in recent years a number of publications have focused on different aspects of their culture.22 Whereas


21 For the concept of landlords and strangers, see Dorjahn and Fyfe, Landlords and Strangers, for its application to the Upper Guinea coast, see Brooks, Landlords and Strangers.

the main focus of the literature with regard to the period before the early 1800s is on ports, trade settlements, and towns, attention then shifts to the interior with the introduction of export crops in the 1830s. As outsiders entered into contact with resident groups in search of locations for cultivation, a diverse palette of ethnic groups and their institutions and practices emerged. References to “ethnic” groups are generally limited to those who entered into contact and engaged in trade relations with Europeans, such as the Mandinga, Fula, Pepel, Bijagó, and Biafada. Monographs and reports from the 1830s provide rough sketches of these populations, some of which had been referred to since the first travelers and compilers made inventories of coastal peoples in the 15th century. The so-called Rivers of Guinea, identified by Rodney as the Upper Guinea Coast,23 formed a complex mosaic, which also included others groups long operating “in the background,” such as the Djola/Felupe and Balanta, but who emerged as key actors with the shift from slaves to crops. Certain groups as the Manjaco and Brames or Mancanhoe received their current ethnonyms only in the 19th century, previously included under the broad label of Pepel. [see map] Other smaller groups such as the Banhun, Nalú, or Pajadinca remained marginal to colonial contexts, despite having played relevant roles in the pre-colonial period. The establishment of Afro-Atlantic trade settlements from the 16th century, associated with the riverine relay trade, was to redirect exchange networks towards littoral regions while extending contacts between coast and interior by way of riverine networks. The cross-cultural relations that developed over time would attract, subsume, and join different native strata into the mediation of exchange, creating a new inter-ethnic stratum, the Kriston, based in and around Afro-Atlantic trade settlements. Early references to Christianized go-betweens typically associate them with certain coastal communities established in such towns as Geba, Farim, Cacheu, and Bissau, with strong ties to the Pepel, Biafada, and Mandinga.24 Both men and women of these cross-ethnic, intermediate communities served as canoemen, pilots, interpreters, informants, traders, suppliers, clerks, and partners for the outsider traders and officials based in these settlements.


24Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, 103-14.
The first academic references to this social stratum appeared only in the early 1950s, when a Portuguese historian and cartographer, Teixeira da Mota, stressed the importance of the “Cristãos da terra” (or “local Christians”) for the history of the Upper Guinea region in the genesis of Luso-African groups. One of the very rare glimpses of this social stratum, also known as grumetes (i.e. cabin or ship boys), was provided by a French historian who gathered historiographical information on the different roles played by these canoes “middlemen,” drawing parallels with other similar intermediaries in Franco-African contexts. Comparisons made with the laptots, as the canoe-men on the Senegal River were known, also showed that these groups interacted with one another and negotiated the coastal and relay trades on the many rivers that flow through littoral areas in the Senegambia, between St. Louis; Rufisque, Porto d’Ale, and Joal on the Petite Côte, as well as along the Gambia, Casamance, Cacheu, and Geba rivers. The radius of action of the Kriston would come to include the coastal areas between St. Louis in Senegal and the Scarcies River in Sierra Leone, as communities emerged in the context of the Afro-Atlantic slave and commodity trades. Some attributed the lack of earlier studies on these groups to “the complete failure of the civilization of grumetes”; thereby implying that perspectives on the Kriston had been elaborated a posteriori in a colonial context imbued with racialist perspectives, thus heightening the need for further research.

Over the following decades a number of scholars emphasized the relevance of such intermediary groups as the Kriston for an understanding of the different Afro-Atlantic trade networks in the region. However, rarely was

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25 Da Mota, Contactos, 9.
26 Nardin, “Recherches sur les ‘gourmets’.”
28 Nardin, “Recherches sur les ‘gourmets,’” 244.
their key role in creating local conditions for the operation of relay networks recognized. They were often overshadowed by the lançados and tangomãos with strong connections to the Cape Verde islands and to the Sephardi diaspora that formed along the Rivers of the Guinea of Cape Verde from the early 16th century, to the detriment of the local brokers who guaranteed the networks’ operation. As a result, the intense activity of these local go-betweens in the barter trades in African slaves, gold, beeswax, hides, salt, and crops in exchange for European iron bars, brandy, gunpowder, beads, and other goods, unfortunately, remained peripheral. Data on these interlinked networks were culled from travel accounts and missionary sources that were unearthed from Portuguese archives since the 1950s, and some of their institutions and practices have since been documented, including their syncretic social, religious and political traditions, as well as Guinean Creole and its different dialects.\(^\text{30}\)

The Kriston inhabitants of Afro-Atlantic trade settlements, were described in official Portuguese sources as “Cristãos por cerimônia” (ceremonial, or nominal, Christians) or “Cristãos da terra” (local Christians, or “Christians of the land”). These epithets were meant to underline their deviance from orthodox Catholic ritual and Portuguese moral precepts. Nevertheless, some missionary sources put them in a more favorable light as examples of the success of their efforts towards making conversions, thus putting them in a more favorable light.\(^\text{31}\) From their first appearances in (travel) sources, their proximity to African societies formed the basis for both denunciation and praise. They were not the only native, non-ethnic brokers of Afro-Atlantic trade; such itinerant traders as the “diilas” formed trading lineages linking the West African littoral with regional market towns

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along the upper reaches of the Niger River (i.e. the Mali Empire). All these networks intersected along a border zone marked by the inland reach of the tidal bore, up to 150-200 kms, in the case of such large rivers as the Gambia. One of the main problems of relay networks was that of logistics, which involved dug-out canoes and small sailing vessels for riverine navigation, to mules, horses, and camels for overland travel. Such considerations largely determined the routes that Kriston followed, the types of commodities they carried, costs and barter prices, and clients, and thereby the limits of their expansion.

The dependency of incoming European traders on the hospitality of their African hosts, i.e. lineage chiefs and elders, above all in terms of accommodations, subsistence, contacts, and local knowledge, gave rise to new forms of cross-cultural interaction. Afro-Atlantic and intra-African trade hinged upon effective negotiation: reliable access to commodities and labor was crucial. While climatic conditions played an important role in regulating the supply of goods, the nature of the terrain and the presence of a great diversity of populations along trading routes added to the complexities of these relay networks. As a result, a “diaspora” of canoe men and women, including *laptots*, Kriston, and Kru(men), the last based in the area between the Sine River and Cape Palmas, now Liberia, formed along the banks of the rivers between of the Rice Coast, between the Senegal and the Scarcies Rivers from the 1500s onwards.

With the gradual transformation in the 17th century of Afro-Atlantic trade settlements much akin to African villages into garrison towns run by European trading companies and government officials, increasing European competition changed trade relations in the Kriston’s favor. The Kriston as-

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32See for example the references to Buckar Sanó (Abubucar Sané), a “djila” trader with whom Jobson did business along the Gambia river in the 17th century; Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1625; New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), the “silates” (M: silati, or master of the trade routes) with whom Mungo Park came into contact. Mungo Park, *The Journal of a Mission to the Interior of Africa, in the Year 1805; Together with other Documents ... to which is Prefixed an Account of the Life of Mr. Park* (London: John Murray, 1815); *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797 with an Account of a Subsequent Mission to that Country in 1805, To which is Added an Account of the Life of Mr. Park* (London: John Murray, 1816), and the “djilas” that Mollien befriended; Gaspard Théodore Mollien, *Voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique, aux sources du Sénégal et de la Gambie, fait en 1818* (Paris: Mme. Ve. Courcier, 1820).

33Along the Guinea coast trade was often suspended during the rainy season, between May and October.
sumed an even more conspicuous role, acting not only as go-betweens but also as hosts for Portuguese, French, and English strangers, thus gaining greater visibility in the historical record. Official reports indicate that by the 17th century Kriston strata were well established in fortified and non-fortified settlements alike and formed the dynamic core of the relay trade between the Upper Guinea coast and its hinterland.34 Trade at Cacheu was supplied from Farim further upriver, and Bissau depended on the relay trade which operated from Geba, both at the furthest reaches of tidal impact.35 Given the navigational hazards and security concerns, canoemen were key actors in the logistics of the riverine trade, while also forming the crews of sea-going vessels that served entrepôts and relay ports along the coast.36

Even on the basis of the often-incomplete information contained in travel accounts, missionary sources and later, from the early 17th century, in reports from coastal entrepôts and settlements, it is possible to reconstruct at least partially the institutions and evolution of these Christianized communities. Their relations with the ethnic groups in the hinterlands of these settlements were based upon kriason37 or wardship, a practice whereby children were entrusted to and raised by Kriston in the towns, and above all by the gan or trading lineages in their midst. Besides being baptized (laba kabesa),38 they would usually learn a craft (carpentry, stonemasonry, weaving, boat-building, iron smithery, etc.) to earn their livings, generally paid in kind, i.e. imported European commodities (incl. iron bars, firearms, gunpowder, and swords). The grumetes, i.e. men who worked as rowers and pilots, would generally receive their remuneration or laba remos (“washing the oars”) in the form of rum or brandy. The better educated amongst them, passing through missionary hospices in the region, would become interpreters, sales clerks, or even private traders in their own rights, maintaining privileged relations with both African societies and incoming stranger-traders.

34Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, 149-89.
36From the second quarter of the 18th century demographic statistics are also forthcoming, showing that the large majority of the populations in the main trade settlements were African freepersons and slaves; see Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, ch. 1 and tables.
37From Portuguese criação, or criar, to raise a child, to rear.
38Portuguese lavar cabeça, to wash (clean) the head.
Often they would also serve in towns as auxiliary soldiers, contracted on a temporary basis for the duration of military campaigns undertaken by traders or government officials.

The women (sometimes also called grumetas) tended to work in trader households as maids, nannies, nurses, cooks, bakers, seamstresses, washerwomen, etc., while at the same time visiting local and regional markets in order to secure food supplies, firewood, textiles, and the like. They formed a notable presence at these markets and fairs, and the freeborn amongst them, i.e. the tungumás or ñaras (from Portuguese senhoras, or ladies), acted as petty traders or “big women,” working for third parties or as independent merchants. Ñaras who became full-fledged entrepreneurs owned slaves and sailing vessels and ran regional trade networks, negotiating in slaves, beeswax, hides, salt, and foodstuffs for imported commodities such as iron bars, gunpowder, brandy, and beads.

These communities, residing in and around fortified (i.e. by mud walls or wooden stockades, until the first stone fort was built at Bissau in the 1760s) trade settlements, not only mediated the relay trade but also controlled it. Portuguese authorities were organized in capitâias governed by resident military governors, or capitães-mores (captains-major), who had certain coastal and riverine ports under their respective jurisdictions but exercised only a very limited authority, circumscribed to the praça or “European” centers of the trade settlements. The wards or bairros typically inhabited by the Kriston and slaves remained beyond their direct influence. From the late 17th century, Cacheu and Bissau were the administrative centers of Portugal’s two Guinean capitâias, located at the mouths of the Cacheu and Geba Rivers respectively (see map). Recognizing the important roles of the Kriston, the capitães-mores “appointed” representatives elected by the elders of particular communities, initially called “cabos da povoação” (settlement

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39Portuguese senhora, or lady. Originally the term tungumá (Port. tungomão) was used for women and men in local creole dialects, spoken in Geba, Cacheu, and Bissau, but from the 17th century onwards the term was used only for free women born in trade settlements. For more information on women traders in the nineteenth century, see George E. Brooks, “A Nhara of the Guinea Bissau region: Mãe Aurélia Correia,” in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.), Women and Slavery in Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983): 293-319; Brooks, Western Africa, 197-226; Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, 255-310; Havik, “From Pariahs to Patriots”.
heads) and thereafter “juiz (legislar) do povo” (people’s judge).⁴⁰ These officials were responsible for regulating the relay trade amongst the members of their communities in legal, business and security terms; they also acted as power brokers with the capitâncias and with private traders, and also between the latter and native communities. Thus they exercised considerable influence, not only in economic but also in political terms, negotiating conditions of trade (access, supplies, prices, taxes, penalties and fines, disputes, etc.), while controlling the riverine traffic (navigation, transport, exchange, wage rates, fares, etc.) Essentially, they were the governors’ ears and eyes, informing them about the state of affairs in the interior, trading opportunities, indigenous institutions, and practices, while also acting as interpreters, riverine police, and recruiters of labor and auxiliaries. Thus, by the 18th century, the “juizes do povo” and the Christianized communities they represented had made themselves indispensable as economic, political, and cultural brokers of the regional relay networks in the Guinea Bissau region.

2. Land and crops

The shift from slaving to commodity exports in the 19th century profoundly altered the relations among Europeans, Africans, and brokerage groups along the West African coast and its hinterland by shifting the focus of exchanges to crops, and thereby to land. Until the 1860s, the slave and agricultural commodity trades were carried on simultaneously by local agents, as slaves were put to work on makeshift plantations or pontas, usually situated on the banks of rivers and creeks, which doubled as factories or trading posts. The need for land re-centered attention on intermediaries capable of negotiating usufruct rights with local communities and of overseeing the logistics of ponta agriculture. The Kriston and other populations, who already produced staple crops (such as rice, millet, and maize) on a small scale to satisfy their own needs and supply to vessels while negotiating larger bulk supplies for trade settlements with local farmers, were well placed to do so. The trade in commodities also created new opportunities for populations with notable farming skills that had hitherto played marginal roles in exchange.

⁴⁰In Portugal, these artisan guilds, also called the Casas dos Vinte e Quatro, which were found in Lisbon, Coimbra, and Oporto, were represented on the respective town councils by the juiz do vinte e quatro, renamed juiz do povo from the 1620s, elected by the different professions or “misteres”; see Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, 135-6.
networks, such as the Felpue and Balanta, who were widely known as expert rice cultivators.\textsuperscript{41}

As a result of Portugal’s liberal revolution (1820-1822), the independence of Brazil (1822), and the costly civil war (1828-1834), the monarchy turned towards its African possessions for revenues. Reforms centralized administration in its overseas possessions under civilian governors (rather than military officers) and created new districts and municipalities (from the 1850s). Other European states also aspired to extend their control in the region. France, after regaining St. Louis and other ports to the north in 1817 following the Napoleonic wars, in the 1820s embarked upon an ambitious program of concluding treaties with local rulers while introducing (initially failed) plantation schemes for the production of peanuts.\textsuperscript{42} Although the ongoing trades in slaves and the distrust of indigenous rulers fearing European occupation, temporarily stood in the way of the successful introduction of export crops, following governor Faidherbe’s campaigns after the 1850s, Senegal eventually became the site of rapid colonial expansion backed by French trading houses based in Bordeaux and Marseille. These initiatives, together with the crisis in the 1840s in the market for Senegambian tree resins (gums), the lowering of import duties in France, and abolition of the slave trade in 1848, would eventually spell the end of the Eur-African intermediaries in that region,\textsuperscript{43} who had effectively mediated trade networks along the Senegal River to African kingdoms in the interior (Gajaaga, etc.). Further south in French Guinea, similar trends marginalized such local traders and brokers as the djiłas, who became subordinated to European trading houses towards the end of the 1800s.\textsuperscript{44} All these relay networks were increasingly


\textsuperscript{43}Brooks, "Peanuts and Colonialism," 39-40; Barry, \textit{Senegambia}, 141.

\textsuperscript{44}Odile Goerg, "Les entreprises guinéennes de commerce; destruction ou adaptation (fin. XIX s.1913)," in Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (ed.), \textit{Actes du Colloque Entreprises et entrepreneurs en Afrique (Xixe et Xxe siècles)} (2 vols.) (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1983), 1: 165-79.
subjected to regulations meant to restrict indigenous traders while reinforcing foreign companies’ revenues.45

When the British successfully introduced peanuts in the Gambia in the 1830s, cultivation of these oilseeds rapidly spread to the Petite Côte, the Casamance, Portuguese Guinea, and the Rivières du Sud, becoming a parallel source of income for trading companies and private traders still engaged in the slave trade.46 In these areas beyond the control of European authorities and trading companies, local intermediaries thrived as they continued to negotiate commercial exchanges with incoming European traders and their agents and indigenous suppliers.47 In view of the autonomy that Kriston communities enjoyed, their strategic location and their strong kinship and clientship ties with most ethnic groups inhabiting the area within the tidal reach, they were well placed to act as regional power, commercial, and culture brokers. However, given that their position and actions were contested both by Portuguese and by native authorities, they regularly came into conflict with traders, military officials, and monopoly companies.48 On account of their hybrid culture (spatial mobility, flexible marriage arrangements, syncretic cosmology, and speakers of both ethnic languages and Creole) but also their alleged lack of education, reliability and unruly behavior (incl. violence, alcohol abuse, etc.), official sources treated them with great ambivalence.49

Thus, when quests for land to produce commodities for export heightened the need for bargaining and conflict management, European trading houses and local traders sought alternatives to the Kriston. They increa-

48See the derogatory comments made by an influential trader and official, Joaquim António de Mattos, regarding Kriston as unfit to play a role in the settlement and cultivation of the island of Bolama: “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 (...)”; Joaquim António de Mattos, Bissau 175-4830; Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Lisbon) (AHU), Conselho Ultramarino, Guiné, cx. 24.
49Havik, Silences and Soundbytes, 138-41.
ingly recruited canoe men and pilots from other local communities such as the Manjaco and Mancane living in the littoral region between Cacheu and Bissau, but also Mandinga from the savanna region in the East.\textsuperscript{50} By the 1880s, these groups effectively shared control the riverine relay trade with the Kriston.\textsuperscript{51} However, traders and officials also made distinctions among these different go-betweens, in accordance with their schooling and creole dialects. A governor, himself a member of a local mercantile lineage or gan, contrasted Kriston from Bissau with those from Cacheu, as having acquired some literary skills and crafts.\textsuperscript{52} Then again, another “filho da terra” identified different creole vernaculars in the towns of Cacheu, Bissau, Geba and Ziguinchor, and Bolama while also distinguishing between the manners of speaking of those whose families had long been established in the towns and others who had recently migrated there.\textsuperscript{53}

By the 1840s, members of other coastal communities (i.e. Balanta, Pepel, Biafada, Bijagó) were also being recruited as freepersons in order to work the pontas along the Casamance and Cacheu rivers and tributaries, the Rio Grande inlet, and the islands of Bolama and Gallinhas.\textsuperscript{54} Settlement and usufruct rights to these pontas were negotiated with elders and chiefs of res-

\textsuperscript{50}(Tribes) such as the Birames (Brame or Mancane) and Mandiagos (Manjaco) who hire themselves as sailors and work until they have earned sufficient to marry and return to their own country to settle.” Mollien, \textit{Voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique}, 342. A similar habitude was observed at the time amongst the Kru or Kroomen from Sierra Leone, whose “object of leaving home and entering the service of navigators, is generally to obtain the means of purchasing wives, the number of whom constitutes a man’s importance.” Horatio Bridge, \textit{Journal of an African Cruiser: Comprising Sketches of the Canaries, the Cape de Verds, Liberia, Madeira, Sierra Leone, and Other Places of Interest on the West Coast of Africa} (ed. Nathanial Hawthorne) (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853), 17.

\textsuperscript{51}“Commercial navigation in the region is in the hands of grumetes and manjacos”; F. A. Marques Geraldes, “Guiné portuguesa: comunicação a Sociedade de Geographia sobre esta provincia e suas condições,” \textit{Boletim da Sociedade de Geographia de Lisboa} 7a série, 8 (1887): 514.

\textsuperscript{52}However, do allow me to note that the grumetes of Bissau are different from those of this government (Cacheu); and that they have been taught to read and thereby belittle the craft they have learned, becoming traders (‘mercadores’).” Barreto, 16-12-1845, in Jaime Walter, \textit{Honorio Pereira Barreto: biografia, documentos “Memoria sobre o estado actual da Senegambia Portuguesa”} (Bissau: Centro de Estudos da Guinea Portuguesa, 1947), 83.

\textsuperscript{53}Marcelino Marques de Barros, “O Guineense: vocabulário português-guineense,” \textit{Revista Lusitana} (Lisbon) 7 (1902): 82-96; 166-88; 268-82, and especially 288, 296-7. The author, a Catholic priest born in Guinea but trained in Portugal, saw the latter group, the so called “descendidos”, i.e. those who had “descended from the interior” as speaking “the least pure and correct” creole.

\textsuperscript{54}Bowman, \textit{Legitimate Commerce}, 94.
ident founding lineages with the help of Kriston and other local brokers. As land became an increasingly coveted asset, impoverished immigrants from the Cape Verde Islands, fleeing drought and famine, sought to hire sailors, canoemen, pilots, interpreters, auxiliaries, foremen, and clerks in order to manage the daily operations of their factories. Whereas slave labor for cultivation was common initially, the incursions of British cruisers targeting slave shipments and slaving ports in the 1820s and 1830s and British occupation of Bolama Island (between the 1850s and 1870) led to the exodus of slaves from coastal and riverine ports and pontas. Suppression of slaving stimulated the emergence of a regional labor market, in which such brokers as the Kriston recruited freepersons from the interior to work pontas as sharecroppers or in the peanut relay trade. At the same time, Kriston, Manjaco, and Mancanhe engaged in the resale of peanuts and other commodities in coastal areas, investing their gains in bride wealth and in their own businesses. When taxes were first levied in the 1850s by newly established municipal councils in Bissau and Cacheu, followed by Bolama in the 1880s, significantly, the grumetes were exempt from payment.

By the time the peanut boom ended, in the 1880s, owing to inter-ethnic conflict and a steep drop on European markets in prices for vegetable oils, European military campaigns had already made some incursions against native groups in the Upper Guinea interior, usually with the aid of grumete auxiliaries. Portuguese authorities continued to rely on the Kriston until 1912, when a newly appointed military commander opted for the deployment of African mercenaries from the Muslim Fulbe and Mande in the interior savanna. He aimed to force coastal groups into submission and gain administrative control over “rebellious” “animist” communities (Manjaco, Mancanhe, Pepel, Felupe, Balanta, and Bijagó) and Christianized strata (Kriston)


56As Bowman, Legitimate Commerce, 96, notes, the refusal of the Biafada and Fula to supply labor to the pontas on the banks of the Rio Grande, forced ponteiros to look elsewhere. They thus used Manjaco and Mancanhe canoemen to act as go-betweens to recruit workers amongst their own communities; see Havik, “A Commanding Commercial Position.”

57Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP), Arquivo Histórico Nacional, Fundo da Câmara Municipal de Bissau, At.1.4., edital no. 3, 8-9-1855.

in the littoral regions. This new military alliance reduced the ability of these groups in coastal areas to act as brokers and meant that the Kriston, who had been long-standing allies of Portuguese authorities, now found themselves on the receiving end of Portuguese military campaigns of “pacification.” The Kriston saw their control over commercial exchange eroded also by a (military) administration (from 1892) that was rapidly establishing control in the hitherto inaccessible interior, above all after overthrow of the monarchy in Portugal in 1910.

An internal alliance composed of trader/planters, Kriston, and exiles (condemned by courts or governors, often for political reasons, the so-called degredados) opposed the colonial military high command and established the Liga Guineense in the same year, which was legalized in 1911.59 This nascent civil society took its cue from the new republican regime in Portugal, which introduced sweeping political reforms.60 Although short-lived, the Liga signaled the beginning of a new era marked by political, economic and social tensions as local populations sought to adapt to the imposition of a colonial administration, while attempting to secure a social and economic niche for themselves. It also heralded the birth of a civil society cultivating republican, nativist, and proto-nationalist sentiments, which were to nurture the seeds of future nationalist opposition to the colonial regime in the 1960s.

One of the effects of these intense and violent campaigns in the interior was the exodus of populations fleeing from areas of conflict, where villages and crops were burned to the ground, cattle rounded up by mercenaries, and residents subjected to physical abuse and terror.61 The destructive impact of these events was not lost on urbanized strata, which directed letters and pamphlets denouncing military intervention and the abuses committed by the military command and the draconian attitudes of governors appointed by Lisbon.62 The republican movement in Portugal, with which the Liga


60Fernando Rosas and Maria Fernanda Rollo (eds.), História da primeira República Portuguesa (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2010).


62Mendy, Colonialismo português em África, 329-47; Trajano, “Polymorphic Creoledom,”
and its members maintained ties, and political exiles from other colonies such as Cape Verde and São Tomé radicalized the opposition in the civil service and in local commerce against the progressive marginalization of local intermediaries.\textsuperscript{63} The passing of a bill in 1912 which laid the foundations for a “modern” civil administration, replaced the *juizes de povo* by appointing ethnic chiefs or *régulos* as the Portuguese authorities’ principal intermediaries with local populations.\textsuperscript{64} The loss of their political influence, as littoral groups with whom they maintained close ties (i.e. the Manjaco and Pepel) were forced into submission, deepened existing tensions, which were further exacerbated by the banning of the *Liga Guineense* (in 1915) and by the intrigues of European powers (i.e. France and Germany) against the background of World War I.\textsuperscript{65} The curious amalgam of Kriston nativists with different ethnic roots, members of local trade lineages, Cape Verdean traders and planters, and exiles with an axe to grind organized in competing *grémios* (or clubs) in Bissau and Bolama, produced an extremely tense period in Portuguese Guinea until the 1920s.\textsuperscript{66}

3. Planters, brokers and pioneers

The involvement of the Kriston in legitimate commerce and export agriculture of the nineteenth century is one of the neglected aspects of their communities. Although some sources acknowledge their important role in the relay trade

\textsuperscript{274-313.}


\textsuperscript{64}Regulamento das Circunscrições civis da Província da Guiné, Lisbon, 1912; in: *Boletim Oﬁcial da Guiné Portuguesa* 42 (24-10-1912).

\textsuperscript{65}Havik, “Esta ‘Libéria Portuguesa’,” 127-9. While Cape Verdeans were purported to be germanophiles, Kriston were said to sympathize with the French, not in the least owing to their long-standing bonds with neighboring Senegal. *Grumetes* were accused of fomenting all kinds of intrigue, while carrying on arms smuggling operations with rebellious groups (such as the Pepel and Bijagó) in Portuguese Guinea.

\textsuperscript{66}These factional struggles would dominate the political stage in the colony between 1910 and 1920, as Lisbon attempted to control the situation by means of a succession of gubernatorial appointments, while ordering enquiries into the alleged scandals; see Trajano Filho, “Polymorphic Creolom,” ch. 3; Havik, “Esta ‘Libéria Portuguesa’”. French sources refer to the presence of “groups of young Catholics” known as the “Parti Capverdien” or the “Christians” - distinguished from the “parti Européen”—who displayed “revolutionary as well as separatist sentiments”. The Kriston had apparently gained considerable influence at gubernatorial level at the time; Martial Merlin, Governor-General AOF, Dakar, 16-10-1919, to Ministère des Colonies, Paris; Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer (CAOM), Fonds Ministériels (FM), 597.
slaves, ivory, hides, and salt), they seem largely to ignore their role as planters or ponteiros. Written sources tend to concern themselves with Portuguese and above all Cape Verdean planters who rapidly expanded peanut agriculture in Guinea, and fellow countrymen eulogized their alleged pioneering role. These abundant references to “Luso-Africans,” “Euro-Africans,” “Portuguese,” and “Europeans” also neglect the initiatives of other, native African communities. Some scholars have attempted to redress these imbalances, discussing the role of Bantara rice growers in the political changes that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. Portuguese claims to such areas as the Río Grande, where most of the hundred or so pontas were located between 1860 and 1880, were also largely justified by the presence of “Portuguese” and “Cape Verdean” planters.

Recent research has found that the Cape Verdians were only part of the story. Indeed, the pioneers of export crop cultivation on pontas in the Guinea Bissau region were women of Kristen origin, such as Mãe Júlia da Silva Cardozo and Mãe Aurélia Correia, who, in partnership with Portuguese and Cape Verdean officials, settled insular locations off the Guinea coast from the early 1830s. These आरा acts as brokers, proprietors, and entrepreneurs, negotiating usufruct rights with dignitaries from such native communities as the Bijagó, on Gallinhas and Bolama islands, acquiring plots, owning and employing slaves on their plantations, hiring (free) workers, buying exchange goods, and exporting crops as the owners of trade houses and plantations. The Portuguese administration and native elders and chiefs often requested their services as commercial and power brokers. They themselves employed members of Kristen communities, as well as Pepel, Manjaco, Mancanhe, and Mandinga laborers, for the relay and the ponta trades. By the 1850s these “big” women and their (female) siblings were leading the effort to revive an ailing economy based upon slave trafficking, under considerable pressure from British cruisers roaming the African west coast.

67Brooks, “Peanuts and Colonialism”; Bowman, Legitimate Commerce.
69Brooks, “Peanuts and Colonialism,” 46-7; Bowman, Legitimate Commerce, 89.
The entrepreneurial role of the Kriston was not limited to coastal areas but also extended to the interior as far as the extent of the tidal reach. The different trading posts along these rivers were occupied by Kriston communities, cultivating staple crops such as rice, maize, and millet as well as fruits and vegetables for their own subsistence and to supply the passing canoes. For example, in the mid 19th century official reports refer to their small villages, barracoons, and rice fields dotting the banks of the Cacheu River. The largest and most important Kriston community was to be found in the town of Geba, which, with a population of thousands of freepersons and slaves, formed one of the main regional centers of their society and culture. When the slave trade began to peter out in the 1860s, Geba soon lost its pivotal position in the region, and many Kriston sought opportunities elsewhere in the ponta and commodity trades. In the 1870s, some of Geba's inhabitants found new opportunities further downstream in Bafulatá, where the Geba and Colufí Rivers met. Planting peanuts in the fertile soils of the Bafulatá plain proved successful, and fellow Kriston and other traders followed over the next decades, whereby the town gained in size and importance. In spite of the end of the peanut boom in the 1880s, Bafulatá's strategic location soon made it also a key entrepôt in the relay trade (mainly cattle, hides, textiles, and salt). The influx of Lebanese and Syrian traders who established themselves in the interior—and not only in Portuguese Guinea but also in neighboring Senegal and French Guinea—from the early 1900s onwards introduced a new stratum of intermediaries to the region, competing with Cape Verdean and Kriston groups. The latter were particularly active in the North of the colony, in the Costa de Baixo area, pertaining to the Manjaco, which became an

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72. (... ) where some of the sales clerks working for traders from Farim and Cacheu live, and also on these banks some “barracas” (Kr: trading posts) on pontas (Port: lit. huts or houses) of grutas from Farim who cultivate rice there”; Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Cabo Verde, Guiné, Papéis Avulsos, cx. 348: OF. 92, GGP-GCV, Bissau 14-10-1867. The villages in question were Jagali, Batur, Cansambú on the left bank, and Genicó on the right bank.


74Once economic activity revived again following the conclusion of the military campaigns, the areas surrounding Bafulatá and Bambadina would become the main centers of peanut production in Portuguese Guinea which reached its peak in the 1950s.

75Edouard Hostains, French consul, Bissau, 18-7-1918, to Ministère des Affaires Étrangers (MAE), Paris; Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer, Archives NS, 580. These Lebanese immigrants were mainly Druze, and mostly Muslims, thus allowing them to build privileged relations with Islamized groups such as the Fula and Mandinga in the east of the colony. At the time, Portuguese officials remained skeptical of their intentions; see Gustave de Coutoulby, French Consul, Bissau, 28-9-1916, to MAE, Paris; CAOM, FM 1291.
important source of rubber and palm kernels, while many Manjacos (and also Mancanhes) outmigrated to the peanut cultivating areas in the Casamance and further.\footnote{Gustave de Coutouly, French Consul, Bissau, 7-11-1916, to MAE, Paris; CAOM, FM 1291.}

Another area that attracted the attention of the Kriston was the Quinara region between the left bank of the Geba River and the Río Grande inlet. Inhabited by the Biafadá, who were closely related to the Pepel on the island of Bissau and also to the Kriston—both in Bissau and above all in the town of Geba—the low-lying area was divided by creeks and well-suited to the growth of such crops as paddy rice. Given that the Biafadá typically grew rain-fed rice and other crops such as maize and peanuts on higher ground ("pam-pam"), they showed little interest in exploring the mangrove-lined banks of the region. Thus, when Kriston from Bissau and Bolama proposed to cultivate the floodplains, Biafadá elders agreed, as long as they paid dawa (dash) to the djagra, or chief, from one of the three founding matrilineages in the areas of settlement. The director of the colony’s customs, Cesar Correia Pinto, a Kriston of Biafadá descent, who also owned a ponta further upstream along the Geba River in Bambadinca, in all likelihood acted as a broker in the process. But the Kriston’s long-established inter-ethnic networks were also mobilized; for example, the Balanta with whom juizes do povo of Bissau, such as Domingos Lacó, maintained close relations. Indeed, in the course of the 1880s, many juizes became planters in their own right, a kind of male counterpart to the female ſaras of the era. Ponteiros had already made overtures in the 1890s to convince the Portuguese authorities to give safe-conducts to Balanta farmers to establish themselves across the Geba River in and around Jabadá, where a factory or feitoria was located.\footnote{At the time, the authorities refused permission on the grounds that Balanta and Biafadá did not get on well together which could cause unrest in an already troubled region. The said factory pertained to a French company, Blanchard & Cie, producing sugar cane and distilling rum (kana) used as payment for the services of native labor. Other pontas were also located in the area, in the 1880s and 1890s, such as São Francisco and Gam Lucunda. For more information on southward migrations of the Balanta Brassa, see Diana L. Handem, Nature et fonctionnement du pourvoir chez les Balanta Brassa (Bissau: INEP, 1986): 33.} Kriston were already particularly active as ponteiros in and around the Farim area, where they recruited Balanta farmers to work sugar and peanut plantations that emerged there in the late 1880s and early 1900s.\footnote{M. Maclaud, Franco-Portuguese Frontier Delimitation Expedition, São Domingos, 15-4-1904, to Governor-General, Dakar; CAOM, FM 1030.} Then, in the 1910s Kriston trader-planters again successfully recruited Balanta farmers from the Mansoa region, ferrying them across
the Geba River in their own canoes in order to settle and cultivate areas in Quíara designated by Biafada elders for that purpose.

The moves of the Kriston to this region were direct results of the military campaigns of the early Portuguese republic, first against the Balanta (in 1913-1914) and then against the Pepel—and the Kriston themselves—in 1915. After fierce opposition and resistance, Balanta and Pepel communities were forced to surrender, and many were killed in the conflict. These highly destructive campaigns, as documented by Pélissier,79 were also the subject of reports by the military high command.80 The latter, as well as travelers, clearly identified the Kriston, often called grumetes, as the main culprits for inciting the Pepel to resist,81 while foreign diplomatic sources and the internal opposition strongly condemned the violence and terror carried out by soldiers and auxiliaries and the disastrous effects on trade in the region.82 For the Kriston, the military campaigns, and above all the abolition of the *Liga Guineense* and the suppression of the *juizes do povo* in all major towns (incl. Bissau and the capital Bolama), constituted a threat to the nascent civil society of the colony.83 The formation of a Kriston diaspora in rural areas was clearly associated with their

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81 As a Portuguese military officer put it after a campaign against the Pepel: “That time the grumetes declared themselves openly against us, and this time they said they were with us. But they’re always the same people; they juggle with a double edged sword (...)” Manuel Pinheiro Chagas, *A Africa portuguesa* (Lisboa: Typ. da Loteria da Santa Casa da Misericórdia, 1908): 103. The commander in chief reinforced this stance: “All the grumetes of Bissau, including the best placed, supported by the *Liga Guineense*, did everything to stop the war.” Teixeira Pinto, *A ocupação da Guiné*, 182. A foreign traveler confirmed this point of view: “Personally I am convinced that the Kristons are behind the affair, who incited the far from war-hungry Pepel to rebel. (...) The Kriston are behind every innate, devilish trick, behind every uprising of the negroes”; H. Homsman, *En Jongeman in Afrika* (Amsterdam: Buyten en Schipperheyn, 1956): 95-97.
82 The British consul based in Banjul, The Gambia, reported on a visit to PG that a reign of “terror” by means of raids and razzias had taken hold of the region with the connivance of the Portuguese authorities and had led to “the greatest atrocities and barbarities” being committed by African auxiliaries; Braithwaite Wallis, London, January 1913, National Archives/Public Records Office, Foreign Office FO 367/342. The internal opposition associated with the *Liga Guineense*, also accused the military command and the governor of carrying out and condoning violence and abuse on the population as well as causing serious problems for the Bissau trading community; Loff de Vasconcellos, *A defesa das vítimas da Guerra de Bissau: o exterminio da Guiné* (Lisbon: Imp. Libanio da Silva, 1916), 22.
attempts to flee the political and military turmoil and seek new opportunities to guarantee their livelihoods.

Owing to the focus of the conflict in the north, the area south of Bissau was largely neglected by both officials and private traders. Immediately south of the Rio Grande inlet lay the Tombali region, which the Franco-Portuguese frontier treaty of 1886 ceded to Portugal (in exchange for the Lower Casamance) and which would remain unintegrated until the 1940s. In the 1910s, few recognized the economic potential of these regions, with numerous rivers and creeks lined by mangroves, largely unknown to outsiders, despite their fertile alluvial soils. By the early 1900s the canoemen, grumetes mostly of Pepel descent, still controlled trade on the Geba River, but by that time they had already fanned out across the region as a result of the crop export trade and their involvement as auxiliaries in the intensifying military campaigns.\textsuperscript{84} Some well-placed Portuguese and foreign observers credited the Kriston with an admirably entrepreneurial spirit, contrasting them with the creolized strata, mainly composed of Cape Verdeans, whom they dismissed as “grandiloquent and apathetic.”\textsuperscript{85}

The Kriston were familiar with rice production, on account of their own subsistence agriculture and their close kinship relations with the (paddy) rice-growing Pepel (in the Bissau area), Manjaco (in and around Cacheu), Mandinga (in Geba and Bafatâ), and Balanta (in Mansoa and Farim areas). But the trade between Pepel and Balanta, and the importance of the Balanta’s rice farming to supply towns such as Bissau as well as incoming shipping, provided them with useful ties and insider knowledge. By the mid-1910s, the Kriston were already well established in the Quinara region, having mobilized Balanta farmers to cultivate the fertile mangrove-lined banks

\textsuperscript{84} The grumetes (mainly associated with the Pepel) have the monopoly of trade and navigation in the waters of Portuguese Guinea; one finds their ‘puntas’ or factories on all the navigable tributaries of the Cacheu, Geba, Rio Grande and Cassini rivers; one also finds them at Carabane, at Ziguinchor, at Bathurst, on the Nunez river and even at Gorée.” M. Maclaud, “La distribution géographique des races sur la Côte Occidentale d’Afrique de la Gambie à la Mellacorée,” Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive 21 (1) (1906): 82-110; and especially 190.

\textsuperscript{85} Maclaud, an officer of the joint Franco-Portuguese frontier demarcation expedition, S. Domingos, 15-4-1904, to the Governor General in St. Louis; CAOM, FM 1030. A Portuguese governor commented that: “The male grumetes are generally employed in petty trade, or on their own account or as intermediaries, and also as masters of riverine shipping. The women are employed in domestic jobs and carry out small transactions with the natives throughout the colony”; Carlos Pereira, La Guinée Portugaise (subsidies pour son étude) (Lisbon: A Editora Lda., 1914), 30.
of the rivers. A knowledgeable foreign diplomat credited them with the initiative for the internal migration of the Balanta and the “purely native colonization” of a region in which Portuguese administration showed little interest. The source, the French consul in Bissau, dated the southward move of the Kriston to the campaign against the Pepel in 1908, their presence growing rapidly again after the campaigns in 1915. 86 Having obtained land concessions on the banks of the Quínara River—from Biafada lineage chiefs or djagras—they were now producing rice with the aid of Balanta farmers.

The latter had migrated southwards as a result of the great population density and the lack of arable plots in the north; but the military campaigns against them in the period 1912-1915 and the despotic reign of the leader of the mercenaries in the Oio region, appointed in 1915 as régulo or chief by the Portuguese authorities, also caused them to seek greener pastures. 87 Balanta producers quickly adapted to the region’s marshy eco-system, building dams in creeks for their paddy rice fields or bolanhas on alluvial soils well suited to cultivation of paddy rice. 88

A report by the French consul to the Governor-General of the French West Africa (Afrique de l’Ouest Française, or AOF) in Dakar in 1918 described the Kriston as “classe à part”, whose historical roots in towns such as Bissau, Cacheu, and Geba, i.e. of “Kriston families”, went back more than three centuries. 89 He praised them for being the true explorers and developers of “Portuguese” Guinea, which was in the process of transformation from a collection of dispersed trade settlements to a territorial colony with its own administration. However, the report acknowledged that the small number of Portuguese and Cape Verdan officials and traders, far from actually acting as colonizers, showed little or no interest in the south, thus allowing the Kriston to take the initiative in that region: “The Kriston appear to be the

86édouard Hostains to Governor-General, Dakar, Bissau, 30-11-1918; CAOM, ANS 580.
88They were cultivating species commonly grown amongst the Balanta Brassia, i.e. aliou and akia.
89Cette classe à part des Christons habite les vieilles villes de la colonie, Bissau, Cacheu, Geba etc. d’ou ils essaient pour fonder des exploitations agricoles. Certaines familles existent toujours depuis plus de 300 ans et peuvent paraît-il le prouver”; Édouard Hostains, Bissau, 30-11-1918 to Governor-General, Dakar; CAOM, ANS (Archives Nationaux du Sénégal) 580.
real and only colonizing agents of Portuguese Guinea.”⁹⁰ They were developing Guinea by establishing pontas not only along the Quíñara River but also along the banks of the Geba and Cacheu rivers. Given that administrative authorities were interested only in extracting taxes, Kristen planters had seized the opportunity owing to their “intelligence” and marked “sense of realism.” The Kristen travelled to the Balanta areas in the north and mobilized “entire families,” whom they lodged on their pontas, giving them parcels of land to cultivate as sharecroppers. Thus, these Kristen ponteiros followed the system put in place in the 19th century during the peanut boom along the Rio Grande, i.e. obliging croppers to hand over their entire rice harvests, subsequently selling the produce with considerable profit, and monopolizing the sale of exchange commodities. Not surprisingly, the Kristen ponteiros were accused of exploiting Balanta farmers. The latter, at least initially, were actually tenant farmers subjected to an extractive regime (“fermage usuraire”), which tended to leave them with little if any livestock. The Balanta, who set great store by cattle as social capital, bought cows and cattle with the revenues they earned but were then forced in times of need to sell the animals to buy rice from the ponteiros at inflated prices.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the French consul prophetically regarded the Balanta as “the race of the future” for Portuguese Guinea and the development of its agricultural potential, acknowledging that the AOF did not have any community within its borders with “similar qualities.” Indeed, they would settle in not only Quíñara but also from the 1910s onwards in the Tombali region further south, thereby greatly expanding floodplain crop cultivation and turning these regions into the main rice producing areas of the colony.⁹² Thus the reputation of Balanta farmers as hardworking and skilled rice growers would spread throughout Guinea during the colonial period.⁹³ The Kristen

⁹⁰Hostains to Governor-General, Bissau, 30-11-1918; CAOM, ANS 580. “Les Christons sont les promoteurs de cette mise en valeur progressive de la colonie.”
⁹¹Kristen ponteiros bought the rice at half the going rate in markets in Portuguese Guinea.
⁹³In a report by the head of the services responsible for overseeing native labor, the Balanta are depicted as “the essential base for the economic development of the colony, above all from the point of view of native agriculture (...) above all paddy rice. (...) And we owe all this [the expansion of rice cultivation] to this prodigious Balanta race.” A. F. Borja Santos, Relatório do ano 1942, Bissau, 20-10-1943, Curadoria Geral dos Trabalhadores Indígenas da
however were to be increasingly portrayed by the Portuguese administration as maverick traders and farmers who took every opportunity to exploit their fellow Guineans, smuggling seeds, crops and alcoholic spirits to attract unsuspecting farmers.

4. Conclusions

The case of the Kriston in Portuguese Guinea illustrates the need for a reassessment of brokerage with the aid of anthropological and historical approaches, in its multiple forms in general and more in particular in an African context. On the basis of the data presented above, the Kriston’s mediation in the Guinea Bissau region also requires careful consideration in view of its longevity, spanning several centuries, and the multiple forms it adopted, i.e. economic, political, and cultural, as the regional and local circumstances changed. Their notable capacity to explore the geographical conditions, local kinship and clientelistic networks, entrepreneurial opportunities and the weakness of the Portuguese presence in the region, underlines the fact that their brokerage roles are fundamental to an understanding of the region’s checkered history. Notably, their contribution to the dynamics of interaction between the different ethnic groups, incoming traders and planters, and the colonial administration stands out as a key marker of the transition from the proto-colonial to the colonial era. Notably, their expanding of the notion and practice of brokerage in the nineteenth and twentieth century to include trade, settlement and agriculture, thereby assuming roles generally attributed to incoming strangers from Cape Verde or Portugal, shows to what extent they acted as pioneers in the region.

The emergence of these native go-betweens and the formation of cross-ethnic communities with hybrid identities and syncretic cosmologies, like the Kriston of Portuguese Guinea, was a direct result of the conjuncture and organization of Afro-Atlantic trade. In this respect their agency evokes parallels with other areas along the West African coast, from Senegal to An-

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Colônia da Guiné; AHU, Inspeção Superior da Administração Ultramarina (ISAU), 1725.

94 See Philip J. Havik, Crossing Frontiers, Breaking Down Barriers: Reconsidering Anthropological and Historical Approaches to Brokerage and the Colonial Encounter (forthcoming, 2012)

95 Dias, “Novas identidades africanas.”
gola. Intermediaries who linked littoral areas to the interior over land or by water became key economic and political players by building relay networks connecting Atlantic traders with the coastal regions’ hinterlands and serving as go-betweens for a weak European administration. With time, they gained a significant autonomy vis-à-vis “ethnic” or resident African societies, to whom they were related by kinship and marriage, becoming traders in their own rights. While the processes by which these intermediary communities emerged differed from region to region, there were marked similarities in their social dynamics of cross-cultural interaction. Over time, they were to demonstrate their adaptability to changing economic and political conditions, by diversifying, deepening and extending their action radius, networks and influence, whilst maintaining a great flexibility in their relations with African societies and with European and non-European outsiders.

Over time, Kriston communities built and retained strong ties with African societies, mercantile lineages, private stranger-traders, and European military and civil administrations. Owing to the long established custom of placing their own children in villages in the interior and accommodating those of their ethnic relatives as wards amongst their trading contacts, African as well as Atlantic, they achieved great familiarity with indigenous cultures and also with European trading houses and incoming stranger traders. Their spatial and social proximity to the centers of European trade and government made them indispensable actors in transactions between the latter and the interior. For over three centuries they exercised a marked control over riverine exchanges of iron bars, firearms, gunpowder, and textiles for gold, ivory, slaves, beeswax, hides, and salt. Their syncretic cosmology enabled them to blend “animist” beliefs with Christian elements, worshipping local shrines while also receiving Christian baptism. In addition, they fostered the emergence of the main lingua franca in the Senegambian and Guinean region, i.e. Guinean Creole or Kriol, while also mastering Portuguese and French. Their knowledge of French grew out of their close relations with regional entrepôts such as St. Louis and Gorée, on account of the coastal trade, further consolidated by the peanut boom, which strengthened ties with the French trading houses exporting to Marseille.97

96See Barry and Harding Commerce et commerçants en Afrique de l’Ouest for Senegal, and Dias “Changing Patterns of Power” and “Novas identidades africanas” for Angola.

97The French consul informs that many of them had received their education in the AOF
The shift in the 1830’s and 1840’s from exporting slaves to the cultivation of export crops tested the commercial acumen and cross-cultural skills of the Kriston, as they mediated between aspiring trader-planters and African communities over land and settlement rights. As brokers multiplied on account of these negotiations which included the supply of produce, commodities and labor, as well as the mediation of quarrels and conflicts, the demand and competition for mediation grew among outsider traders, ethnic communities, and a Portuguese colonial administration-in-the-making. However, the scramble for land and crops accentuated the notion that the Kriston formed a native stratum with its own particular interests, which did not necessarily square with the ambitions of government officials, trading houses, and planters to gain economic and political control. While a number of ēnas or ‘big women’ gained unassailable positions as traders, planters, and power brokers in the region, other Kriston actors such as the juizes do povo also became independent political actors. The military campaigns waged by Portugal from the last quarter of the 1800s would heighten this awareness of diverging interests and accelerate attempts to curb the role of the Kriston in general and the juizes do povo in particular. As these campaigns began to gain strength, Kriston resistance to their marginalization as regional intermediaries increased. The subsequent radicalization of their position in the political infighting that followed the Portuguese Republic in 1910, illustrated by the short-lived Liga Guineense, formed the backdrop for their internal migration and the extension of their networks into previously unexplored areas.

The role of the Kriston in expanding rice cultivation and their close collaboration with Balanta farmers has so far been largely neglected, in favor of Portuguese and Cape Verdean trader-planters, whose contributions have been emphasized in the literature and in official reports. Whereas a few authors referred to their southwards migration in conjunction with the Balanta producers, the emphasis of official Portuguese sources has largely been on the role of the latter, above all in connection with a number of big pon-

(e.g. in St. Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Conakry) where they learned to read and write, and continued to send their children there. The artisans amongst them also learned their trades in schools in the AOF; Thostains, Bissau, 30-II-1918; CAOM, ANS, 580. One may conclude therefore that the Kriston should not be regarded as “Luso-Africans,” as Mota, Contactos culturais, and other scholars have done, but as an Afro-Atlantic social stratum whose cultural references went far beyond the “Lusophone” context.
teiros in the Tombalí region.\textsuperscript{98} The fact that this region would become the major rice producing region from the 1940s is by no means incidental. On account of the “opening up” of the south by the Kriston, the surface area covered by paddies increased rapidly, so that by the mid 1930s Guinea was actually exporting rice. Despite the fact that the colony boasted agricultural and extension services from the 1920s, these had little or no impact on these successes in the south, given the colonial focus at the time on the more densely populated and commercially developed north and east. In addition, official figures regarding land concessions do not reflect the dynamic that took place in the Quinara region, as Kriston planters usually obtained usufruct rights to their parcels from African “landlords” belonging to one of the three founding Biafada matri-lineages in the area. As the colonial authorities began to scrutinize land concessions and agricultural production in the 1930s and 1940s, the legal validity of their holdings came under fire, causing a significant number to lose their titles.

Until the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Kriston had been depicted in Portuguese sources as an urbanized stratum of canoemen and petty traders; from the early 1900s onwards this image was replaced by one of rebellious actors who openly challenged colonial authorities and incited African populations to resist Portuguese designs. At the same time, another transformation, but less visible, was under way, as the Kriston turned into planters, “hiding” far from the watchful eyes of officials, attracting native farmers, and monopolizing the transport and sale of rice harvests. Accused of exploiting Balanta sharecroppers, they were identified as a “distinct caste” with an economic base that, while retaining traits inherited from their ethnic ancestors and relatives, also acted as “assimilated” citizens with all the privileges implied by this social and political status in the Portuguese colonial context.\textsuperscript{99} The


\textsuperscript{99}The grumete is a descendant (mostly of the Manjaco and Pepel) whose greater exposure to the colonizer has provided them with ‘civilizado’ status and allowed them to enter the group of cristãos. Since then they constituted a distinct caste, and refusing to recognize their roots they regard themselves as superior to them. However, they preserve the same psychological traits, almost the same customs, only differing (from their neighbors) on account of their European dress, which does not prevent them from wearing the loincloth of their ascendants when they live in the interior, in the ‘nato’, enjoying hypothetic concessions of land, at the expense of the work of the Balanta whom they skillfully manage to attract.” Luís António de Carvalho Viegas, \textit{Guiné Portuguesa} (3 vols.) (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1936), I: 163-4.
colonial administration’s imposition in the early 1900s of racialist “indigenato” laws that distinguished between *civilizados* (citizens), *assimilados* (assimilated natives) and *indígenas* (natives) was meant to limit natives’ spatial and upward social mobility. While some of the Kriston were absorbed into the stratum of *civilizados*, many more were incorporated into the intermediate group of *assimilado* or assimilated Africans, while others were simply included in the native population with *indígena* status. Owing to their ambiguous position in society and to their cross-cultural and bargaining skills, they attempted and often succeeded in seizing opportunities and exploiting the loopholes that the *indigenato* legislation offered, especially where Portuguese authority was weak, as in the south of the colony. The French consul’s observations on the Kriston posing a potential threat to Portuguese authorities were indeed borne out by history: from the late 1950s onwards they were to play a very important role in the nationalist mobilization campaigns and guerrilla war against the Portuguese authorities and their armed forces.100

100 The protracted but successful nationalist campaigns waged by the Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) would eventually result in decolonization and independence in 1974; for the role of Kriston, working in trade and plantations, and their role in the nationalist mobilization campaigns, see James Cunningham “Guiné Bissau 1956-1974: A Reassessment” (conference paper, n.d.).