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A Decolonisation Delayed and a Case for the Local Approach

Local State and Transition in Guinea-Bissau

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Abstract

This article investigates the possibilities of the local approach in revisiting traditional historiographical narratives on the decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau, a process which has mostly been analysed from national and imperial standpoints. Drawing from local archival sources from the region of Cacheu, it argues that the transition process at the local level was rather complex, with a new administration that took time to be installed and colonial officials who assured the continuity of administrative tasks. Moreover, local sources demonstrate that the Guinean liberation movement did not have a good knowledge of the region and mobilised local structures to collect information.

Keywords

Local archives – Guinea-Bissau – Decolonisation – Cacheu

Resumo

Este artigo explora as possibilidades da abordagem local para visitar narrativas historiográficas tradicionais sobre a descolonização da Guiné-Bissau, um processo que

tem sido sobretudo analisado a partir de perspetivas nacionais e imperiais. Utilizando fontes de arquivos locais da região de Cacheu, o artigo defende que o processo de transição ao nível local foi bastante complexo, com uma nova administração que demora a instalar-se e funcionários coloniais que asseguram a continuidade das tarefas administrativas. Para além disso, as fontes locais mostram que o movimento de libertação guineense não possuía um bom conhecimento da região e mobilizou estruturas locais para recolher informação.

Palavras-chave

Arquivos locais – Guiné-Bissau – Descolonização – Cacheu

On 10 September 1974, the declaration of recognition of the independence of Guinea-Bissau was read and signed in Lisbon by the Portuguese authorities and a delegation of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape-Verde (*Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*, PAIGC), the liberation movement that had fought the Portuguese presence since 1963. Historiography has been consensual on the fact that, given the importance of the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (Armed Forces Movement) – the military movement that from early on conducted the political process in Portugal after the revolution of 25 April 1974 – in Portuguese Guinea and the PAIGC's unilateral declaration of independence in September 1973, such moment was inevitable. Indeed, the new political regime in revolutionary Portugal proceeded to swiftly recognise the independence of the country, following the signature of the Algiers Agreement on 26 August 1974. According to the Agreement, Portugal committed to recognise Guinea-Bissau as a sovereign state on 10 September. Furthermore, it declared an immediate cease-fire and established the departure of Portuguese troops from the country until 31 October.¹ The recognition of independence thus appears as a natural outcome to eleven years of war, a process during which Portugal had lost most of the colony's territory to the PAIGC.²

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- 1 Rosas, Fernando, Mário Machaqueiro, and Pedro Aires Oliveira (dir.). *O Adeus ao Império. 40 anos de descolonização portuguesa* (Lisbon: Nova Vega, 2015); António E. Duarte Silva. *A independência da Guiné-Bissau e a descolonização portuguesa. Estudo de História, Direito e Política* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1997).
 - 2 Chabal, Patrick, David Birmingham, Joshua Forrest, Malyn Newitt, Gerhard Seibert, and Elisa Silva Andrade. *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

A closer look to the ground may well lead us to interrogate how that transition was experienced at the local level – a scale of approach until now largely neglected. Indeed, as of 16 November 1974, two months after the independence, it was colonial official Vicente Marciano de Melo who was managing current administrative affairs in the district of Cacheu, notably paying salaries to local staff.³ While the departure of the last colonial acting governor and his troops on 15 October 1974, and the subsequent arrival of PAIGC top officials in Bissau, have made it into historiographical cannon,⁴ the local experience of decolonization has been largely omitted from historical studies.

I argue that a local approach will complexify the history of the decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau. Even if by the end of the war, the PAIGC could claim large portions of the territory as “liberated areas” (in such parts of the country, the Portuguese controlled only the urban centers), the largest part of the population was living in areas under Portuguese rule.⁵ The transition to independence was thus experienced differently in different areas, something that the literature has failed to acknowledge.

In this article, I take the example of Cacheu, a district in the northwest of the country, to examine the possibilities of such approach. Despite being subject to attacks by the PAIGC since 1965 (especially in its western part),⁶ and even though Portuguese officials admitted losing control of certain parts of its territory,⁷ the colonial administration was still functional in most of the district throughout the liberation war. This was despite the fact that the PAIGC had elected deputies to the first national parliament (*Assembleia Nacional Popular*) for Cacheu as a liberated region.

In the first part of this article, I examine the existing literature on the decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau. A traditional standpoint has been a national and imperial approach, which remains a strong reference. More recently, scholars have made significant efforts to internationalise imperial and decolonisation processes in general, and that of Guinea-Bissau in particular. Nonetheless, the local approach is yet to be integrated in those studies.

3 Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas – Arquivos Históricos Nacionais, Bissau (INEP-AHN), B5/2.31, Nota n.º 676–974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (16/11/1974).

4 Rosas et al. *Adeus ao Império*, 122.

5 Amado, Leopoldo, *Guerra colonial & guerra de libertação nacional, 1950–1974* (Lisbon: IPAD-Instituto Português de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento, 2011).

6 *Ibid*, 236.

7 Among others, INEP-AHN, B1/B43.490, Província da Guiné. Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Relação dos regedores e encarregados dos territórios deste concelho, elaborada de conformidade com o solicitado em telegrama n.º 250, de 27 do corrente mês, dos Serviços de Administração Civil. (30/08/1968).

This leads to the second part, in which I use the case of Cacheu in order to highlight some gaps in the historiography. I do so by examining archival sources produced by the local district administration during the last months of 1974. These local archival sources reveal a transition that was far more complex, shedding light on the realities of an “emergency” transition. Firstly, they show that transition took place with a certain delay compared to state sources and ensuing historiographical narratives, which led the new state to rely on colonial officials. Secondly, despite the actual change and disruption induced from above, the continuity of colonial state tasks was evident. Thirdly, the PAIGC exhibited a lack of knowledge of local realities and feared local reactions to its installation in an area it claimed to have liberated.

1 Decolonisation as a National and International Phenomenon

The majority of the historiography on the decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau has examined the process from two standpoints: the imperial one – the decolonisation of the territory as part of the disintegration of the Portuguese empire in the 1970s—and the national one – the liberation struggle as the path to national independence.

In 2015, in the introduction to the book *O Adeus ao Império. 40 anos de descolonização portuguesa*, a self-declared work of dissemination, the editors provided an overview of the literature on the decolonisation of Portuguese empire.⁸ They acknowledged that the diversification of studies had allowed for the insertion of decolonization within wider analyses of late colonialism, thereby questioning the perceptions of Portuguese decolonisation as an exceptional case. Nonetheless, the approach undertaken by the contributors was mostly national and/or imperial. While the first chapters explore the Portuguese point of view, the transition process for each colony is the subject of a separate chapter. This includes Guinea-Bissau, whose respective chapter was penned by António E. Duarte Silva, an author who has conducted significant research on the history of Guinea-Bissau, including important work on the country’s decolonisation process.⁹ Silva’s work mainly investigates aspects of political and juridical history, including both the Portuguese and the PAIGC’s participation in the process, but examines the processes of colonialisation,

8 Rosas et al, *Adeus ao Império*, 7–12.

9 Silva, *A independência da Guiné-Bissau*; Silva, António E. Duarte. *Invenção e Construção da Guiné-Bissau (Administração Colonial/Nacionalismo/Constitucionalismo)*. (Coimbra: Edições Almedina, 2010).

decolonisation and post-colonial nation building from a purely national point of view. In its ensemble, this book replicates the scale of analysis used by previous works. The history of Portuguese decolonisation has been understood at an imperial scale, with reference works published in the 1990s establishing such a pattern, a trend that has proven persistent.¹⁰

Indeed, historiography on the Portuguese decolonisation has mirrored an aspect identified by Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Hée in other imperial historiographies, “whereas national history has been transnationalized in recent decades, the history of empires has, by and large, remained nationalized”.¹¹

When isolated from imperial narratives, the processes of independence and transition in Guinea-Bissau have been predominantly observed from a national perspective. This is a clear result of the PAIGC’s own agenda, which Mustafa Dhada referred to as the “campaign for statehood”,¹² as well as of the traditional importance of national narratives in historiography.¹³ For Guinea-Bissau, this has meant that authors have generally focused on the historical process of the liberation/colonial war leading up to the actual decolonisation and the construction of the nation-state.¹⁴ This is despite the fact that the PAIGC itself was a binational party and integrated international movements, achieving remarkable diplomatic success.¹⁵

Literature on the country’s history has thus far been concerned with two distinct periods: the colonial era and the postcolonial era. The national approach, due to its scale and emphasis on the liberation struggle, advances a linear narrative of the decolonisation, portraying formal independence as a natural and definitive conclusion. Both approaches, with their focus on imperial and national-scale dynamics, overlook the complexities on the ground.

10 Ferreira, José Medeiros. *Portugal em Transe* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores/Ed. Estampa, 1993); Bethencourt, Francisco, and Kirti Chaudhuri (dir.). *História da Expansão Portuguesa*, vol. v: *Último império e recentramento, 1930–1998* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1999); McQueen, Norrie. *The Decolonization of Portuguese Africa. Metropolitan Revolution and Dissolution of Empire* (London and New York: Longman, 1997); Pinto, António Costa. *O Fim do Império Português. A Cena Internacional, a Guerra Colonial, e a Descolonização, 1961–1975* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2001).

11 Hedinger Daniel, and Nadin Hée. ‘Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition’, *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), 429.

12 Dhada, Mustafah. *Warriors at Work: How Guinea Was Really Set Free* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 61.

13 Saunier, Pierre-Yves. ‘Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux’, *Genèses* 4, no. 57 (2004), 110–126.

14 Amado, *Guerra colonial*; Dhada, *Warriors at Work*; Chabal et al, *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*; Lopes, Carlos. *Etnia, Estado e relações de poder na Guiné-Bissau* (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1982).

15 Chabal et al., *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, 9, 17.

The process of actual power transition throughout the territory beyond Bissau is largely absent from such narratives. Historiography has yet to explore how different regions of the territory experienced this transition.

In the meantime, efforts have been made to “decentralize and dynamize empire studies”¹⁶ regarding Portuguese decolonisation in order to move beyond sole national and imperial perspectives. An important contribution to this decentralisation of decolonisation has been made by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and António Costa Pinto.¹⁷ As for the case of Guinea-Bissau, one of the most consistent efforts to integrate the liberation struggle and decolonisation into transnational dynamics was the special issue edited by Rui Lopes and Víctor Barros for *The International History Review* in 2020.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the transnational and global history of Portuguese decolonisation in general, and that of Guinea-Bissau in particular, remains a rich field of studies.

2 The Possibilities of the Local Approach in the Decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau

Mustafah Dhada particularly emphasised the unique nature of liberated regions where the Guinean state was forged.¹⁹ This should prompt historians to investigate the process of transition from a divided, war-torn territory to a unified, independent country. Despite calls for an increased interaction between different levels of historical analysis – international, metropolitan, colonial – regarding the phenomenon of decolonisation,²⁰ the local level remains largely uncharted.

Examining the sources produced by the local Portuguese administration allows historians to delve into the complexities of the Guinean case: the local approach reveals the continuities in state logics and the delays in the implementation of the national state, ultimately challenging the narrative of straightforward liberation. The local experience of decolonisation consisted of both abrupt change and continuity. Exploring local realities helps unveil a transition process that was more nuanced than linear and triumphalist narratives

16 Hedinger and Hée. ‘Transimperial History’, 430.

17 Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira, and António Costa Pinto (ed.). *Portugal e o Fim do Colonialismo. Dimensões internacionais* (Lisbon: Edições 70, 2004).

18 Lopes, Rui and Víctor Barros. ‘Amílcar Cabral and the Liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: International, Transnational, and Global Dimensions’, *The International History Review* 42, no. 6 (2020), 1230–1237.

19 Dhada, *Warriors at Work*, 55–61.

20 Jerónimo and Pinto, *Portugal e o fim do colonialismo*, 10–13.

of change suggest. Indeed, following in the perspective of Eva-Maria Muschik, I view decolonisation rather as an “open-ended process”, where circumstances play a significant role.²¹

2.1 *A Delayed Transition and Overlapping Structures*

On 26 August 1974, the day the Algiers Agreement was signed,²² district administrations across the territory began receiving instructions from the colonial government in Bissau in preparation for the upcoming power transition.²³ These instructions included the listing and handover of all movable property and real estate, as well as the valuation of distributed seeds, ongoing construction works, and safe and bank balances to be transferred to the new administration. The colonial Civil Administration Services also directed local administrations to halt all ongoing works and to secure the funds necessary for salaries and regular expenses of August and September. Telegrams carrying these instructions also provided a schedule for deactivating local administrations: the administration at Teixeira Pinto (current Canchungo), the district’s administrative seat, was scheduled to be deactivated on 10 September. Further instructions were issued on the following day.²⁴ The successive arrival of instructions in Teixeira Pinto underscores the particularly urgent nature of Guine-Bissau’s decolonisation. On 31 August, the deputy district administrator of Cacheu, António Pinto Inácio Nobre, forwarded copies of all these telegrams to his subordinates.²⁵

21 Muschik, Eva-Maria. ‘The Art of Chameleon Politics: From Colonial Servant to International Development Expert’, *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9, no. 2 (2018), 220.

22 The Algiers Agreement was the culmination of negotiations between the Portuguese government and the PAIGC for the former to recognise the independence of Guinea-Bissau. It settled the conditions for the cease-fire in the country as well as for the power transition. Despite pressure by the PAIGC, the Agreement did not include the independence of Cape Verde, which the Portuguese government set to a subsequent moment. (Rosas et al, *Adeus ao Império*, 116–119.)

23 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Telegrama do Chefe dos Serviços da Rep. Prov. dos SAC, Augusto Quintino de Almeida Cabrita, às administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Nova Lamego, Tite, São Domingos e Farim (26/08/1974). INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Telegrama do chefe dos serviços da Repartição Prov. dos SAC, Augusto Quintino de Almeida Cabrita, às administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Farim, Nova Lamego, Tite e São Domingos (26/08/1974).

24 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Cópia de telegrama confidencial do Comandante Chefe GA Cívica Cacheu, Bigene, Binar, Encheia, Teixeira Pinto, e outros (27/08/1974).

25 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Cópia do telegrama do chefe de serviços da Civil, Augusto Quintino de Almeida Cabrita, à administração de Gabú (31/08/1974); INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Cópia do

The day after independence was recognised, the Guinean government approved a new administrative division for the country, marking an actual change brought about by decolonisation in the region of Cacheu. Prior to the country's independence, the territory that would become the region of Cacheu consisted of the districts of Cacheu, São Domingos, and Bula. At that time, the district of Cacheu comprised five administrative posts (Teixeira Pinto, Cacheu, Caió, Calequisse, Pecixe), São Domingos comprised three posts (São Domingos, Sedengal, Suzana), while the district of Bula had no posts. The districts were overseen by a district administrator, and the posts were under the jurisdiction of a post commissioner, who reported to the former.²⁶

Indeed, following the new administrative map promulgated on 11 September 1974, the district of Cacheu became the region of Cacheu, and the regional capital moved from Canchungo (formerly Teixeira Pinto) to the town of Cacheu. The renaming of Canchungo carried a significant symbolism, as the town had been named Teixeira Pinto in 1948 in honor of the Portuguese officer who had led the region's occupation in the 1910s. The new region incorporated the areas of the former districts of Cacheu, Bula and São Domingos, as well as the former post of Bigene, which had been part of the district of Farim. The new region was divided into six sectors.²⁷

The new state thus altered local power structures by implementing the Constitution of 1973 and enforcing a new administrative division. According to the constitution, the Guinean territory was divided into regions, which were in turn divided into sectors, each governed respectively by regional and sectorial committees.²⁸ Regions replaced the former districts, and sectors replaced the former administrative posts. Sectors were further divided into sections, each

telegrama do Chefe dos Serviços da Rep. Prov. dos SAC, Augusto Quintino de Almeida Cabrita, às administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Nova Lamego, Tite, São Domingos e Farim (31/08/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Cópia de telegrama da Civil para as Administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Nova Lamego, Tite, S. Domingos e Farim. (31/08/1974); INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Cópia de telegrama do Chefe de Serviços da Civil, Augusto Quintino de Almeida Cabrita, às administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Farim, Nova Lamego, Tite e São Domingos (31/08/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Cópia de telegrama da Civil às Administrações de Bafatá, Bissorã, Teixeira Pinto, Catió, Bula, Farim, Nova Lamego, Tite e S. Domingos (31/08/1974).

26 Cerdeira, Pedro. 'Reconstruire le quotidien administratif à Cacheu (Guinée-Bissau) à la fin des années 1950', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 140 (2018), 69–81.

27 "Decisão n.º 9/74", Boletim Oficial. República da Guiné-Bissau (BORG), 18/01/1975, n.º 3: 27.

28 Silva, *A independência da Guiné-Bissau*, 148.

governed by village committee. Below them, villages were governed by village committees.²⁹ This chain of committees replaced the colonial administrative hierarchy, aligning with the principles of democratic centralism.³⁰

Furthermore, the new organisation represented a definite change in local political structures as African chiefs, who had been most relevant state agents in the daily governance of empire,³¹ were not included in the new structure. This is confirmed by local sources: on 25 November 1974, when the local administration paid pensions due in the post of Pecixe until the end of the year, the local chiefs were only paid until September.³² This indicated that the new state power aimed to bypass a group of individuals perceived as a colonial institution that had previously played a decisive role in fulfilling fundamental state tasks, such as tax collection. This constituted a major shift in local politics. In the long run, however, as Clara Carvalho has shown, in some cases chiefs were integrated into local power structures.³³

However, in practice, these formal changes did not immediately and clearly alter local power structures. For instance, despite no longer existing as an administrative subdivision, the colonial post of Pecixe continued to correspond with the district administration of Cacheu. On 20 September 1974, Vicente Marciano de Melo, who had replaced Pinto Nobre as district administrator of Cacheu following independence, wrote to the subordinate post of Pecixe, instructing the local post commissioner to replace the caretaker of the canoe, as the current one, Marcelino Fernandes, was deemed an “irresponsible agent” and should be “dismissed from service on the first opportunity”. He also requested his subordinate to issue a transit permit to Fernandes so that he could report to the district administration.³⁴ Moreover, the following day,

29 On the duties of village committees, which very much gave continuation to the ones held by the local colonial administration, see Andréini, Jean Claude, and Marie-Claude Lambert. *La Guinée-Bissau. D'Amílcar Cabral à la reconstruction nationale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978); Carvalho, Clara. 'Poder Local e Autoridade Tradicional: Das Assembleias do Povo ao estado democrático', in *Lusofonia em África. História, Democracia e Integração Africana*, ed. Teresa Cruz e Silva, Manuel G. Mendes Araújo, and Carlos Cardoso (Dakar: Conselho para o Desenvolvimento da Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais em África (CODESRIA), 2005), 155–173; Amado, *Guerra colonial*, 296.

30 Silva, *A independência da Guiné-Bissau*, 77, 186.

31 Cerdeira, 'Reconstruire le quotidien', 72–73.

32 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 692/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (25/11/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 693 do Responsável do Comité de Estado do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (25/11/1974).

33 Carvalho, *Poder local e autoridade tradicional*, 163.

34 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 608/974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (20/09/1974).

Marciano de Melo advised his subordinate in Pecixe to exert more efficient control over the materials under his responsibility.³⁵ In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation, administrative concerns remained remarkably stable. Not only Marciano de Melo maintained his vigilance over his employees' conduct, but all the mechanisms of communication and movement control remained in force.

Furthermore, both notes were sent “[f]or the good of the nation”, a farewell formulation reminiscent of the Portuguese dictatorship. In the weeks following independence, the new national state continued to heavily rely on colonial human resources, as reflected in their actions, concerns, and communication codes.

2.2 *Colonial Officials in a Guinean State*

As Marcelino Fernandes was dismissed, the following month, Marciano de Melo accepted his subordinate's suggestion of hiring Guerra Dembo as the new canoe driver of Pecixe, while at the same time giving him permission to hire two more crewmen depending on the canoe's revenues.³⁶ Vicente Marciano de Melo was a 49-year-old Cape-Verdean official who had worked for the state since 1949 and had been part of the Guinean administrative ranks since 1954.³⁷ As for Melo's interlocutor at Pecixe, José Lagna Tchuda, he was a Guinean colonial clerk who had been replacing the local commissioner since early April and had continued to oversee the post after the independence.³⁸

Therefore, the new administrative hierarchy and division took some time to fully take effect. Despite the country's independence, colonial officials remained in charge of local affairs and continued to carry out their usual responsibilities. In the case of the Marcelino Fernandes affair, it was actually the efficiency and prestige of the state that were at stake, reflecting a continuation of aspects of the colonial order. Furthermore, the district administrator continued to oversee the payment the gratuities, salaries, and family allowances to the administration's employees.³⁹ Same went for the payment of uniforms

35 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 612/74 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (21/09/1974).

36 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 628/974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (02/10/1974).

37 “Quadro Administrativo”, Boletim Oficial da Guiné (BOG), 09/09/1974, n.º 37 (2nd supplement): 18–19.

38 “Declarações”, BOG, 18/06/1974, n.º 25: 388.

39 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 627/974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (02/10/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 676–974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (16/11/1974).

for the administrative police guards.⁴⁰ It was only from late November onward that the sector state committee of Canchungo would appear as the entity responsibly for making these payments, despite not being the legal administrative center of the region.⁴¹

The local sources indeed reveal the complexities of the transition managed by local officials. While keeping the administration operational, colonial officials were the ones responsible for undertaking tasks related to the transfer of power. For instance, on 1 October 1974, Vicente Marciano de Melo, requested his subordinates to send him the war weapons under the posts' responsibility with the "utmost urgency".⁴² He was implementing the instructions issued on 27 August by colonial authorities following the signing of the Algiers Agreement, albeit with a considerable delay.⁴³

Change and continuity were both enforced by colonial officials. On 12 October 1974, the caretaker official of the district administration of Cacheu asked the posts to conduct an urgent census of the respective population in the "usual form and principles".⁴⁴ This time, the signing official closed his memorandum with "for the good of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau", appropriating a colonial formulation and accommodating it to the new political situation. The new administration revealed the same anxieties of the colonial administration concerning taxation, which remained a fundamental state revenue. Indeed, on 27 November 1974, Orlando Nhaga, who had since taken over the position of president of the regional state committee of Cacheu, issued the regional state committee's first memorandum, an urgent request for information on the regional projections of the increase or reduction of taxpayers for the following year's domestic tax collection to be sent to the government.⁴⁵

40 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 650/974 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (26/10/1974). The administrative police guards were a colonial police force. The new Guinean state only abolished it in May 1975, creating the possibility for agents to be reintegrated as civil servants. ("Lei n.º 9/75", BORGB, 10/05/1975, n.º 19: 217; "Rectificação", BORGB, 17/05/1975, n.º 20: 221–222.)

41 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 703 do Responsável do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (30/11/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 719 do Presidente do Comité do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (23/12/1974).

42 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota circular n.º 624 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Vicente Marciano de Melo, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (01/10/1974).

43 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Cópia de telegrama confidencial do Comandante Chefe GA Civis a Cacheu, Bigene, Binar, Encheia, Teixeira Pinto, e outros (27/08/1974).

44 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota circular n.º 660/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (12/10/1974).

45 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Cópia de circular urgente n.º 1/974 do Presidente de Comité do Estado Regional de Cacheu, Orlando Nhaga, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (27/11/1974).

As shown by the signing officials and the positions they held, it is clear that the posts of the district were not deactivated according to the calendar transmitted on 26 August. Indeed, 10 September did not represent an actual change in the local administration. Acting colonial governor Carlos Fabião only left the territory with the last Portuguese troops on 15 October, and the Permanent Secretariat of the PAIGC's Executive Committee for the Struggle (*Comité Executivo da Luta*) only entered Bissau on 19 October.⁴⁶ The transition of power was, in fact, delayed, which had repercussions on the way the new local state was introduced in the region of Cacheu. Even when the district administrator disappeared from the correspondence in November, he was replaced by an "overseer" of the district administration of Cacheu. The overlap of Portuguese and Guinean positions and hierarchy accounts for a transition process that was not linear. This is further confirmed by the trajectories of officials and employees.

Indeed, there was the possibility for colonial administrative staff to remain in Guinea-Bissau and serve the new national state. This was indicated in the instructions issued by the Portuguese military authorities on 27 August.⁴⁷ Moreover, a decision by the head of the Guinean government on 18 April 1975, which dismissed former colonial Civil Administration Services employees who had not returned to the country,⁴⁸ confirmed their possibility of staying. And some indeed remained. In the region of Cacheu, for instance, Alfredo Baticã Ferreira, the bailiff of the colonial district administration, remained in service in the sector of Canchungo.⁴⁹ José Lagna Tchuda, the acting commissioner of Pecixe, later served as a secretarial official at the Guinean Directorate General of the Interior from February to September 1975, after which he went on to serve at the State Commissariat of National Security and Public Order.⁵⁰ As for Cape-Verdean António Inácio Pinto Nobre, the district administrator of Cacheu until the independence, he was appointed head of a section within the Guinean civil service in early 1975.⁵¹

46 "Decisão n.º 7/75", BORGB, 25/10/1975, n.º 43: 462.

47 INEP-AHN, Bl.2/4, Cópia de telegrama confidencial do Comandante Chefe GA Civis a Cacheu, Bigene, Binar, Encheia, Teixeira Pinto, e outros (27/08/1974).

48 "Comissariado Principal. Despacho", BORGB, 31/05/1975, n.º 22: 258.

49 INEP-AHN, Bl.2/4, Cópia da nota n.º 721 do Presidente do Comité do Sector de Canchungo à Caixa de Previdência dos Funcionários Públicos da Guiné (23/12/1974)

50 "Subcomissariado de Estado da Administração Interna, Função Pública e Trabalho. Despachos", BORGB, 21/06/1975, n.º 25: 310. "Subcomissariado de Estado da Administração Interna, Função Pública e Trabalho. Despachos", BORGB, 11/11/1975, n.º 41: 446.

51 "Subcomissariado de Estado da Administração Interna, Função Pública e Trabalho. Despachos", BORGB, 21/06/1975, n.º 25: 310.

The changes within the state were not linear, and the construction of the new state was hesitant. Institutional confusion and hesitation was visible until the end of November. On 25 November 1974, the local administration fulfilled the usual duties of the colonial administration, including the payment of the remunerations to Pecixe's chiefs until September and the pensions.⁵² However, despite their same date, the former was made by the caretaker official of the district administration of Cacheu, while the latter was undertaken by the caretaker official of the sector state committee of Canchungo. This indicates that even the locations of power took time to move and stabilise.

Until the end of 1974, administrative correspondence was issued by the sector of Canchungo, showing that the former colonial district capital continued to act as the administrative headquarters for the new region. The sector of Canchungo acted as an intermittent replacement for the former district seat, which by law was assigned to the town of Cacheu. The new order took time to be introduced. These nuances are lost in broader national approaches.

2.2 *The PAIGC Meets Cacheu: Getting Acquainted with Local Reality*

A local approach allows for the questioning of certain narratives. Despite its supposed status as a liberated area, the new state admitted to having a limited knowledge of local realities of Cacheu when administratively taking over the region. On 11 November 1974, while administrator Vicente de Melo was still signing off correspondence, the “person in charge” of the district administration of Cacheu issued an urgent memorandum. It stated that the president of the regional state committee was required to present a weekly report on the territory. However, given “the current circumstances, combined with the partial if not complete ignorance of PAIGC officials regarding the milieu”, the contribution of commissioners of post was perceived as of “extreme utility”. Therefore, while they remained in office, colonial commissioners should send weekly reports on their jurisdictions, particularly regarding the political, economic and social situations. Specifically, they had to include the following elements: the area's political situation, the population's reaction to the transition of power, local improvements needed, notes on the local commercial situation (notably the prices of first necessity goods), and any difficulties encountered along with any measures taken or to be taken in response.⁵³ Colonial staff was

52 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 692/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (25/11/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 693 do Responsável do Comité de Estado do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (25/11/1974).

53 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota circular (urgente) n.º 659/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (11/11/1974).

thus mobilised to help establish the new power structures. The memorandum of 11 November is also relevant because it highlights a lack of knowledge about the region by the liberation movement turned ruling party.

Like the colonial administration, the new state perceived local administration as the gateway to understanding and managing local realities. On 13 November 1974, the caretaker official of the district administration of Cacheu requested urgent statistical maps of the population based on the 1973 census from the posts. The urgency was underscored by the statement, “[t]his service has priority over any other one”.⁵⁴ This marked a shift in the administrative focus, highlighting the new state’s need for accurate and up-to-date demographic data to inform its governance.

Interestingly, the correspondence on 12 November was still signed off with the phrase “for the good of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau”, reflecting a continuity in administrative language. However, from 13 November onward, the district administration of Cacheu adopted the new state’s official correspondence formulation: “for unity, struggle, and progress”. This change symbolised the alignment of local administrative practices with the ideological and rhetorical framework of the newly independent state.

This transition illustrates how, even as the new state implemented changes, it relied on established colonial structures and personnel to maintain administrative continuity and ensure effective governance during a period of significant upheaval. The shift in language also signals the beginning of a broader transformation as the new state sought to embed its principles and vision within the everyday operations of local administration.

The new government in Guinea-Bissau mobilised local administrative structures to gather detailed information about the local economic landscape, including data on merchants, producers and farmers.⁵⁵ This action mirrored the colonial administration’s focus on local finances and economic control. In November 1974, faced with “serious and understandable concerns” over the continuous decrease in state revenues since April 1974, the Finance Services, which was a colonial government department, directed public services to curtail their expenses and maximize efficiency to avoid a deficit.⁵⁶

54 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota circular (muito urgente) n.º 672/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (13/11/1974).

55 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 697/74 do Presidente do Comité de Estado do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (18/11/1974).

56 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Circular n.º 661/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (12/11/1974).

The new administration's measures reflected the continuation of colonial economic practices. For instance, the government set retail prices for essential commodities like rice and imposed regulations on peanut merchants, requiring them to own a cleaning machine to ensure the cleanliness of their produce. These steps indicate that the new state inherited and perpetuated many of the colonial government's economic control mechanisms.⁵⁷

Indeed, numerous practices and traits of the colonial administration remained in place during the early transition period in Guine-Bissau. For instance, on 15 November 1974, the caretaker official for the district administration of Cacheu issued a directive to subordinate administrations that mirrored colonial administrative protocols. The directive stated that trips by committee officials to Bissau required prior permission from the competent department, and any disobediences would be punished.⁵⁸

On 6 December 1974, Filinto Vaz Martins, under-commissioner of State for Energy, Industry, and Hydraulics, issued a memorandum asking regional presidents for the names of the responsible individuals for the region's sectors, so "we can contact them when necessary".⁵⁹ Orlando Nhaga replied on 31 December 1974, providing the names of the region's presidents of sector state committees but also those of the regional departments' heads, namely the officials in charge of security, education, and youth and sports.⁶⁰ The new sector committees were presided by António Fernandes (Canchungo), João Luís Correia (Cacheu), Armando Augustu Malú (Caió), Paula Cassamá (Bula),⁶¹ Jorge Biague (Bigene) and Maurício Rodrigues Santy (São Domingos). Most of these officials would be officially appointed retroactively on 31 May 1975, with effects after 1 October 1974,⁶² even though throughout October colonial officials had still been ensuring the conduction of local administration. Furthermore,

57 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 297/974 do responsável do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (29/11/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 737/74 do Responsável do Comité de Estado do Sector de Canchungo à secção de Pecixe (30/12/1974).

58 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Circular n.º 674/974 do Responsável da Administração do Concelho de Cacheu ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (15/11/1974).

59 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Nota circular n.º 3/974 pelo Sub-comissário de Estado da Energia, Indústria e Hidráulica, Filinto Vaz Martins, ao Presidente do Comité da Região de Cacheu, Orlando Nhaga (06/12/1974).

60 INEP-AHN, B1.2/4, Cópia da nota n.º 741/974 do Presidente do Comité Regional de Cacheu, Orlando Nhaga, ao Sub-comissário de Estado da Energia, Indústria e Hidráulica, Filinto Vaz Martins (31/12/1974).

61 The appointment of Paula or Paulina Cassamá was a sign of an actual change in Guinean administration, the entrance of women to positions of power within the formal local administration.

62 "Despachos", BORG, 27/09/1975, n.º 39: 426–428.

the officials appointed to preside over the sectors of Cacheu and Caió on 31 May were Zeca Cardoso and Sana Tchuda, whose names were not the ones listed on 31 December. New legislation gave benefits to individuals who probably took over the positions later than the official appointments would lead us to believe. Nonetheless, by the end of 1974, the new local state appeared to be fully functioning. Even if on 30 December 1974, the finally renamed section of Pecixe was still receiving superior instructions from the sector state committee of Canchungo.⁶³

3 Conclusion

Historiography on the decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau has been consistent in analysing the process either within the context of the disaggregation of the Portuguese colonial empire following the Portuguese revolution of 25 April 1974, or as a national trajectory of liberation struggle and subsequent independence and state-building. Some efforts have been made to integrate such processes into transitional and global approaches.

Nonetheless, all of these approaches conceal the complexities of the transition at the local level, whose administrative structures were modified by the new state from the moment of independence, in some aspects fundamentally, such as in the case of the end of the legal existence of African chiefs. However, reality on the ground proved to be rather different as the new state took its time to properly take over Cacheu. Exploring local sources shows a colonial administration that continued to assure local administrative tasks many weeks after the independence. It shows that colonial officials, even African ones, remained in their positions. Along with this delayed transition, administrative procedures remained very much stable. Local sources also show that the PAIGC was unaware of local dynamics, even fearing the reaction of local populations. Once again, it relied on colonial administrative practice and expertise for the collection of data and information. The analysis of the transition processes throughout the territory should help deepen the understanding of the realities of decolonisation on the ground, where circumstances and necessity opened possibilities for colonial officials.

63 INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 297/974 do responsável do Sector de Canchungo ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (29/11/1974); INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 737/74 do Responsável do Comité de Estado do Sector de Canchungo à secção de Pecixe (30/12/1974).

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