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Native Birth

Identity and Territory in Postcolonial Guinea-Bissau, West Africa

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Prelude

In 1998, several members of Guinea-Bissau's National Assembly introduced an amendment to the country's constitution. If passed, the amendment – which became known as '*artigo quinto*' (Article Five) – would require the president of the republic, along with several top ministerial positions (such as prime minister and minister of justice) *to have been born* in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, as well as to be of Guinean parentage. After much public debate, the proposed amendment was passed in the Assembly, and needed only to be signed off by the interim president.¹ This has not happened. In February 2001, members of various political parties and NGOs met for three days to attempt to 'reach a consensus on a new constitution for Guinea-Bissau' (IRIN-West Africa Update 908; 12 February 2001). The two main disputes centered on the relationship between the government and the military and *artigo quinto*. One 'humanitarian' source was quoted as follows: 'In a country where about half the population is said to have come from abroad, mainly Guinea, Senegal, Gambia and Cape Verde, such an article creates serious problems' (IRIN-West Africa Update 908; 12 February 2001). As of April 2002, no consensus regarding the new constitution has been reached.

Also during 1998, Guinea-Bissau experienced a popular military uprising with the sole objective of removing 19-year long president João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira from office. General Ansumane Mané, then head of Guinea-Bissau's army, led the uprising. Mané had risen in the ranks of Guinea-Bissau's army since he joined it as a combatant in the 11-year long liberation war, which finally ended with independence in 1975. He had also served for many years as President Vieira's bodyguard. During Mané's 1998 campaign against Vieira, Senegalese troops who were brought in to fight for Vieira leafleted the Guinean countryside from low-flying helicopters with propaganda urging Guinean citizens not to support Ansumane Mané. The argument in the leaflets (ironically scattered throughout regions with extremely low literacy rates) was the following: *Ansumane Mané was not born in Guinea-Bissau; he was born in the Gambia. He is therefore not truly Guinean, despite his lifetime's distinguished military service.* Subsequent dramatic events focused even more attention on Mané: in November 2000, Mané supposedly attempted to re-gain control of the military by revoking several military promotions made by President Kumba Yala and proclaiming himself head of Guinea-Bissau's military. After Mané's failed military take-over attempt, he fled Bissau to seek refuge in the outskirts of

the capital. At one point, news sources announced that Mané had been captured and that procedures were underway to repatriate him to the Gambia (IRIN-West Africa Update 855; 11/24/00). It soon turned out that Mané had not been caught, and a few days later he was killed in a shoot-out between government loyalists and his supporters (eerily foreshadowing subsequent events in Kinshasa). The national television station broadcast images of Mané's corpse sprawled on the back of a truck, presumably to send a clear message of government power and control over oppositional forces and to quell any further attempts to disrupt state authority.²

Many Guineans³ and international observers have called for investigations into Mané's death; others have called for closer vigilance of the increasing power (and increasing ethnic homogeneity – or 'balantazação' as one opinion writer coined it, referring to the fact that Yala has appointed members of his own ethnic group – the Balanta – to all top government positions) of the current government.⁴ Meanwhile, Yala's government began illegally jailing various civilians, including six opposition leaders and the founder of Guinea-Bissau's national human rights league, claiming that they had supported Mané's attempted military take-over. The instability in Bissau, and fears over the government's persecution and intimidation tactics, have led to increasing exodus from the capital to the countryside and neighboring nations.

Similar events recently reverberated in Cote d'Ivoire during the fragile process of preparing for democratic elections following the unexpected coup in what was, until a short time ago, considered one of West Africa's most stable civil societies. The eligibility of the main opposition candidate for president – Alassane Ouattara (also the former Prime Minister) – was called into question, based on concerns about his authentic Ivorianess given the fact that he might have been born outside Cote d'Ivoire. Ouattara has admitted that he holds a passport from neighboring Burkina Faso, and his parents were born in Burkina. Cote d'Ivoire's constitution has a clause that insists candidates for president must be Ivorian from birth. The controversy over Ouattara's nationality helped propel a rising tide of xenophobia directed at an immigrant population that makes up about a third of Cote d'Ivoire's population and the bulk of the agricultural workforce. After much heated debate, Cote d'Ivoire's supreme court barred Ouattara from running. Elections in October 2000 resulted in the victory of socialist leader Laurent Gbagbo, although Ouattara's supporters called for a new election. Shortly after the

elections, looting and killing broke out in the capital over the succession to power, which is now cast as an ethnic struggle. Cote d'Ivoire's supreme court continues to exclude Ouattara from political participation, barring him from running in parliamentary elections. As of 2001, the death toll, increasingly involving random violence in the streets of Abidjan, continues to rise.

Introduction

This paper will delve into one dimension of these irony-laden examples of postcolonial politics: the intensified and expanded attention to birthplace as a determinative factor in national identity and legitimacy. Focusing on Guinea-Bissau, I will explore the logic of 'native birth' in the postcolonial nation-state as a marker of authenticity, particularly in light of recent scholarship on modernity.

The episodes above sparked my curiosity about natal locality because of some peculiar aspects of constitutional native birth stipulations in the West African context, and more widely.⁵ First, the *long durée* of West African history would seem to counter notions of territorial boundedness and birthplace as relevant in 'local' constructions of identity. From early migrations across the continent, to the genesis of new polities on the internal frontier, to the trans-Saharan trade routes connecting North and West African peoples, through the establishment of precolonial states, to the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, urban migration, and nation-state formation, West African history can be characterized by movement across porous borders – both geographical and social. Even in the post-independence era, there has been much traffic of goods and people across national borders. The recent attention to natal locality, then, seems to suggest a change in the notion of identity within the postcolonial state as bound to birthplace. I will explore what kind of imaginative work is involved in recalculating the relation between national territory and identity.

A second, and related, aspect of native birth stipulations is that they seem to apply only at the national level. Birthplace does not get invoked at any more local level – one's congressperson or mayor need not be born in the locale for which they are running for office (as evidenced by Hillary Rodham Clinton's senatorial victory in New York). Why, then, does the nation have a particular stake in birthplace?

Finally, the salience of birthplace seems, at first blush, to have a wholly anti-modern quality. It flies in the face of a quintessential aspect of modern personhood: self-fashioning. How can something as out of one's own control as the place in which one is born have any weight on determining one's trajectory, after the accident of birth? Moreover, birthplace stipulations stitch together identity and territory. Much has been made (by Appadurai and others) of deterritorialization as a hallmark of modernity. How does a conviction that the modern world is defined by the decline of the nation-state and a deterritorialized order of things take into account the highly territorial, and exclusively national, basis for the significance of birthplace? How can we reconcile the tenacity (and intensification) of preoccupations over birthplace with modernity?

This paper is framed by concerns about native birth stipulations – their lack of fit with the facts of African history and local notions of identity, their exclusively national basis, and their seeming incongruity with modernity. In attempting to grapple with these issues, I have found a series of plausible analyses but no single coherent answer. In this essay I present various interventions, operating at different levels of analysis, each of which sheds light on a particular aspect of this issue, but none of which can account for the whole story.

Political Dimensions

One set of explanations for increasing concerns with natal locality comes from a rather straightforward, political science orientation. First, such maneuvers can be seen as thinly veiled political machinations from individual power players. In Guinea-Bissau, the introduction of *artigo quinto* was specifically targeted at a few key individuals who were poised to launch what would have been successful presidential campaigns or become top government ministers, and happened to be of mixed parentage. Their opponents seized on this fact and, through *artigo quinto* and a general appeal to Guinean nationalism, attempted to destabilize their popularity. This strategy of character assassination in highly charged political campaigns is far from extraordinary or unfamiliar, and its motives do not require much explication.

Second, intensified concerns with native birth and national boundedness might be the result of a perceived state of national vulnerability. Such rhetoric and strictures are more likely to come to

the fore during moments of national crisis, political and social upheaval, and transitions in state leadership. Contemporary Guinea-Bissau can be characterized by such instability due to recent repercussions from ‘modernizing’ trends, the continued fall-out from the 1998 civil war, the subsequent sweeping overhaul in the national government and dramatic realignments of political parties and coalitions. These changes have lent to an air of instability, and opened up questions about what it means to be Guinean and whether Guinea-Bissau itself is a viable nation-state. At such uncertain times, there tends to be a rigidification or redefinition of nationality, both in terms of territorial boundedness and criteria for membership. This tendency can be recognized in other moments of African postcolonial history, such as the immediate post-independence penchant to eject ‘outsiders’ (Idi Amin’s expulsion of Indians from Uganda being most obvious and infamous example) and extreme measures to ‘authenticate’ the nation and its citizens (such as Mobutu’s *authenticité* campaign in Zaire).

Finally, attention to native birth might represent the inevitable fall-out from renewed democratization efforts in various African nation-states. Part of the process of democratization involves an inexorable jockeying around who is, and who is not, a member of the *demos*. Such debates are bound up, of course, with issues of electoral politics – who is eligible to vote, who is eligible to represent or lead the nation. In nation-states comprised of complex mixtures of population groups (like almost every nation in Africa), perhaps birth within the territorial bounds of the nation becomes a kind of lowest common denominator for belonging.

In sum, then, intensified concerns with natal locality may be explained through a combination of 1.) personalized power plays; 2.) an outcome of socio-political upheaval and transformation; and 3.) an upshot of revitalized democratization efforts. The exploration of this phenomenon could stop here and elaborate on the empirical basis of each factor outlined above. But these interpretations seem insufficient, especially as they do not account for what makes such strategies viable from a popular perspective. In other words, while political machinations, democratization, and national uncertainty help explain why birthplace as constitutive of identity is being mobilized at this historic junction, they do not account for the popular purchase and ideological value of this specific trope. Following Anderson (1983), we know that national

sentiment requires more than just realpolitik and power politics. We must explore, then, why savvy politicians have tapped this particular vein of popular sentiment.

Postcolonial Power

One possible explanation for the viability of such political maneuvers in West Africa can be found in Achille Mbembe's (1992) masterful analysis of postcolonial power. The central concern driving Mbembe's analysis has to do with the complicity of the supposedly subordinated subjects with their dominators. Mbembe asks: 'Why does the population apparently collude with its government?' (Mbembe 1992:37). His answer, argued through Bakhtin's notion of the obscene and grotesque, is that there is an 'intimacy, an almost domestic familiarity, in the relationship between ruler and ruled which effectively disarms both and turns power-play into performance' (Mbembe 1992:37). Mbembe's analysis leaves little room for revolution or any dramatic change in power relations – resistance is seen only as a day-to-day playfulness that primarily serves to reconstitute the power structures already in place. The postcolony, in Mbembe's view, is characterized by the 'illicit cohabitation' and the 'mutual zombification' of rulers and ruled:

peculiar...to the postcolony is the way the relationship between rulers and ruled is forged by a means of a specific practice: simulacrum (*le simulacre*). ... people whose identities have been partly confiscated have been able, precisely because there was this pretense, to glue back together the bits and pieces of their fragmented identities. By taking over the signs and language of officialdom, people have been able to remythologize their own conceptual universe while in the process turning the commandement into a sort of zombie. ... [This process] produces a situation of disempowerment (*impouvoir*) for both the ruled and the rulers (Mbembe 1992:10).

Mbembe's notion of the Gulliverian logic of the postcolony, a kind of disproportionate response on the part of the state to moments of resistance in which 'the tiny becomes huge, and the familiar strange, accompanied by the emptiest of gestures...' does resonate with on the ground experiences in Guinea-Bissau (Mbembe 1992:16). President Kumba Yala's display of might – through random detainments, shoot-outs, and nationally televised images of Ansumane Mané's bullet-ridden body – is, by conventional standards, a rather extreme response to Mané's attempted power play. It also resonates with Michael Watts's (1999) discussion of the disproportionate exercise of state power in Nigeria. Examining why Sani Abacha's regime in

Nigeria took great pains to exterminate two minority and fringe movements, Watts explains that what was particularly disturbing to the Nigerian state about these movements was their exposure of a ‘national public secret’ – the weakness of the Nigerian nation-state itself as an imagined community. Watts shows how disproportionate violence is the postcolonial state’s response to such exposure of the very fiction (or at least fragility) of the nation itself.

However, while Mbembe and Watts help shed light on the disproportionate display of state power in Guinea-Bissau, their analyses do not account for the peculiarities of native birth as a leitmotif in these episodes. Such an explanation must consider how ideas about native birth operate at the level of an Aristotelian commonplace – that is, something *with* which one argues but *about* which one does not argue. In Guinea-Bissau, debates about *artigo quinto* centered on questions of racism and exposed the personalized motivations behind the proposed amendment, but did not question the fundamental basis of natal locality as determinative of national authenticity. Analyses of this phenomenon must thus consider how ‘native birth’ operates as a custom in E.P. Thompson’s sense: a thing that encodes important but unspoken assumptions about a cultural system (Thompson 1993). Through this lens, I will address some of my initial preoccupations with national exclusivity, identity, and modernity.

Nations and Nationalism

Recalling the introductory observation that natal locality seems to only have salience at the national level, I will now examine some particular aspects of nations and nationalism that might help to illuminate this facet of native birth stipulations.

Benedict Anderson’s watershed analysis of nationalism suggests an embeddedness of native birth within the very origins of nations and nationalism. Anderson makes a case for the Creole origins of nationalism, based to some extent on the accident of birth in the Americas – what he calls ‘the shared fatality of trans-Atlantic birth.’ Speaking of the Creole, Anderson remarks:

Even if he was born within one week of his father’s migration, the accident of birth in the Americas consigned him to subordination - even though in terms of language, religion, ancestry, or manners he was largely indistinguishable from the Spain-born Spaniard. There was nothing to be done about it: he was irremediably a creole. Yet how irrational his exclusion must have seemed!

Nonetheless, hidden inside the irrationality was this logic: born in the Americas, he could not be a true Spaniard; ergo, born in Spain, the *peninsular* could not be a true American (Anderson 1983:57-58).

Thus, if we accept Anderson's argument, we see from the very beginning of modern nationalism a linkage between birthplace and legitimacy.

Furthermore, Hobsbawm and Ranger (and their followers) have elucidated the role of 'invented traditions' in establishing nationhood. Simply put, nations need to establish a sense of the past in order to legitimate their presence in the present.

We should not be misled by a curious, but understandable paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion (Hobsbawm 1983:13-14).

Michael Watts strengthens this argument in his explication of Nicos Poulantzas's somewhat cryptic assertion: "A national unity or modern unity becomes a historicity of a territory and a territorialization of a history" (Watts 1999:19). Watts unpacks this statement by explaining that

the authentication of a national project must ... involve the construction of an ethno-historical project, the creation of a sense of 'naturalness.' ... Nation building is an institutional, political and cultural process that involves a particular style of imagining to construct a collective identity which sutures territory and history (Watts 1999:29-30).

What could be more 'natural' than birth and more 'territorial' than the physical space within the confines of national borders? Watts' analysis is, in many ways, an application of Raymond Williams' notion of selective tradition – 'an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification... It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present' (Williams 1977:115-116).

Collectively, Williams, Hobsbawm and Watts help shed light on a curious element embedded in Guinea-Bissau's *artigo quinto*. The only other presidential eligibility criterion in the current Guinean constitution is a minimum age requirement – like in the U.S., all candidates for

president must be at least 35 years old. If *artigo quinto* becomes incorporated into the constitution, the combined eligibility criteria eliminate the possibility for *anyone* to run for president for the next several years, given that Guinea-Bissau itself (the nation in which a potential, 35+ candidate must be born) is only 25 years old. While we might dismiss this as an ironic legislative oversight, perhaps the insights of the authors above provide a more apt (if less conscious) explanation: Guinea-Bissau's historical amnesia regarding its own recent 'birth' is a necessary pathology given the nation's need to believe in its own primordial existence. As Hobsbawm reminds us, 'all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history [and, I would emphasize, *extended* history] as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion' (Hobsbawm 1983:12).

In addition to its need for history, territory, and a primordial sense of self, the nation also requires a cohesive emblem or symbol that signifies the unity of its members.⁶ In Guinea-Bissau, one of the most visible national symbols is the appearance on men's heads of a snug-fitting, multi-colored, wool cap, popularized by Amílcar Cabral, the architect of Guinea-Bissau's independence movement. Cabral was particularly adept at fostering a sense of Guinean identity, which involved a conscious effort to transcend ethnic loyalties. Almost all ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau traditionally have an ethnically distinguishable hat, worn by initiated men. Cabral's hat combines elements of the various 'ethnic' hats, and its symbolism is not reducible to a single ethnic group. Despite its gender-lopsided use, it has stood as a symbol of Guinean national unity over and above ethnic diversity. But after the 1998 civil conflict, the efficacy of the hat in the service of national cohesion has become increasingly eroded. Given the popular resentment of Nino Vieira, and by association, the PAIGC (the national liberation party, which has been the only party to rule Guinea-Bissau since independence), Cabral's hat has become more a symbol of PAIGC corruption, and of partidarian fractiousness, than of Guinean unity. In addition, newly elected president Kumba Yala, a self-ascribed proud member of the majority Balanta ethnic group, has taken to wearing the Balanta hat in official and public settings. The Balanta hat is a red wool cap with a pom-pom; it is a highly visible marker of Balanta-ness. There is much barroom chatter about the appropriateness – and the implications – of this presidential display of ethnicity.

Now that the once omni-present Cabral hat has fallen out of favor, markers of Guinean-ness are up for grabs. Thus, invoking birthplace might serve as a generic marker of authenticity and cohesion that does not have to be elaborated by any specific content. Again, given the circumstances of flux and uncertainty within the nation, perhaps it is not so surprising that such primordia are invoked, and resonate, in attempts to find solid ground.

To sum up, the nation's need for territorially based history, a primordial sense of itself, and a symbolic sense of unity all help to further elucidate aspects of the 'native birth' phenomenon. Now that I have examined some of the workings of native birth stipulations at the level of the nation, I will explore its implications for notions of identity.

Fluid and Fixed Identities

An important complementary angle from which to approach 'customary' invocations of natal locality requires an analysis of identity formation, and in particular, changes in West African notions of identity. I suggest below that part of the answer to why invocations of birthplace-as-identity are viable lies in the legacy of a colonial re-shaping of the very idea of identity.

Much recent scholarship on colonialism and postcolonialism employs the trope of a colonial freezing of formerly fluid identities. Elsewhere, I have explored these issues through a consideration of several hundred years of Portuguese-African interaction in the Senegambian region (see Davidson 2002). Reviewing Peter Mark's (1999) analyses, I explored the dynamics of Portuguese and African contact on the Upper Guinea Coast and their ensuing implications for identity formation. Mark argues that processes of creolization and hybridity reflect tendencies toward assimilation, inclusivity, and fluidity across cultural lines not only of Luso-African groups but of a pre-colonial, 'indigenous' coastal African sense of ethnic identity:

The boundaries were fluid rather than fixed indicators of the 'otherness' of opposed populations... In this respect, Luso-Africans represent a model of identity formation quite rare in the modern world... One is led, if not to deny that coastal Luso-Africans conceptualized 'otherness' in the construction of their own sense of being 'Portuguese,' at least to suggest that this sense of the 'other' played a relatively circumscribed role in creating their image of who they were. This model of identity formation - flexible, malleable, and based on cultural and socio-economic factors - was characteristic of societies along the Upper Guinea Coast and derived from a local identity paradigm (Mark 1999:182).

In addressing the changes in Luso-African identity in subsequent centuries, Mark points to the ultimate dominance of the seventeenth century European formulation of identity being largely based on skin color, and the re-classification of coastal Luso-Africans accordingly (Mark 1999:184-187). Similar arguments on the impact of colonialism abound in postcolonial literature. The consensus, simply put, can be encapsulated in the following formula:

Precolonial notions of identity = fluid and contextually based

Colonial notions of identity = fixed and rigid

Terrence Ranger's (1983) chapter on 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,' illustrates this point quite cogently. In colonial Africa, Europeans

sought to tidy up and make more comprehensible the infinitely complex situation which they held to be a result of the 'untraditional' chaos of the nineteenth century. People were to be 'returned' to their tribal identities; ethnicity was to be 'restored' as the basis of association and organization. The new rigidities, immobilizations and ethnic identifications, while serving very immediate European interests, could nevertheless be seen by the whites as fully 'traditional' and hence as legitimated... The trouble with this approach was that it totally misunderstood the realities of pre-colonial Africa. These societies had certainly valued custom and continuity but custom was loosely defined and infinitely flexible (Ranger 1983:247, 249-250).

In a different continental context, Partha Chatterjee's (1993) analysis of colonialism echoes the same general formula. According to Chatterjee, non-modern identities in India (even caste identities) were fluid and contextually defined, and precolonial communities were characterized by their 'fuzziness' (Chatterjee 1993:222 and chapter 11). Modern political discourse fixed these identities and introduced a rigidity previously unknown. It is only when colonial administrators arrived and began to enumerate (bodies, castes, ethnic groups, communities) that the concept of particular communities (defined in opposition to each other) came into being.

The accounts of colonial administrators making order out of seeming chaos, and using European classification schema to assign individuals to ethnic groups which might or might not have existed prior to their arrival, do not need to be restated here. What is important, for our purposes, is to understand the impact of a colonial/European sense of identity on subsequent formulations

of national identity. Chatterjee sees this as critical for understanding the legacy of colonial sociological discourse in terms of how it still structures postcolonial politics.⁷

Scholarship on colonialism thus leads us to conclude that the postcolony inherited from colonialism the modes for constructing identity and belonging. This is most effectively expressed by Michael Watts: 'It is as if difference must be constructed through an ineluctable logic of denial, refusal, exclusion: identity as zero-sum game' (Watts 1999:12). Put another way, European colonial notions of identity operated through the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction. The rules of this game, when applied to the current situation in West Africa, become glaringly clear: If you are 'from' the Gambia, you cannot also be Guinean. And if you have one foot in Burkina Faso, you cannot place the other one (with any hope of standing upright) in Cote d'Ivoire. Perhaps, in this light, the rigidity and rule-bound aspects of native birth constitutional stipulations, and the assertion of their legitimacy and value in the postcolonial African nation-state, represent yet one more piece of a colonial legacy of rigidification and inflexibility of identity.

But there is something unsettling about this conclusion: it reinscribes the importance of colonialism without exposing the popular sentiment in postcolonial contexts that makes native birth important. To assert that precolonial or 'indigenous' notions of identity were fluid and flexible and a colonial or European sense of identity was the contrary seems too easy. The obvious question that ensues from such an exposition is, of course, why. Why would 'indigenous' models of identity and social groupings be based on principles of fluidity and inclusivity while European models be based on principles of opposition and exclusion? What factors would lead to the emergence of such different schema for organizing human difference? And why did the European model 'win'? Following E.P. Thompson's analysis of the making of a new human nature with the emergence of capitalism, we must ask, as he does: 'How far was it imposed, how far assumed?' (Thompson 1993:390). It is not enough to identify the 'external pressures which enforced this discipline;' we must also explore how and why such changes were received, absorbed, resisted, and eventually internalized into a new subjectivity.⁸

This is, in many ways, a Foucauldian question that has been taken up in various forms in Subaltern Studies. Chatterjee (1993) addresses such concerns through his objection to Anderson (1983) via the example of Indian nationalism. According to Chatterjee, what needs to be considered, in light of the Indian case as well as most postcolonial cases, is the particular way the nation is imagined in an anti-colonial struggle. Chatterjee's objection to Anderson is with Anderson's thesis of the modular adoption of national forms. Chatterjee asks:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized (Chatterjee 1993:5).

Chatterjee counters Anderson's notion of modularity not only on emotive grounds, but because it does not fit the empirical reality of postcolonial nationalisms. 'The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a difference with the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated by the modern West' (Chatterjee 1993:5).

The main problem of conventional analyses of nationalism, in Chatterjee's view, is that they have concentrated almost exclusively on the political history of nationalism, and by ignoring its cultural dimensions, they have failed to gain a full understanding of nationalism, particularly in its postcolonial form. Chatterjee argues that

anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social practices into two domains -- the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of state-craft, of science and technology, a domain where the West has proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority has to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa (Chatterjee 1993:6).

This split becomes the foundation on which Chatterjee builds his theory of Indian nationalism; it is in the spiritual domain that the real imaginative work takes place. A process akin to Williams's (1977) selective tradition and Thompson's (1993) formation of a new human nature (which takes on a more Foucauldian 'subjectivity' cast in Chatterjee's rendition) yields the postcolonial imagined community. It is the workings of this process, entirely missed in the purely political analyses of nationalism, that Chatterjee seeks to uncover in his study.

Such an analysis owns up to (and does not apologize for) the fact that anticolonial nationalism in Asia and Africa needed to adopt certain Western traditions, but it also accounts for the ways in which the anticolonial struggle 'fashion[ed] a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western' (Chatterjee 1993:6). It offers a nuanced example for how to go about answering some of the questions that linger after all-too-neat formulations of the colonized consciousness.

Reconciling Native Birth with Modernity

One of the enigmatic aspects of the salience of natal locality outlined in the beginning of this paper concerned its seemingly anti-modern quality, both in terms of its inherent anti-self fashioning bent and its move toward reterritorialization. The intensification of 'native birth' stipulations and the often-grotesque displays of state power that ensue in such contestations are, without a doubt, reterritorializing moves on the part of the nation. As Appadurai (1996) has suggested, global deterritorialization appears to beg a reactionary backlash of national reterritorialization; that is, grounded place becomes the nation's revenge against deterritorialization. But this interpretation casts such dynamics in a mutually exclusive antimony, stressing that the wave of history is toward de-localization, and hence reterritorializing can only be a kind of a temporary, if sometimes cruel, backlash. The situation becomes more complicated, though, when we see, in practice, that reterritorialization and increased concerns with authenticity actually reinscribe dislocations by helping to propel major population disruption. So the project of reterritorialization (especially when backed by State power) ironically intensifies the conditions of its own undermining. Perhaps, then, it is time to consider the ways in which natal localization seemingly conflicts with the logic of modernity. How can we reconcile the apparently 'anti-modern' move of *artigo quinto* with otherwise rapidly modernizing trends in Guinea-Bissau and an expressed wish to 'be modern'?

Concerns over birthplace are, in many ways, the national version of a general resurgence – in Africa and many other parts of the world – of claims to autochthony. In some instances, the very meaning of autochthony has been inverted. In Burkina Faso, for example, *les autochthones* used to be pejorative, referring to uncivilized people of the land. Now, *les autochthones* carry a positive valence, signifying the legitimate holders of knowledge and rights, the real Africans, the un-assimilated. Such switches in signification are part of an ongoing process of imagining and instituting identity in the postcolonial framework. Following Chatterjee's framing of postcolonial nationalisms emerging through anticolonial well-springs, autochthony, authenticity, and Africaness are re-defined as tied to the land, and 'belonging' as intimately enmeshed with birth and blood.

Such tendencies evoke Kopytoff's (1987) frontier thesis of African ethnogenesis.⁹ Given the historic conditions of possibility for frontier-based social formation, Kopytoff argues that African societies are not primordial entities that grew from an 'ethnic germ' and maintained an ethnic essence over time. Rather, African frontier polities are an amalgam of 'ethnic and cultural detritus' from surrounding societies, which repeatedly become incorporated into new social entities (Kopytoff 1987:7). Throughout his discussion, Kopytoff stresses the importance of 'firstcomer' status in the formation of emerging polities. Simply put, according to the firstcomer principle, authority is legitimized by being first (first born in a family, first on the land, lineage founder, etc.). The firstcomer principle establishes precedence as part of legitimacy and hierarchy. Thus, 'legitimation,' as Kopytoff notes, 'is couched in culturally valued idiom' both through the first-comer principle and evoking ancestral ties (Kopytoff 1987:71). Importantly, claims of first-comer status did not necessarily depend on factual chronological primacy on the land, but on successful civilizing of preceding savagery, on the introduction of social order, or on the redefinition (politically, socially, ritually) of previously occupied territory. Kopytoff's analysis resonates with Williams's (1977) notion of selective tradition as well as Hobsbawm and Ranger's invented tradition as means of securing legitimacy and authority. It also captures, in a postcolonial context, the nationalist mission of uplifting or civilizing the nation while validating, in a complementary fashion, its autochthony.

It is evident at this point that the incongruity of seemingly anti-modern invocations of birthplace in a place of hyper-conscious modernization can only be addressed by recasting the dynamic between the modern and traditional. Rather than assuming an inimical relationship between the two, or an inexorable progression (with inevitable backlashes) from the traditional to the modern, the case of natal locality in the modern nation-state suggests a more recursive connection.

Recent concerns with native birth in the modern nation-state highlight the intrinsic relationship between the ‘modern’ and ‘anti-modern.’ The constitution and nation-state, as ‘modern’ forms, update ‘traditional’ notions of descent-based legitimacy. Yet they must also draw on notions of autochthony to do so. It is the slippage between the ‘modern’ (democratization, constitutional reform, nationalism) and the ‘traditional’ (firstcomer status, autochthony, genealogically- and territorially-based legitimacy) that make native birth stipulations viable, especially in terms of deep-seated popular sentiment.

Conclusions

I initially became curious about notions of birthplace during my first visit to Guinea-Bissau, in July 1999. I arrived in Bissau just a few weeks after the last day of the civil war, and was immediately swept up in the heady mixture of optimism, devastation, confusion, and boredom that I came to recognize as a peculiarly post-conflict ethos. Many rainy-day conversations during that extreme rainy season were filled with the thrill of victory over corruption. As people re-built their bullet-ridden homes, the radio played and re-played a catchy epic song recounting Ansumane Mané’s heroic overthrow of Vieira’s tainted government. Enterprising adolescents sold montage photographs of the *junta militar* cut and pasted into the geographic shape of Guinea-Bissau or military heroes posing with bazookas on their shoulders, and truck drivers tacked these images onto their dashboards and cracked windshields. Collective attention was riveted on this single past event – the ousting of their autocratic president – and when I would ask the pesky question ‘What comes next?’ I was most often met with blank stares and dismissive shrugs.

It was in this milieu that *artigo quinto* (the proposed constitutional amendment stipulating native birth and parentage requirements for national political leaders) made its appearance, was debated on the streets and in the newspapers, was passed by members of the National Assembly, and was

eventually evasively shoved in a drawer, unsigned, by the interim president. The amendment immediately captured my attention, both in and of itself (as a rather odd piece of legislation) and as a site of public contestation over issues like identity, race, nationality, and leadership. When I discussed it with acquaintances in Bissau, most intellectuals dismissed it as a relic from the previous government, a last and futile attempt by desperate legislators to undermine progressive and competent leadership. They were sure it would disappear once a new president was elected and things returned to normalcy.

Just one year later, under the newly elected government of Kumba Yala, not only did *artigo quinto* resurface in discussions on constitutional reform, but rhetoric on Guinean birth and legitimacy was brought up in reference to the previously infallible hero Ansumane Mané. The suggestion that he should be repatriated to his ‘native’ Gambia seemed ludicrous given his stature and service record in Guinea-Bissau.¹⁰ Mané’s death in the shoot-out between his loyalists and Yala’s troops precluded the possibility of bringing this repatriation attempt to fruition, so it is fruitless to guess what the outcome would have been had he lived. What these events do suggest, however, is that concerns with native birth, national identity, and insider/outsider boundaries did not dissipate with the democratic election of Kumba Yala’s government. Such preoccupations (spurred on by news from Cote D’Ivoire) are more alive than ever.

Perhaps, given the various explanations offered in this paper, it seems less surprising that the ideological trope of birthplace-as-identity should be evoked at such moments of transition. But, in addition to the dramatic changes currently underway in Guinea-Bissau, attention to birthplace as constitutive of belonging reflects another wider cultural transformation emergent in Africa since the late colonial era. African polities have always been concerned to specify who belonged and who was an outsider, usually in genealogical or co-residential terms. But there has been a long tradition of incorporating outsiders into African societies through marriage, absorption, appropriation, and assimilation. Whatever the means, membership in a particular society generally emphasized cultural dimensions – through fictive kinship and the adoption of language, mode of dress, type of livelihood, and religious practices – over political and legal status. Relatively recent macro-level political and economic transformations – such as

colonialism, independence, and democratization – have no doubt had a profound impact on micro-level beliefs and practices involving insiders and outsiders. Intensified concerns about native birth within the nation-state can be viewed as part of an ongoing change in the status of strangers within African societies. As Shack suggests:

In the contemporary era of self-government, newly independent African nation-states have increasingly treated *jus in personam* and *jus in rem* as rights to be defined and enforced by the state within its legal and political boundaries. But exercising this privilege of sovereignty has reversed, as it were, the ‘normal’ process of change in the status of strangers (Shack and Skinner 1979:5).

Thus, attention to birthplace simultaneously encodes deep-seated sentiments about firstcomers and territory, and transforms longstanding traditions of incorporation. It is this embodiment of multiple intrinsically-bound contradictions – modern and anti-modern, rooted in and uprooting ‘indigenous’ notions of identity and belonging, cohering and excluding, irrationally affective and rationally effective – that makes native birth stipulations such a rich site of enquiry and continued enigma.

¹ Debates about *artigo quinto*, both in the national newspapers and in informal settings, focused on the ‘racist’ aspects of the proposed amendment. Opponents emphasized the dangers of racialized politics and insisted that criteria for leadership should be based on capacity and public service records, not blood (see *Diário de Bissau*; 10-29 July 1999).

² The events surrounding Mané’s death have never been confirmed, and Yala has refused any independent investigations into the case. Some people in Bissau political circles suspect that Yala provoked Mané’s actions by making unreasonable military promotions, calculating that Mané would respond as he did, and thus providing a pretext for eliminating him (Interviews, Bissau; October-December 2001). Since November 2001, Yala has thwarted three other supposed “coup attempts,” jailing many opposition leaders and closing down independent newspapers in the process. Increasingly, people in Bissau suspect Yala of fabricating these coup attempts in order to undermine members of opposition parties and other critics.

³ I use the term ‘Guinean’ to refer to the people of Guinea-Bissau. This should not be confused with Guineans from the neighboring Republic of Guinea (also known locally as Guinea-Conakry).

⁴ See Eduardo Costa Dias, ‘A Balantização da Guiné-Bissau,’ *Jornal Público* (5 December 2000); Lisbon, Portugal. The Balanta are the majority ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau, comprising 30 percent of the population. There are approximately 32 ethnic groups (depending on who is counting) in this country of 1.2 million inhabitants. The main ethnic groups, other than the Balanta, include the Fula, Mandinga, Manjaco, Mancanha, Papel, Bijagós, and Felupe.

⁵ Of course, constitutional stipulations on ‘native birth’ of the president are not exclusive to West Africa. The U.S. constitution, as well as many others around the globe, requires that the president be native born.

⁶ Quoting the literary theorist Lauren Berlant, Watts points out that the nation “requires a National Symbolic ... through which the historical nation aspires to achieve the inevitability of the status of natural law, a birthright” (Watts 1999:19).

⁷ As Chatterjee states: ‘...even if we dismiss the sociological view that declares India to be a mere collection of discrete communities as a peculiarly colonial construct, we are apparently still left with a brand of postcolonial politics whose discursive forms are by no means free of that construct’ (Chatterjee 1993:224).

⁸ Such investigations comprise an important next step in studies of ethnicity in the postcolonial world. The revelation that many ethnic classifications emerged from colonial officials’ attempt to make order out of seeming chaos raises deeper questions of how and why these identities and ethnic categories took root, how they have become reified and naturalized, and how they are experienced today.

⁹ In essence, Kopytoff’s proposal is a direct repudiation of both the tribal model for African social formation and evolutionary theories that posit a band-to-polity direction of development. Kopytoff’s frontier thesis offers an alternative model of African ethnogenesis given historic patterns of movement and relatively shallow histories of most contemporary ‘ethnic groups,’ as well as accounts for the presence of widespread cultural and political phenomena (such as divine kingship).

¹⁰ Mané’s fall from grace is a matter of complexity beyond the scope of this paper. Across the country, opinions regarding Mané’s loyalty to Guinea-Bissau, especially given his post-1999 comportment, vary widely (Interviews, Bissau and Interior; October 2001-June 2002).

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