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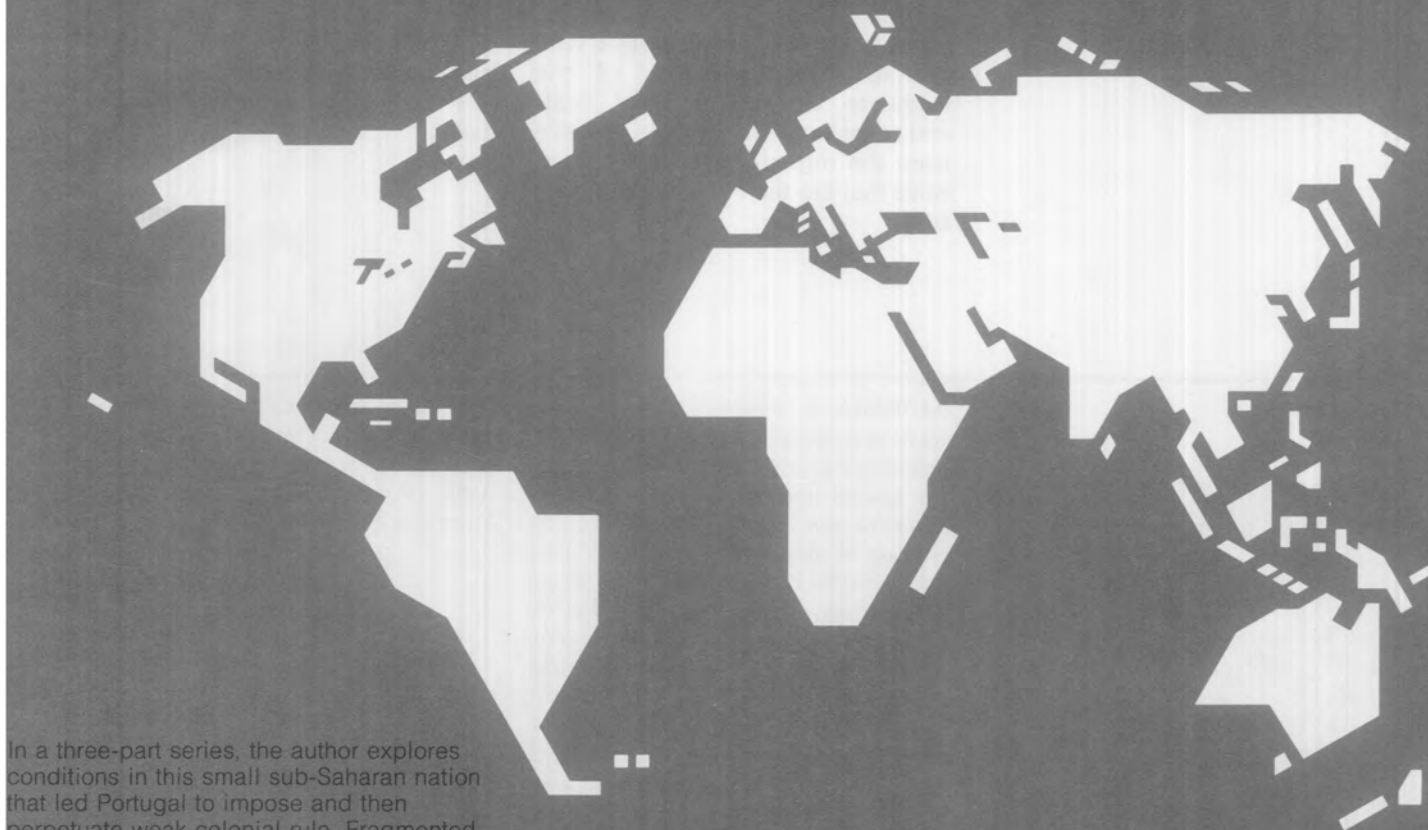
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Reports

GUINEA-BISSAU
Part I: The Colonial Experience

by Barbara Harrell-Bond and
Sarah Forer



In a three-part series, the author explores conditions in this small sub-Saharan nation that led Portugal to impose and then perpetuate weak colonial rule. Fragmented and impoverished, Guinea-Bissau had few advantages at independence except the bonds forged in the anticolonial struggle.

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During the night of Friday, November 14, 1980, tanks moved through the streets of the capital city of Bissau and soldiers went round warning the populace not to leave their homes: a coup d'état had just ousted Luis Cabral, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau since its establishment as an independent state more than seven years before. Cabral, a mestizo (whose father came from the neighboring Cape Verde Islands) in 1956 co-founded, with his half brother Amilcar Cabral, the Guinean nationalist party, PAIGC (Partido Africano de Independência de Guiné e Cabo Verde, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde).

The coup (which is discussed in detail in Part III of this series of *Reports*) was led by the country's Prime Minister and an important leader in the PAIGC, João Bernardo Vieira ("General Nino"), a native Guinean. Nino, already regarded by his fellow-countrymen as a legendary figure at the age of 41, had earned his reputation as one of the chief guerrilla leaders of the PAIGC during the 11-year liberation struggle against Portugal. The coup had been carefully timed: many leading members of the government were out of the country and the atmosphere was tense in the wake of the

recent severe shortages of rice—the staple food of the Guinean people. Bottles of imported alcohol graced the store shelves but essential provisions were not available. Accusations of corruption had been leveled against Luis Cabral and the Volvo-driving, Paris-garbed bureaucrats of his regime.

Cabral, holidaying at the time on Bubaque, an offshore island, was put under house arrest. Two senior members of the government who resisted the takeover were killed, and a third, injured, sought asylum in the Swedish Embassy. The international press carried reports of demonstrations in the streets of Bissau celebrating the overthrow of Cabral's government.

Though circumstances surrounding the coup remain unclear, one thing is fairly certain—it at least brought a temporary halt to moves to unite Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands. (Both countries had suffered from and fought together against Portuguese colonial rule, which had lasted more than 500 years.)

Guinea-Bissau was one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from its colonial rulers through guerrilla warfare. As the PAIGC gained control of parts of the country during the war, it had introduced into these areas an alternative social and economic structure which won it the support of the majority of the peasantry before the war was over. Since independence, the government of Guinea-Bissau has been fairly successful in maintaining a policy of nonalignment, and during its first seven years of self-rule it has attempted a unique development

strategy emphasizing social justice and a fair distribution of benefits.

This, the first of three *Reports*, will look at the colonial history of Guinea-Bissau. Part II will describe the development of the nationalist movement, the ideology of Amilcar Cabral, its leader, and the armed struggle which began in 1963. Part III will discuss the experiences and problems of the country since independence.¹

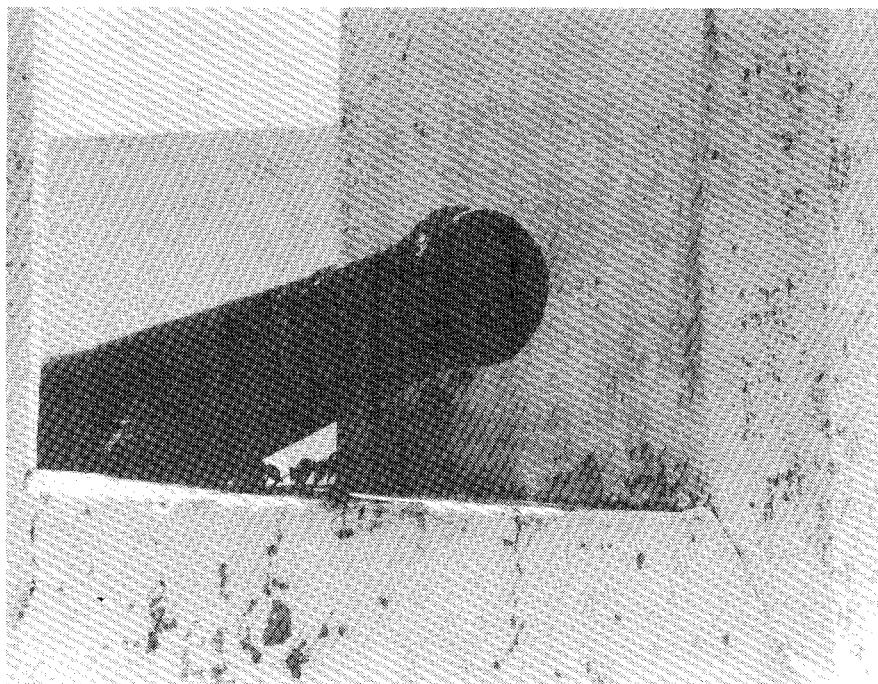
Portugal's "Empire"

When Portuguese navigators and sailors, probably in 1446, first sighted the green and swampy coast of present-day Guinea-Bissau, they were no doubt unaware of the fact that they were beginning to lay the foundations of an international economic and political system that more than five hundred years later would still continue to dominate the lives of the majority of the world's inhabitants.... Nor did the Portuguese sailors realize that the land they were about to "discover" would not only be among the very first included in this world system yet to be born, but also be among the very last to be forced to belong to it in its classical form of direct colonialism.²

While most accounts credit Portugal with being the first "colonial power" in Africa, at least one demythologizes its early adventures there:

What is true is that the Portuguese maritime pioneers achieved a trading and raiding presence along the coast after the 1440s; in the Congo estuary and along the northern part of the coast of Angola after 1480; and at a few points on Africa's Indian Ocean seaboard.... This faint early presence they were gradually

I spent time in Guinea-Bissau during July and August 1980. Sarah Forer, an American studying for her master's degree in economics at the University of Paris, assisted in the research and writing as an AUFS student intern. I am particularly grateful for her work translating French sources.



A relic of the early days of slaving, part of the fort at Cacheu.

able to transform into permanent emplacements and small trading settlements.

*...Portugal cannot be said to have wielded any real control over these territories until late in the nineteenth century, or even, for regions far from their main bases, until early in the twentieth. This weakness derived partly from the industrial and technological backwardness of Portugal itself, partly from the rivalry of other imperial powers, and partly from the strength of African kingdoms and politics which faced and long resisted Portuguese invasion. In western Angola, for example, there was almost continuous warfare for nearly a hundred years after 1575.*³

Some historians regard the crusading zeal of the Portuguese and their search for "Prester John" as the chief motives for this small and chronically poor country setting sail around the world. Prester John, a mythical potentate, was thought to be the ruler of a Christian kingdom, vaguely located in an area that was sometimes defined to include Ethiopia and East Africa and some of Asia. However, the evidence clearly shows that such religious motives were only a thin disguise for commercial motives. Even the Pope recognized the economic importance of spreading the gospel when

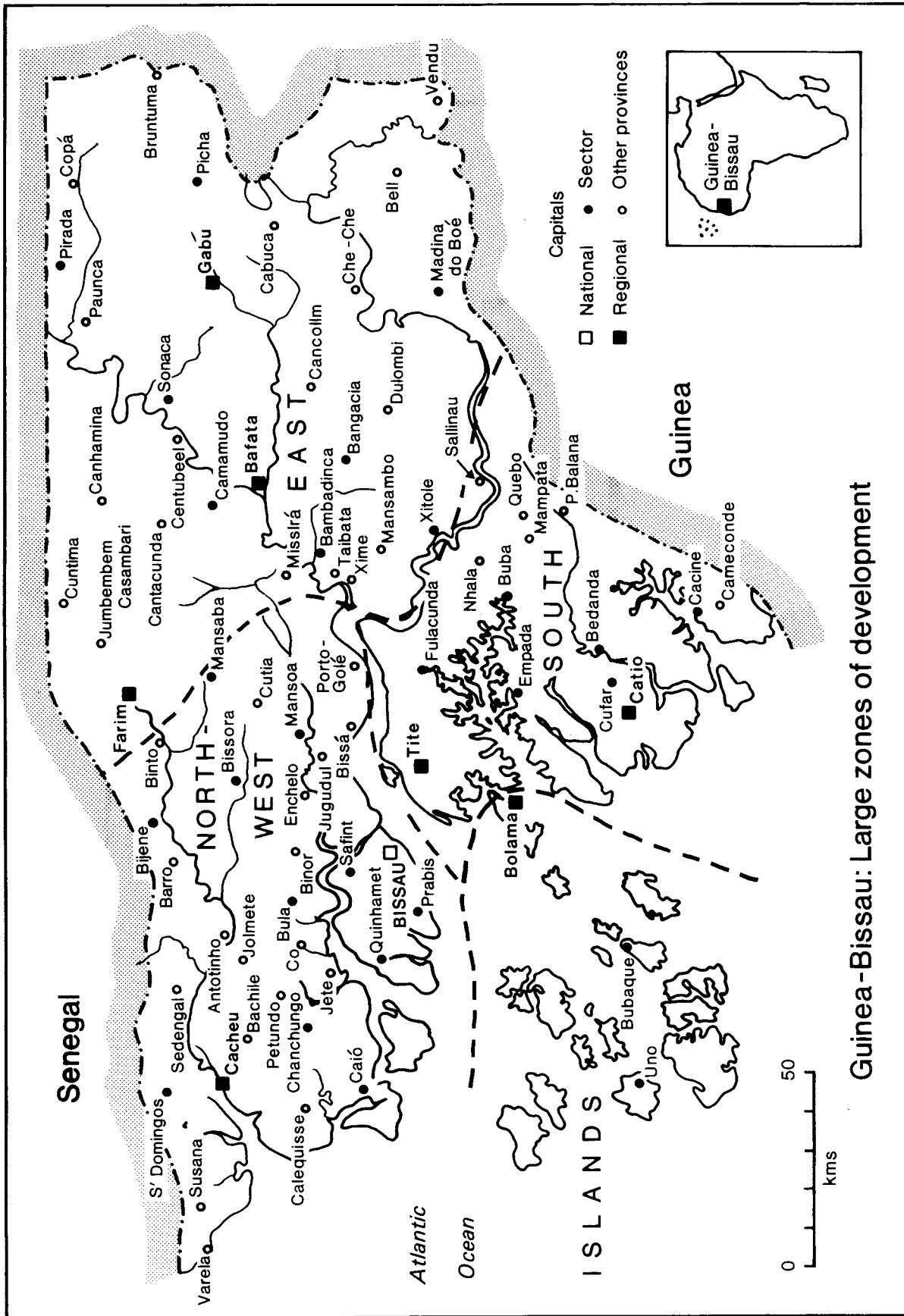
he granted the King of Portugal and his successors "the monopoly of the trade with the inhabitants of the newly-discovered regions," although he forbade them to sell arms to the "enemies of the Faith."⁴ The quest for gold from the Guinea coast, as well as other trade, led to the establishment of a series of trading centers and forts along the African coasts, and forts on the east coast were built to protect the spice trade route to India and Indonesia. The slave trade became the principal activity of the Portuguese on the west coast of Africa after they had developed sugar plantations in Madeira, São Tomé, and Brazil.

The uninhabited islands of Cape Verde were systematically settled by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century as an outpost for their mercantile activities. Cape Verde served as a base for slaving operations and for the production of cotton and textiles which were exchanged with Africans for slaves and other products. Some evidence suggests that the Portuguese encouraged intermarriage between their settlers and Africans from the Guinea coast, which resulted over the centuries in the development of a distinct, catholicized Cape Verdean mestizo population. Until 1530 the Portuguese enjoyed a monopoly of commerce in the area. Thereafter,

interests in Portugal could no longer protect their trading monopoly because of the occupation of the mainland by Spain from 1580 to 1640. Cape Verde was "a sort of first edition of the American colonies... [which] enjoyed a period of splendor at the beginning of Portuguese mercantile capitalism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, before entering a decline with the rise of the Antilles and Brazil."⁵

As the Dutch gained control of a substantial portion of the Asian trade, followed by the French and the English, the focus of the Portuguese trading empire shifted from the west coast of Africa to Angola and Brazil. Moreover, during the sixteenth century, relatively few Portuguese—perhaps 10,000—manned the overseas empire. Portugal itself was ill-served by the capital its overseas territories yielded. Rather than developing the home economy, either manufacturing or agriculture, capital flowed through Lisbon and into Holland and England and even, in the case of Brazil, to other colonies. The west coast of Africa continued to be a rich source of slaves, but Angola became Portugal's main source of manpower for the plantations and mines in its colony of Brazil.

Although initially the slave trade relied on the application of force, the Portuguese soon established trading partnerships and coalitions with local individuals and groups which supplied slaves. Before the end of the sixteenth century there were at least ten such trading points between Cape Verde and the Sierra Leone River. Resident Portuguese traders, *lançados*, entered into close relationships with the local people and often intermarried. Missionaries were also active in the area. These *lançados* (or *tangomãos*, as they were also called) were "private traders who resided in Guinea against repeated prohibitions, providing a ready means of evading the attempted Portuguese monopoly of trade."⁶ As early as 1466, Cape Verde had its first charter from the Portuguese Crown which, in addition to providing a judiciary and a revenue department, granted exclusive rights over the Africans resident



Guinea-Bissau: Large zones of development

in the islands and license to trade on the mainland. By residing on the mainland, the *lançados* were able to avoid paying taxes, and despite a series of ferocious measures—including the threat of capital punishment—Portugal was unable to control the expansion of this community of Portuguese and their families. The *lançados* lived under the rule of African leaders, subject to the local legal system, and cooperated with the Africans in promoting free trade in the upper Guinea Coast. They were joined by French, British, German, and Dutch traders, who also participated in the lively import-export market in a variety of commodities besides gold and ivory. Many Africans became fluent in these European languages, but more commonly trade was facilitated by the development of Creole languages along the coast. *Crioulo*, which is the lingua-franca in today's Guinea-Bissau, has its origins in this period.

The Eighteenth Century

The end of the seventeenth century saw the Portuguese in dire financial straits. Unlike England and France, Portugal's imperialism never provided the base for an industrialized economy. Portugal had to import cereals and manufactured goods, using its exports of sugar, tobacco, salt, fruit, and wine to pay for these essentials. The Portuguese suffered from a perpetual balance of payments problem; exporting primary products and importing manufactured goods—a practice more characteristic of a colony than of a colonial power. For example, the Treaty of Methuen with Britain, signed in 1703, provided for preferential rates for the import of Portuguese wines in exchange for the duty-free entry of British textiles.

The mid-eighteenth century found the Portuguese empire in a crisis which was due largely to declines in production of sugar, gold, and diamonds from Brazil, the mainstay of its tottering economy. Portugal was, however, able to capitalize temporarily on markets in Europe which were being neglected as a result of French and British involvement in the American war of independence.

Portugal's practice of establishing trading centers on the coast of West Africa and building slave forts was copied by the British and the French

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The region which the Portuguese called "Guinea of Cape Verde" stretched from the Cape Verde Islands all the way to what is today the Liberia-Sierra Leone border. This region had been the preserve of the Portuguese traders settled on Cape Verde, but gradually British and French competition reduced the Portuguese influence, and the Portuguese empire entered a period of further stagnation. During the late eighteenth century, the British founded their first colony in Africa—Sierra Leone—and in 1808 decided to enforce the abolition of slavery on the coast of West Africa. This meant a direct confrontation with the Portuguese, the only "colonial" power still actively engaged in the slave trade. At the same time, the British wished to keep good relations with the Portuguese, and sought Portuguese cooperation by suggesting that they confine their slaving activities to the east coast of Africa and Angola.⁷

The Nineteenth Century

The Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century had serious effects on conditions within Portugal. The invasion of Portugal by French troops resulted in diplomatic pressure from the British for the royal family to flee to Brazil. In 1808, the family bowed to this pressure and fled, escorted by British warships. In 1822, Brazil declared its independence from Portugal, a loss that led Portugal to abandon its system of colonial monopoly; Brazil was thrown open to British trade and direct foreign influence. The loss of Brazil (the source of 80 to 90 percent of Portugal's colonial commerce) increased Portugal's troubles, and the country suffered internal instability and economic hardship. In addition, the decline in Portugal's West African trade due to pressure from Britain and France meant that Portugal could no longer compete successfully as a trading nation. Even its long-established grip on such trading centers as Bissau was temporarily lost to the British and French who entered into their own private agreements with local notables.

Portugal's influence on the west coast of Africa was limited to Cape Verde and Bissau. From 1834 they were administered as a unit, although the administrative presence

in Guinea-Bissau was limited to the coast, which in 1836 was made a district under the general government of the Cape Verde Islands. The Portuguese constitution of 1838 established that its overseas provinces would be governed by special laws passed in conformity with the needs of the residents and suited to their geographical situation and the conditions of their social environment.

A series of attempts had been made to implant official representatives of the Portuguese government in Bissau, the first coming in 1614 when an official of the Crown was appointed to serve in Cacheu. This effort, made to secure the revenue which would result from a trading monopoly, led to direct confrontation with local Africans who were determined to maintain free trade relations. Portuguese attempts to prevent foreign ships from stopping in Bissau led to further serious setbacks in their relationship with the local people; the King of Bissau gave his personal guarantee of safety to ships sailing under other flags. In efforts to prevent the monopolization of trade, the Africans were joined by the *lançados*. Portuguese attempts to preserve sole authority over the area proved ineffective and French, English, and Dutch traders thrived. In May 1676, the first Company of Cacheu was launched but its success was no greater, and its interests were later transferred to the island of Bissau. In 1690, a second company called the "Company of Cacheu and Cabo Verde" was established but its efforts to control trade in the area fared no better.

In 1869, Guinea-Bissau was divided into four districts. The administrative centers, Cacheu, Bissau, Bolama, and Buba, were all located on coastal estuaries. In 1878 Portugal had already decided to occupy Guinea-Bissau by force and to subdue the native population which had grown ever more hostile to the Portuguese presence. But the military was repelled in the north, at Bolor, still only on the coast, and they were unable to move into the interior because of African resistance. In 1879, Portugal formally separated the administration of Guinea-Bissau from that of the Cape Verde Islands and officially proclaimed Guinea-Bissau to be its colony; its right to

rule over Cape Verde had never been questioned.

Having been increasingly dependent on Britain for manufactured goods and capital ever since the 1703 Treaty, Portugal was forced to rely on British patronage for its place in the scramble for Africa. Conflicts between Portugal, France, Belgium, Germany, and England over the Congo River area led in part to the famous Berlin Conference at which, in 1844-45, the areas of Rios da Guiné do Cabo Verde were formally recognized by these powers as Portuguese Guinea. The conference had been organized ostensibly to decide finally the boundaries of European control in Africa, but the scramble went on for much longer. The present boundaries of Guinea-Bissau were not established until the Franco-Portuguese Convention of 1886. After the Berlin Conference, Portugal signed treaties with France and Germany which recognized its sovereignty in the territories that lay between Angola and Mozambique, thus threatening British interests in the area which is now Zambia and Zimbabwe. Britain objected, noting Portugal's inability actually to occupy these lands according to the terms of the Berlin Conference. Portugal then sent expeditions to give military support to its claims, but Britain delivered Portugal an ultimatum to withdraw, backing it up by sending battleships toward Mozambique. Portugal was finally forced to sign a treaty limiting its territories in southern Africa to the present-day borders of Mozambique and Angola.

Spurred by the humiliation of the British accusation of inability to occupy their colonial territories effectively, the Portuguese set out to transform their image of weakness. They began a series of military operations against native resistance which find few parallels in colonial history for bloody and ruthless brutality. The financial cost of these wars, added to Portugal's already weakened economic state, led Britain and Germany to assume that Portugal would be unable to solidify its control in southern Africa, and in 1898 they entered into a secret treaty by which they would have shared out these two territories between them had Portugal lost its tenuous hold.

The Twentieth Century

Before World War I, however, Portugal had managed to consolidate its rule through its struggles against armed African resistance in its colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé and Príncipe, two small islands off the coast of Equatorial Guinea.

In 1911, the Portuguese government created a Ministry of Colonies to decentralize the administration of its overseas territories and enacted special laws to deal with each, according to their "state of civilization." Three years later, legislation established special administrative procedures for the native populations separate from those controlling Portuguese citizens resident in the colonies. European recognition and administrative procedures aside, the Portuguese continued to face stiff resistance in their efforts to "pacify" the natives of their territories in Africa. The inability of the many ethnic communities in Guinea-Bissau to unite against the invading Portuguese forces meant that the country was largely under Portuguese control by 1915, although sporadic outbreaks of armed revolt continued until 1936.

The colonial policies of the Portuguese in all their territories were oppressive in the extreme. Slavery was not officially abolished in Portuguese territories until 1836—in some places it continued for another 40 years. With abolition came further stagnation of the plantation economy (for which Guinea-Bissau had supplied many slaves), and in 1899, the Native Labor Regulations were passed. Despite their legal dressing, these amounted to a system of forced labor. Echoing the capitalist myth of the freedom of the worker to choose his means of livelihood, the regulation read: "All natives of Portuguese overseas provinces are subject to the obligation, moral and legal, of attempting to obtain through work the means that they lack to subsist and to better their social condition. They have full liberty to choose the method of fulfilling this obligation, but if they do not fulfill it, public authority may force a fulfillment."⁸ In other words, unemployment became a crime and "unemployment" from the Portuguese point of view

included subsistence farming: "Only the possession of sufficient cattle, or the cultivation of a significant quantity of a cash crop provide[d] exemption from the necessity to take another job."⁹ (In Mozambique, for example, this policy raised workers for the mines in South Africa, for the roads and plantations of Mozambique itself, and for the cultivation of cotton destined for the textile industry in Portugal.) The practice of exporting labor from Angola to São Tomé and Príncipe to work on cocoa plantations became a matter of international concern in the first years of this century. Although the Portuguese claimed that these workers were under contract as indentured servants, interviews on board ships verified that they were slaves, prompting the Cadbury Chocolate Company in Britain to boycott São Tomé cocoa.

By 1910, Portugal had still not become an industrialized power. That year marked the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the tumultuous Portuguese Republic which ended in a coup in 1926. During the intervening 16 years, there was an average of one revolution and 3 governments per year. Only one of the elected presidents actually completed his 4-year term and more than 500 different people held cabinet positions. There were 9 presidents, 44 ministers, 25 uprisings, 3 dictatorships, and in the last five years of the Republic, there were more than 300 bombings.

Behind this incredible instability lay a number of factors. Portugal had, in 1916, joined the Allies in World War I. This led to the accumulation of a staggering debt and consequently the budget deficit for the 1918-19 fiscal year was the worst in all Portugal's recorded history. In an effort to rescue the economy, the national currency, the *escudo*, was devalued, but the effect was only to worsen the balance of trade. The right to strike was recognized in 1911, and worker unrest plagued the government from then on. In 1917, for example, there was an outbreak of civil violence, food stores being sacked by starving workers. 1921 was marked by another significant outbreak of worker unrest. Even the professional middle class, of which army officers formed an important segment, saw their purchasing

power severely curtailed; in fact, their salaries were only slightly higher than those of the workers. The country, growing more unstable as the economic position and social mobility of the military—a major force in Portugal's politics—was threatened, suffered under politicians so inexperienced they were inept even in the practice of corruption.

Fascism and the Colonies

The 1926 coup inaugurated a military dictatorship. Dr. Antonio Salazar's authoritarian rule began two years later when he was appointed Minister of Finance and given control of the budget of every ministry. The transformation of the Portuguese government into a fascist regime occurred over the next few years, and this regime survived until 1974. The new government comprised a coalition of the military and the Catholic Church, together with banking and other financial interests, including large landowners (the Church was one of the largest), and large commercial cartels. Salazar relied on these traditional institutions and sought to rally the populace around the slogan "Faith, Family and Work" to justify his oppressive authority over a disintegrating society consisting largely of illiterate peasants. Poverty and political oppression made emigration to the colonies and other parts of the world a widespread phenomenon.

Salazar's government also ushered in a distinct change in colonial policy; for the first time, colonial exploitation was organized systematically. Portuguese companies were granted preferential tariff systems in the overseas holdings. Capitalizing on this advantage, the companies established stores in the colonies where peasants who had never had a monetary system traded their produce for coupons. With these coupons, they were forced to buy basic subsistence foodstuffs, which formerly they had produced before colonization on communally owned land for their own consumption. It might well be asked why it was that African peasant farmers were unable at this time to feed themselves.

The ending of the slave trade in the nineteenth century had seriously damaged the bank accounts of Portuguese merchants, and they had

turned to cash-cropping in the colonies, using forced labor. In 1840, groundnuts (peanuts) had been successfully introduced into Senegal by the French and their cultivation spread quickly in Guinea-Bissau to the Bolama region. In the early part of the twentieth century, there was a rapid expansion of groundnut cultivation, which required Portuguese colonial penetration into the interior. As has been noted, the indigenes resisted and were put down by armed force. The growing of groundnuts was at first optional, but later on the companies were able to force African peasants to produce this crop, the Lisbon government cooperating with the large companies by making colonial administrators responsible for insuring production. Local Portuguese merchants and farmers also benefited from this system of control, the merchants serving as middlemen in the purchase of groundnuts, and the settled Portuguese farmers acquiring access to labor. The classical method of drawing African farmers into cash-cropping through taxes was thus only one of the repertoire of methods which was applied to the colonies. The Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau had managed to take advantage of the hierarchical Islamized societies present and had gone so far as to introduce white Portuguese chiefs into some of these groups. Where more subtle methods failed, the commercial interests of the Portuguese in groundnut and palm oil production were imposed at gunpoint. (In other colonies, local African chiefs were co-opted and taxes collected in the form of produce. In parts of Mozambique, for example, a man was required to pay 100 pounds and a woman 50 pounds of cotton per year; failure was punished with a method of torture involving beating the hand with a small stick called the *palmatoria*, an instrument of discipline in Portuguese schools.)

Thus, instead of being able to concentrate on growing their own subsistence foods, African farmers were forced, in a variety of ways, to concentrate on cash crops, rendering them victims of the commercial companies which were expanding their exploitation of the economies of the colonies. Cash-cropping soon reduced the variety of foodstuffs grown and adversely affected the

nutritional standards of the peasants.

Other important changes were occurring in colonial administration following the onset of the Salazar regime in Portugal. After the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Portugal's fragile hold over commerce in the Guinea-Bissau region had been lost to the Germans and the French, a price Portugal had to pay for its presence in Africa. It is therefore not surprising that in 1927 more than 70 percent of exports from Guinea-Bissau were destined for importation into these two countries, while in turn, they exported manufactured goods to Guinea-Bissau. Consequently, by the early 1930s, Portugal was largely a functionary serving the interests of France and Germany. Such a relationship was unacceptable to Salazar's nationalist government. Further, business interests in Portugal were determined to bring the country into the twentieth century by industrializing the economy, and this required wealth and raw materials. For these Portugal was dependent on its overseas possessions.

In an effort to reassert Portugal's hegemony, legislation was passed in 1926 which once more designated Angola and Mozambique as Portuguese colonies. This proclamation was extended to Guinea-Bissau the following year. Salazar, who had briefly been Overseas Minister but had never set foot in any of the Portuguese colonial territories, created a new type of administration for them, detailed in the Colonial Act of 1930. Lisbon was declared the center of control of the overseas provinces, and all policy decisions concerning the colonies would be made by the central government in Portugal, minor affairs being decided by the Overseas Ministry. This legislation also included a provision for differing personal law for two categories of inhabitants of the colonies. One, *indígenos*, included the majority African population; the other, *não-indígenos*, applied to the whites, the mestizos and the *assimilados*, who were regarded as citizens of Portugal, distinctions of great importance for Portugal's colonial policy.

In 1933, along with a new constitution for Portugal, known as the New State, the Organic Charter of the

Portuguese Colonial Empire was promulgated. This included administrative reforms which essentially limited the decentralization provisions of 1911. One of the most important aspects of the Organic Charter was its attempt to provide a legal base for the re-establishment of Portugal's lost commercial monopoly. Protective tariffs were introduced to insure Portuguese shipping a monopoly for transporting materials moving between colonies and Lisbon. Given the imposition of such disadvantageous terms, merchants from France and Germany began to withdraw from Guinea-Bissau. Raw materials were exported from the colonies to Portugal, refined, and then resold. The elimination of French and German competition meant that the terms of trade for the Africans in the colonies worsened, as Portugal, with its monopoly control, was able to impose prices lower than world market prices. Purchases of cash crops in Guinea-Bissau were controlled by middlemen. The peasants remained outside the imposed monetary system, yet were totally dominated by it. Growing only rice for their own consumption and delivering palm nuts and groundnuts for the export market, their other food needs were inadequately met by the coupon system.

Portugal and NATO

Portugal's allegiance in World War II became a matter of Allied concern when its Azores Islands located in the North Atlantic proved strategically important in the war against Germany. Even before Portugal had stopped exporting vital war materials to Germany, the British had established an air base in the Azores. The United States entered into negotiations for similar facilities. In 1943, U.S. policy vacillated between considering taking the Azores by force, and complying with the Portuguese demand that American military interests be removed immediately after the war was over, with the United States assuring Portugal of support for its sovereignty over its empire. America's attitude toward Portugal was complicated by Portugal's known fascist regime and oppressive colonial policy. Salazar, a committed nationalist, disliked any act which smacked of infringement on Portuguese sovereignty, and the negotia-

tions over the Azores were prolonged. Anxious to deflect stories carried in the American press which had labeled Salazar a fascist, George Kennan—the man responsible for these negotiations with Portugal—refers to him in his memoirs as a “man of principle.”¹⁰ There is little indication that the U.S. was, at this time, overly concerned with Portugal's “domestic dictatorship or any future self-determination for [its]...colonies,” U.S. lack of interest in Africa per se being demonstrated by the fact that at the time there was not even a bureau of African affairs in the State Department.

*[The U.S.]...interests in the Azores for strategic military purposes shaped postwar relations with Portugal and affected international relations. Such determination of policy by military and security interest alone may perhaps be disillusioning to idealists fresh from the reading of the Atlantic Charter, or still steeped in similar passages from their high school history textbooks. But it is hardly surprising in view of the general trends of American policy. The applicability of such ideals [as decolonization] has been severely selective: confined to where political forces have compelled them to be taken into account, or where they could be profitably employed against an opponent.*¹¹

Thus, the Dutch for example, found themselves under the pressure of “American anticolonialism” when it appeared that a policy of withdrawal was the only tactic that would preserve Indonesia (and Southeast Asia in general) from communism. Roosevelt's and Stalin's pressure on Churchill over British holdings was similarly self-interested. The absence of strong nationalist movements in the Portuguese colonies at the end of World War II meant that Portugal and its colonies remained largely untouched by the “winds of change” which had begun to blow. American strategic concerns largely ignored Portugal and Africa as a whole, excepting the Azores.

The defeat of Germany found Portugal re-establishing its important economic links with Britain and other European powers. The Portuguese government participated in the Committee of European Eco-

nomic Co-operation in 1947 and sought Marshall Plan aid in 1948. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded the following year, and Portugal was included in its membership. Although French colonies in North Africa were included as members, there was no mention in the treaty of Portugal's colonies. Portugal's depleted economy left it with nothing to contribute to the alliance or, of course, to the economic interests of the newly formed committee of European cooperation. The primary interest that Portugal presented to the founders of NATO was the Azores Islands, which were crucial in Cold War defensive strategy. Military aid from the United States to Portugal began in 1951 and a new agreement, granting more extensive base rights in the Azores, was also signed. Substantial portions of the Portuguese military forces were thus American-trained and equipped. Most American aid to Portugal was spent with an eye to European defensive orientations, but some went on “such projects as the highway from the Genguela Railway to Chingola, the port at Lobito, or the runway in Vila Luso. In 1953 a loan was made to Rhodesia and Portugal which paid for the rail link from Rhodesia to Lourenco Marques”¹². (This particular investment insured transport of crude oil to Salisbury long after international sanctions against the Rhodesian government had been imposed.) Good relations with Portugal continued with a new agreement over the Azores signed in 1962. Americans neither challenged Portugal's colonial policies nor its dictatorship, and indeed the United States supported Portugal's bid to join the United Nations.

Portugal and the United Nations Organization

Portugal's first application to the United Nations was made in 1951. In anticipation of the requirements for acceptance, the Portuguese constitution was revised by removing the term “colony” as applied to their overseas holdings, and introducing the nomenclature “overseas provinces.” Lisbon's new rhetoric defended the notion of “political unity and economic solidarity of all the Portuguese territories” and of “the spiritual assimilation of the non-metropolitan populations.” The legislation stated that the overseas

provinces were now an integral part of the "motherland." Provision was made for the appointment of deputies from these provinces to the Portuguese parliament, and the franchise was extended to those Africans of "civilized status," according to the Portuguese definition, less than one percent of the black population. Upon this legislation Portugal hoped to base its claim that it did not control any non-self-governing territories.

In 1955, Portugal was admitted to the United Nations as part of a deal with the Soviet Union, in which each camp of the Cold War was granted the admission of several new members. When an attempt to apply the United Nations' requirement that members report on conditions of nonself-governing territories was made in 1956, Portugal asserted that it had no such possessions. During the years following there were a number of debates on the status of Portugal's provinces, and in the late 1960s, the United Nations passed several resolutions condemning Portugal's practices in its colonies. These pressures had little effect on the internal politics of Portugal (despite protests which came from movements within the country), nor did they shake the support of Portugal's Western allies.

By 1961, however, events had taken a slightly different direction. A series of international incidents resulted in the "Third World" becoming a new battlefield for power and influence. Within Angola, armed revolt had broken out and the U.S. administration revised its policy toward Portugal and its colonies. At a meeting of the Security Council on March 15, 1961, a draft resolution was introduced which called on Portugal to introduce the reforms which had been part of the previous year's resolution. Although no members voted against this resolution, it failed, with six abstentions against five positive votes. The United States voted in favor.

Reforms and Assimilado Status

The year in which Portugal became a full member of the United Nations marked another change in the administration of Guinea-Bissau. A new judicial and administrative system was introduced and placed under the control of the bureaucrats stationed in the country. These

administrators were recruited from the assimilado population of Cape Verde. Guinea-Bissau, integrated into the centralized judicial system of Lisbon, became a subdistrict. The new institutions and rules gave only apparent consideration to the multiplicity of indigenous laws, and, as noted above, legislation distinguished between two types of citizens. Natives were subject to a municipal court system—only the Portuguese and assimilados (0.3% of the population) resident in Guinea-Bissau had the right to appeal to Lisbon.

Although it has been widely believed that Portugal's colonial policy in Africa lacked a "color consciousness," color was certainly one of the most important diacritical class marks. It has already been noted that, very early, individual Portuguese traders intermarried with Africans along the coast, and a number of important African families today have their roots in these early unions. Many mulatto children were educated in Europe and served as agents and factors for the mercantile interests of the companies operating on the west coast of Africa. At times there were voices in Portugal which protested against such assimilation into African society. The Church was primarily concerned about baptism and conversion, and the government was always upset about its loss of revenue due to the ability of these groups, which had strong contacts with indigenous leaders, to circumvent their financial obligations to the Crown.

*Portuguese racial prejudice is not as closely tied to the idea of race, as such, as is the racism of northern Europeans. Nor is its expression unambiguous. But it clearly exists. And the scorn for Africans inherent in the Portuguese attitudes can be seen in the very mechanism which is proposed for attaining the "multi-racial" unity of the Portuguese nation. That mechanism is assimilation: not through the creation of some new culture, but through becoming Portuguese, absorbing Portuguese culture and language.*¹³

The distinction between different types of citizens had existed in practice for some time and, formally, it had already been introduced under the Colonial Act of 1930. This law

and the Native Statute of 1954 distinguished between indígenas and assimilados. The former included all those who had not fully assimilated the Portuguese language and "civilization." Only assimilados could exercise the few democratic rights granted the people of Guinea, which included the right to vote for members of the National Assembly in Lisbon or for members of the Government Council in Bissau. "Less than *four-tenths of one percent* of the Africa population was classified as assimilado during the 1950s. This figure gives the true measure of democracy in colonial Guinea."¹⁴ An indígena could become an assimilado only if he fulfilled a set of requirements: these included the ability to speak Portuguese, being over 18, holding a job which provided sufficient income to support him and his family, having a record of good conduct, having attained a certain level of education and "habits which are a condition for the unrestricted application of the public and private law," and having proof that he had never refused to perform military service or deserted it. Reflecting the implication that the indígena was "uncivilized," census figures up to 1959 categorized the population as *civilizado* and *não-civilizado*.

Most important, the United Nations report from which the statement of these rules derive, noted that the indígena status also carried with it economic and social implications through the operation of the labor laws which "frequently subjected him to forced labor both for public works and private enterprises." As a result of international pressure following the UN's exposure of Portugal's discriminatory plural legal system, the Native Statute of 1954 was repealed along with the introduction of other so-called reforms. In 1961 the African inhabitants were formally recognized as Portuguese citizens, although their private or personal law remained tied to the indigenous systems. Language and the "cultural" criteria were dropped from citizenship requirements and schools were opened to black children. Labor reform legislation was passed, although in practice it had relatively little effect upon the lot of the majority of Africans. The preamble to the reformed labor law sounds like an admission of guilt

The cathedral in Bissau.



The courthouse in Bissau.



A section of the main highway to Bafata.





The Portuguese did not encourage education as every hand was needed for the growing of cash crops for export. All the agricultural work was done by manual labor and even today most farming is done by hand labor.



Cattle grazing in the eastern part of Guinea-Bissau.

Women at work plowing a field.



concerning the conditions of the colonies:

*All distinctions between ethnical or cultural groups have disappeared and in the future all workers, whatever the ethnical or cultural group to which they belong, shall be subject to the same law; compulsory labor in any form is not permitted; no penal sanctions are provided for the nonfulfillment of labor contracts; there is no paternalistic guardianship of workers; the recruitment of workers through the intervention or with facilities granted by the authorities is forbidden; there is no intervention of the authorities in the elaboration of labor contracts.*¹⁵

The idea that a multi-ethnic Portugal existed and that it stretched over continents and oceans as a single entity was passed off as being the very opposite of apartheid theories of racism. Portugal's pretense that racial discrimination in its African possessions did not exist was part of the same racist theory that included the euphemistic designation of its colonies as "overseas territories," and its "system of assimilation." The distinctions between native and non-native peoples were maintained by Portugal to be of a "cultural" not a racial nature; the proof, it was said, lay in the process of assimilation, whereby Africans who successfully fulfilled certain cultural requirements were treated on an equal footing with their white, fellow countrymen.

Legal changes pertaining to local government were also included in these 1961-62 reforms introduced by Portugal. All these reforms were formulated in response to increasing pressure following the United Nations General Assembly declaration of decolonization, Resolution 1514 (XV), of December 14, 1960. This declaration recognized the right of independence and self-determination of all colonized countries and peoples.

Decolonization

Support by Western powers for decolonization was a response to the actual political situation of the world. The Cold War had been intensified by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. The development of the nonaligned movement stemming from the Conference of Bandung in 1955 showed the West

that many new states were determined to pursue their own paths of development without the guidance of their former colonial masters. Support for "peaceful transformation" from colonial status to independence in Africa and elsewhere became the strategy for maintaining political, economic, and social control over these emerging states. The lesson of what had happened to Egypt was too painful and immediate to be ignored: Nasser's reaction to the West's transgressions against Egypt's sovereignty had raised the ugly specter of the Soviet menace as a force to be reckoned with in dealings with nationalist movements elsewhere. At the time of the UN resolution, 23 other former African colonies had already won their independence (Egypt, the twenty-fourth, is often not counted as an "African state.")

The general policy followed by the colonial powers (excluding Portugal) resulted in a phenomenon known as "neocolonialism," the maintenance of the colonial system despite the legal transformation to self-governance. It included economic, political, social, military, and technological domination, and required the cultivation of a local elite which aligned its interests with those of the imperialist power. In many cases, independence was contingent upon agreement with constitutional arrangements which assured such binding ties. For Portugal, as we shall see in Part II of this series, neocolonialism was not a viable option.

As part of its overall program to encourage decolonization, the UN set up a Special Committee on Territories Under Portuguese Administration. Because it continued to insist that its territories were an integrated part of Portugal, Lisbon refused to allow this committee even to visit its colonies in Africa. The special delegation from the United Nations was forced to conduct interviews with refugees and local political officials of neighboring countries in order to ascertain the conditions of life in the Portuguese colonies. They were charged to investigate in particular the effects of Portugal's so-called reforms of 1961. The committee reported back to the Assembly in the following terms:

In the Committee's view, the reforms which Portugal claims to have introduced not only failed to meet the basic aspirations of the peoples of the territories for self-determination, but did not even bring about any significant changes in political, economic, social, and educational conditions. Further, despite so-called far-reaching reforms, many of the fundamental laws, as well as the discriminatory status of the indigenous inhabitants, remained unchanged.

The Committee noted that the majority of the territories' inhabitants could not have elected representation in the territorial organs of Government since the right to vote still depended on both a literacy qualification [the ability to read and write Portuguese] and the payment of a minimum tax of 200 escudos.

The Committee further reported that all the representatives of the political parties which had been heard, even those whose parties were committed to direct action, for example those in Angola—were prepared to negotiate with Portugal on the actual transfer of power if Portugal recognized the right of the peoples to self-determination and independence....

*The Committee found that it was Portugal's continued insistence that there could be no change in the status of the territories and the denial of the political aspirations of the people that led them to despair of a peaceful solution. Therefore, the Committee stressed that for Portugal the most urgent step forward would be to recognize the right of peoples of the territories to independence.*¹⁶

The United Nations Assembly shared the conclusions of this committee and on December 14, 1962, passed a resolution which condemned Portugal's attitude, urging it to take steps to follow a recommendation that the rights to self-determination and independence be granted to its colonies. Furthermore, it called on Portugal to cease its acts of repression and grant unconditional political amnesty. The UN stressed the importance of granting the free functioning of political parties and proposed that Portugal negotiate with their representative institutions and immediately grant

independence to all its territories. Portugal, relying on the implicit support of its NATO allies, rejected the committee's report as unobjective and partial, and with its Legislative Council reforms in 1963, set about erecting further justifications for denying self-government.

Guinea-Bissau after 1960

The colonial legal changes instituted in Guinea-Bissau after 1960 effected the following results. The country was divided into 12 subdivisions, 9 of them urban (called *concelhos*), and 3 rural areas (*circunscrições*). Below the level of the provincial government in Bissau, local officials ruling these 12 subdivisions were appointed from Lisbon, and their powers included both judicial and administrative functions. In the rural areas, where most of the population lived, control was exercised through chiefs who carried out the colonial policy. These chiefs were the tax collectors, the heads of police, and were directly responsible to the government for the maintenance of order in the chiefdom. These functionaries worked with local leaders who were themselves appointed by the Portuguese and were their allies.

Amílcar Cabral, an agronomist and founding member of the liberation movement (PAIGC), had himself made a thorough investigation of the structure of colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau and his report accorded with the findings of the United Nations Special Committee. But the formal descriptions of the legal and administrative system or even of Portugal's racist policies vis-à-vis the African population do not begin to describe the extremes of oppression and human suffering which were being endured in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. The life expectancy in Guinea-Bissau, estimated between 35 and 38 years today, continues to be among the lowest in the world. Infant mortality was admitted to be 40 percent and, in certain areas, up to 80 percent. The population suffered from the typical disease patterns of the tropics but expenditure for health services in 1960, according to a World Health Organization report, amounted to only 32 escudos per head (about \$1.00). In the field of education Guinea-Bissau compared most unfavorably with the neighboring African countries with

only 3.8 percent of children of primary school age and 0.3 percent of children of secondary school age actually attending schools. With almost no mechanization of agriculture, every hand was required for the production of cash crop quotas demanded by the financial interests which were exploiting the country. (The greater natural resources of Mozambique and Angola meant that the hardships associated with forced labor were even more profoundly felt. In these two colonies mines were opened and the Portuguese established large plantations.)

In both Angola and Guinea-Bissau, political parties were officially formed in 1956 (Mozambique's liberation movement, FRELIMO, was founded in 1962 and a clandestine movement was formed in São Tomé and Príncipe in 1961). Initially, the objectives of the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau were to gain independence and self-determination by peaceful means, and efforts were made to negotiate with the Portuguese government. Despite examples of how irresistible were the pressures from armed nationalist movements in such places as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Algeria and Tunisia having the fearful word "socialist" in the titles of their newly independent states) and despite the several precedents where colonial powers had adopted the "wisdom" of neocolonialism as a policy for their colonies, Portugal remained intransigent. Yet, in a declaration made in June 1961 to the Special Committee on Territories under Portuguese Administration, Amílcar Cabral still held out the offer to talk:

The people of "Portuguese" Guinea are convinced that it is not yet too late for reason to triumph, and they are therefore always prepared to negotiate, through their legitimate representatives, with the Portuguese government in order to establish the forms of peaceful liquidation of Portuguese colonial domination and define the ways and means through which "Portuguese" Guinea can accede to independence.

Revealing his understanding of political realities, he went on to say:

Under such circumstances it was obvious that consideration would be

given to Portuguese interests that have developed in our country without being incompatible with national sovereignty. This would naturally be done without compromising the intransigent defense of the rights of the people of "Portuguese" Guinea.¹⁷

The Portuguese, unfortunately, ignored the existence of the PAIGC, and did not listen to Amílcar Cabral's words. Nor did they see the handwriting on the wall—the armed struggle began in early 1963.

The system which the PAIGC and other nationalist movements in the Portuguese colonies were attacking has been described as "ultra-colonialism," the most primitive and most extreme form of colonialism.¹⁸ As a "colonial power," Portugal was unique: like its colonies, Portugal was itself stagnating in underdevelopment. It suffered from a pre-industrial infrastructure, with property controlled by a feudal regime, the military as the sovereign power, and a fascist government, the precise conditions which determined this phenomenon of "ultra-colonialism." Internal pressures forced a shift in Salazar's policy toward a more rapid industrialization within Portugal, but this only exacerbated the problems. In the colonies the demands for capital and raw materials increased and Portugal was also forced to relax its position on multinational investment. Seriously dependent upon its NATO allies, Portugal had neither the means nor the manpower to protect its overseas interests against the revindications of African nationalism—except through bullets and napalm.

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NOTES

1. Lusophone African studies have been relatively neglected by scholars outside Portugal. There are some competent studies in English and French on the early period of Portuguese contact with Africa, based on colonial records and oral traditions, but from the eighteenth century onward there are fewer studies. Moreover, without a knowledge of Portuguese, one's understanding of internal conditions in Portugal which had a direct effect upon its colonies is limited. There are English and French studies on the subject but Portuguese scholars are not entirely satisfied with their interpretation of the situation. This is particularly true of books and articles about twentieth century Portugal and its colonial relations.

2. L. Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau: A Study of Political Mobilization* (Uppsala, 1974), p. 3.

3. Basil Davidson, "Recent History of Angola," *Africa South of the Sahara, 1978-9* (London, 1978).

4. C.R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion 1415-1825: A Succinct Survey* (Johannesburg, 1961), pp. 7-8.

5. S. Amin, *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1973), p. xvii.

6. W. Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545 to 1800* (Oxford, 1970), p. 75.

7. Letter from Zachary Macaulay to Lord Castlereagh, May 8, 1807 (CO/267/24).

8. N. Bruce, *Portugal: The Last Empire* (Vancouver, 1975), p. 60.

9. W. Minter, *Portuguese Africa and the West* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1972).

10. Ibid., p. 39.

11. Ibid., p. 40.

12. Ibid., p. 47.

13. Ibid., p. 20.

14. Rudebeck, *Guinea Bissau: A Study...*, p. 22

15. Ibid., p. 23.

16. Quoted from *A Principle in Torment II. The United Nations and Portuguese Administered Territories*, in Rudebeck, *Guinea Bissau: A Study...*

17. Rudebeck, *Guinea Bissau: A Study...*, p. 46.

18. Perry Anderson, *Le Portugal et la fin de L'ultra-colonialisme* (Paris, 1962), p. 18.

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