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BEING BOTH FREE AND UNFREE. THE CASE OF SELECTED LUSO-AFRICANS IN SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY WESTERN AFRICA: SEPHARDIM IN A LUSO-AFRICAN CONTEXT

by

PETER MARK* and JOSÉ DA SILVA HORTA**

In his late story “Schachnovelle”, Stefan Zweig recounts the case of a man, imprisoned in solitary confinement by the Gestapo, who saves his own sanity by playing chess. However, since he has neither a chess board, nor pieces, nor an opponent, he must play the entire game in his head and he must be both Black and White. Zweig’s conceit of a hero who simultaneously or sequentially embodies two apparently contradictory roles, inspires historical reflection on an analogous situation: that of a group of individuals who embodied two seemingly contradictory identities. This article considers such a group of individuals, men who, during one stage of their careers as merchants engaged in international trade, constituted a social category. The Luso-Africans, or “Portuguese” of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Upper Guinea Coast in West Africa were literally both black and white. In some cases they were, as well, both slave and free. Historiography has acknowledged that among the residents of European origin New Christians were a very relevant part¹. We argue that the presence of Sephardic traders in the region must be integrated in this Luso-African context and the situations and issues we address help to understand the experiences they have undergone.

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¹ Recent evidence of this thesis may be found in Toby GREEN, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chaps. 4 and 5.

The article proposes to respond in particular to the following questions²:

- 1) What does local belonging look like when shot through the prism of work and labor? In other words, did local belonging produce new regimes, institutions and networks of work?
- 2) Conversely, what do work and labor look like when they are forged in networks of local belonging? In other words, did work and labor produce or transform the social fabric of local communities, including, but not exclusively, kinship alliances and ties across generations? We may ask whether an alliance by marriage of a *lançado* Jew or Christian with an African woman was represented like a kinship alliance in terms of consequences at a lineage level. Might, instead, the marriage just have had a local interpretation of value acquired? That is to say: by marriage Luso-Africans did not leave their social status of merchants; they even constituted a separate ethnic group. Is that not evidence that they were not fully integrated into local lineages? In this case alliances yes, kinship alliances certainly, but as a strategy of creating an intermediate status, hybrid if you will, in which the woman does not leave the lineage and has the privileges of not losing commodities and wealth if the husband dies. Usually, when *lançados* and Luso-Africans died, all of their merchandise went to the local ruler. And the same women (*senhoras* were not all widows as far as we know) are at the same time given the status of merchants and given identity markers common to any other *branco*. Maybe this was one of the reasons why *senhoras* were so powerful in Guiné do Cabo Verde... They were both “Black” and “White” like the chess player of the first lines of the article.

Along the same line of thought, bearing in mind readings of André Álvares de Almada (the manuscripts of c. 1592-1593 and 1594), André Donelha (1625, referring mostly to his late sixteenth century experience on the Guinea coast), the Jesuit accounts (early 1600s), as well as Francisco de Lemos Coelho (1669 and 1484, mostly relying on knowledge gathered up to the 1660s), a personal relationship of trust between a *lançado* and/or a Luso-African community and an individual African ruler is sometimes more important than a kinship alliance, something that can certainly reinforce and seal that trusting relationship. The sources are full of episodes relating the attitudes of a ruler to a trader or community of traders.

Sebastião Fernandes Cação, a powerful Portuguese New Christian merchant of the Biafada/Rio Grande region, in his *Relacion* of c. 1608 makes clear how crucial his friendship (*amizade*) with the local rulers was³ based on

² The theoretical framework for this essay derives from a working conference hosted by the International Research Seminar “Rework, Arbeit und Lebenslauf in globalgeschichtlicher Perspektive”, of Humboldt-Universität, Berlin. The conference “Work, Labor and Local Belonging in Early Modern Context”, held in June 14-15, 2013, was organized by Yavuz Aykan. We are grateful to Dr. Aykan for the rubric suggested by this conference, and to the other participants for their ideas and suggestions.

³ Anonymous and untitled account, whose authorship is attributed to Sebastião Fernandes Cação, [*Relacion de todo el distrito de Guinea y gouierno de Caboberde*], REAL ACADEMIA DE LA HISTORIA DE MADRID, *Jesuitas*, T. 185, n.º [16]. See José da Silva HORTA, A “Guiné do Cabo

the ships and traders he managed to bring to their ports. This was the case for instance of the king of Bisege, Mangalí⁴. In 1608 Sebastião Fernandes Cação (and his people certainly) as well as the other Portuguese hosts in the region were about to lose the trust of the Biafada rulers because the promise of an alliance against the Bijogo with the help of the Portuguese Crown did not materialize. Because of this, the resident Portuguese had reason to fear for their own lives.⁵ Also, the decision to change the location of a Luso-African community to another village depended on the local king's will.⁶ And a change of ruler (as in Joal) could change the politics of relationships with Jewish traders.⁷ Should not this be considered when we talk about belonging and its conditions? The context is not new: it is the relationship between host and guest in Greater Senegambia. But sources suggest that in some of these situations the connections between host and guests were broken.

We have chosen to focus on one relatively small group – the Luso-Africans of the Upper Guinea Coast in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Members of this community were merchants, coastal traders, and boatmen. They also included the *lançados* and other resident Portuguese. They served both as commercial and as cultural brokers or intermediaries⁸ between Portuguese and Cape Verdian merchants coming from abroad, such as the writers of the accounts we have mentioned (later also Dutch, French, and English), and West African artisans and merchants. The members of this group were themselves the descendants of marriages (or relationships) between Portuguese men who had come to live (illegally) on the

Verde": *Produção Textual e Representações (1578-1684)*, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2011, p. 215.

⁴ See J. S. HORTA, *A "Guiné do Cabo Verde"*, cit., p. 216, n. 354.

⁵ Anonym Jesuit, 1607, "Enformação de alguas cousas de Guiné e da disposição que alli há pera a conuerssaõ daquella gentildade e dillatação de nossa santa fee catolica, tirada de alguas cartas do Padre Manoel Aluares, da Companhia de Jesv e de Gaspar Gonçalves Pereira, vesitador daquellas partes e de Sebastião Fernandez Cação, Capitaõ do Ryo Grande", in ARCHIVUM ROMANO SOCIETATIS IESU [ARSI], *Lus.*, Cód. 74, fls. 81v-83v, in António Brásio (ed.), *Monumenta Missionaria Africana, África Ocidental*, Lisboa, Agência Geral do Ultramar, 2nd series, Vol. IV, 1966, p. 269.

⁶ See André Álvares de ALMADA, *Tratado Breve dos Rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde* [Oporto Ms. dated 1594], ed. António Brásio, Lisbon, LIAM, 1964, p. 77: the Kassanga king Masatamba, friend of *ours* ("os nossos") authorized the Portuguese community in Bugendo to move to his lands, to the port of Sarar, on the Cacheu river.

⁷ Peter MARK and José da Silva HORTA, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 176-178.

⁸ For a strong overview of the concept of "brokers," as well as an up-to-date bibliography on the subject, see Philip HAVIK and Toby GREEN, "Introduction: Brokerage and the role of western Africa in the Atlantic world," in T. Green (ed.), *Brokers of Change. Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial West Africa*, Oxford, The British Academy and Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 1-26. In Havik's and Green's words, "brokers were people who linked up different worlds, who made connections where there had been none", p. 2.

African coast among local societies, and African women, generally members of the local elite, many of whom were also traders. The members of Luso-African society considered themselves “Portuguese,” which is also what they were considered to be by members of local African societies among whom they lived and with whom they carried out commerce. They were sometimes referred to as “Portuguese” by European-born members of the Iberian community in West Africa, although over time, and certainly by the end of the seventeenth century, that status came to be widely contested by other European visitors and observers.⁹ Members of the Luso-African or “Portuguese” community had the unique quality of living and working between two cultures, and often moved back and forth between two identities. In a concrete sense, they existed in the interstices between two societies; at least some of them successfully belonged to both. In consequence, they enjoyed two or more seemingly contradictory roles within these societies. In other words, they held two identities that, from a present-day perspective, would appear to have been mutually contradictory. One key to understanding the ability of some Luso-Africans to navigate between their two identities, is the fact that they belonged to both Portuguese (or European) and, although in a limited sense, Senegambian kinship groups.

The exploration of the West African coast and its major archipelago, the Cape Verde Islands, was completed in the early 1460s.¹⁰ The most important space of Euro-African commerce in Western Africa through the sixteenth century was Greater Senegambia (henceforth Senegambia) or, in the words of contemporary Portuguese, “Guiné do Cabo Verde”.¹¹ This region also coincides geographically with the current term, the “Upper Guinea Coast”. Within West Africa this was the region which early and most deeply engaged in the Atlantic trade and which established intense interaction with the Atlantic world. Long-distance Mande-speaking traders connected the sahel and savannah to Guinean routes and markets, where they met other African agents of local and riverine commerce. From the mid-fifteenth century

⁹ See Peter MARK, *“Portuguese” Style and Luso-African Identity*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 23 ff.

¹⁰ For the exploration of the Cape Verde Islands, see Luís de ALBUQUERQUE, “O descobrimento das ilhas de Cabo Verde”, in L. Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos (ed.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, Lisboa/Praia, Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Direcção do Património Geral de Cabo Verde, Vol. I, 1991, pp. 23-39.

¹¹ On the origin of the concept of “Guiné do Cabo Verde”, see J. S. HORTA, “Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in ‘Portuguese’ Accounts on ‘Guinea of Cape Verde’ (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)”, *History in Africa*, Vol. 27, 2000, pp. 99-130 and *Idem*, A “Guiné do Cabo Verde”, cit., pp. 41 ff; The concept of Greater Senegambia was first developed by Boubacar BARRY in *La Sénégambie du XV^e au XIX^e siècle: traite négrière, Islam et conquête coloniale*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1988. The recent work of Eduardo Costa DIAS together with P. MARK and J. S. HORTA has made a reassessment of the concept. See *Trade, Traders and Cross-Cultural Relationships in Greater Senegambia*, special issue of *Mande Studies*, n.º 9, 2007 [2010], pp. 1-8 and 9-20.

onwards, this African trade network connected with Luso-African merchants and European traders.

The earliest commerce between Guinea of Cape Verde and the Atlantic world was centered in the Cape Verde Islands, located about 280 miles off the West African coast. From the 1460s until the early seventeenth century, Santiago Island was the base for Portuguese activities in the Rivers of Guinea. The Cape Verdean colonists or *moradores* (those, mostly of Luso-African origin, who had the status of residents), were given the privilege of trading on the coast by the Crown. But shortly, to limit private activity and stimulate internal growth, Portugal severely limited trade by the Cape Verdean settlers and all other Portuguese. One response was to become *lançados*, i.e. to launch themselves onto the mainland, beginning a new life in close association with African societies. Trading in slaves, ivory, wax, and hides as well as forbidden merchandise – swords and daggers and iron –, *lançados* or *tangomaos*, as they were also known, did not hesitate to conduct business with European rivals of the Portuguese Crown, the French, the English, and the Dutch.

The *lançados* settled near the rivers that served as transportation routes for trade goods and where commodities arrived from the inland caravans, and they frequently married African women. During the sixteenth century, *lançados* who did not return to Cape Verde, or Portugal, together with their offspring, the *filhos da terra*, formed the core of Luso-African communities. Living in African villages or founding their own communities, these Luso-Africans also incorporated into their communities some of the local African *grumetes*, literally “cabin boys”. The *grumetes* were African mariners who were indispensable as navigation guides, as translators, and as trading agents and, in some cases, political mediators.¹²

The term *grumete* (or occasionally, in French, *gourmette*) had a range of meanings. *Grumetes* were Africans who established close working relationships with European merchants, sometimes as boatmen (they knew the local inland waterways), sometimes as servants. Generally, *grumetes* were Christians; sometimes, they were slaves. Anyway they were full members of the Luso-African or “Portuguese” community provided they identified as such.

The offspring of the *lançados* identified as Portuguese and Christians and had a number of other ethnic markers: they were traders, they spoke Portuguese or, by the late seventeenth century, *Crioulo*, and they had a distinctive material culture. Other Africans also could adopt these cultural markers of “Portuguese” identity. These individuals included wealthy traders and local rulers. African men and women who developed relationships

¹² Frequently, *grumetes* belonged to African ruling lineages and were given by their own relatives to be raised by the Portuguese, whom they then escorted in their maritime activities. The *grumetes* served as crucial brokers. They generally accepted the Christian religion and identified themselves with Luso-African society, while maintaining the ability to switch their identity in different circumstances.

(professional as retainers or other) with *lançados* or *tangomaos*, could ultimately become part of the same community like the ones, among the Biafada, described by Almada:

Entre estes negros andam muitos que sabem falar a nossa língua portuguesa, e andam vestidos ao nosso modo. E assim muitas negras ladinhas, chamadas tangomas, porque servem aos lançados. E estas negras e negros vão com eles de uns Rios para os outros e à ilha de Santiago, e a outras partes; mas não o fazem os nossos sem primeiro haver licença de seus pais ou tios, irmãos dos pais, porque em todo Guiné se têm os tios por pais de seus sobrinhos, filhos de seus irmãos.¹³

Several characteristics of these culturally mixed communities create a challenge for the historian/historical ethnographer. First, some of the Luso-Africans held multiple identities, sometimes sequentially, sometimes simultaneously, but often contextually determined. This reflects the fact that members of the Luso-African community were often able to move back and forth between identities that, to observers today, would appear mutually contradictory. For example, slave and free; Christian and Jewish; Jewish and Muslim; Christian and local African religion.

Second, although some Luso-African “Portuguese” were literate and at least one Cape-Verdian, Almada (and probably also André Donelha), who identified himself with the Luso-African world, left an important and detailed narrative of West African coastal societies (actually three versions of that narrative, written shortly before and after 1594), nevertheless, we lack much information about their lives. Especially lacking is information from, as it were, their own mouths.

Third, existing contemporary documents, for the most part, present a definition of work that reflects the cultural biases of the writers. Work is mentioned. For example, Donelha (in 1625)¹⁴ talks about the working abilities of the African artisans, something we hear about as early as 1505 from Valentim Fernandes and Duarte Pacheco Pereira.¹⁵ And Almada praises the expertise of local blacksmiths.¹⁶ Often, however, information about work must be deduced from indirect mention.

In short, it is difficult to attribute specific African attitudes towards work on the basis of late sixteenth and seventeenth-century written sources.

¹³ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

¹⁴ André DONELHA, *Descrição da Serra Leoa e dos Rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde (1625)*, ed. A. Teixeira da Mota and P. E. H. Hair, Lisboa, Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1977, p. 154.

¹⁵ Valentim FERNANDES, “Descripçam de Cepta por sua costa de Mauritania e Ethiopia pellos nomes modernos prosseguindo as vezes algũas cousas do sartão da terra firme” (1507), in *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, Lisboa, Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, p. 115. Duarte Pacheco PEREIRA (c. 1505-1508), *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis de Duarte Pacheco Pereira*, ed. Joaquim Barradas de Carvalho, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1991, p. 469.

¹⁶ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., pp. 45, 88-69, 97, 117, from the Lisbon Ms. of c. 1592-1593, p. 101.

Those sources do provide some information about diverse forms of labor that were probably considered work. The sources also provide significant data about European biases which they brought with them to West Africa.

Direct information about African labor – leaving aside the intractable problem of ascertaining Senegambian conceptions of what constituted “work” – is provided by Almada in his description of the Buramos and Papels. He writes:

Em amanhecendo enchem as molheres [*sic*] as bocas de cinza e desta maneira andão trabalhando e fazendo todo o serviço sem falarem hũas cõ as outras, somente lansarem as mãos naquellas couzas q̃ tẽ pera fazer. [...] Os negros andão metidos nas suas searas e trabalhos fazendo cazas, tirando o vinho das pallmejas, tratando de hũs Reinos pera outros cõ vacas, panos, ferro, que e mercadoria que corre antre elles, porque hão os escravos.¹⁷

So while the women worked without talking, “*os negros*” (presumably referring to the men, as opposed to the just-mentioned women) go to the fields and build houses and collect palm wine, and trade with other kingdoms to acquire cattle, cloth, and iron, “by which they got the slaves”. It is noteworthy that the work Almada stresses includes women’s work. Further, this is the version of the longer Lisbon Manuscript. In the later Oporto Manuscript, Almada, writing for an audience of Iberian authorities, skips almost all the details on work but maintains the reference to the work by women in what becomes a shorter passage:

Os negros Buramos são bons serviçais pretos: [...] Usam de uma cousa que se pode notar, que para as mulheres não serem palreiras nem comiloas, tanto que amanhece tomam uma pouca de cinza do lar na boca e ali a trazem até o jantar; e em todo este tempo não comem nem falam; todo o trabalho que fazem, a maioral da casa lança mão da obra, e todas fazem o mesmo. E desta maneira ficam trabalhando sem falarem.¹⁸

In fact Almada is interested in showing Buramos’ ability to work – potentially for Iberian authorities in the perspective of a colonization project? – and mostly the local method of control of feminine work, within a discourse which is not far from misogyny. He even states that this method should be applied to Portuguese women in Cape Verde.

A century later, Lemos Coelho writes:

A terra he fertilissima de peixe que trazem aqui os negros de baixo, fumado em grande quantidade. Ha muito chauco, que he a fruita de que se fas o azeite vermelho [...] O trafego em terra, assim do trabalho como de negocio, he o mayor que há em todo o Guine.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, from the Lisbon Ms. of c. 1592-1593, p. 86.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, from the Oporto Ms., pp. 79-80.

¹⁹ Francisco de Lemos COELHO, “Discripção da Costa da Guiné e Situação de todos os Portos e Rios della, e Roteyro para se poderem Navegar todos seus Rios” (1684), in Damião

The final clause here shows that Lemos Coelho, himself a merchant, considers that activity to be in the same category of “work” as the agricultural activities and fishing and smoking of fish that he also describes. This statement confirms Donelha’s claim, some decades before, that trading in Guinea was a very laborious activity, putting it explicitly into the category of work, after giving details on the efforts needed to disembark merchandise on the river banks: “Escrevo tudo o acima pera que saibam quanto *trabalho* custa aos que andam em Guiné o que ganham.”²⁰

The representation of agricultural labor is not linear from Cadamosto, in the mid-fifteenth century, up to Almada. In the latter source, in some cases, like the Fula (and below), agriculture is praised. The Biafada are seen as “*preguiçosos*”²¹. Again, the gender bias is evident on the part of European narrators. Women performed much of the work that elicited comment.

Começa o inverno nestas partes no fim de Abril, entrada de Maio por diante; fazem os negros as searas dos arrozés naquelas lalas, e fazem valados de terra por amor da venida do Rio, mas nem por isso deixa o Rio muitas vezes de os romper e alagar as searas; depois deste arroz nado, o arrancam e transpõem em outras lalas mais enxutas, donde dá logo mantimento.²²

The above cited passage is not entirely negative or, rather, it is double: if on the one hand the “*valados*” are frequently insufficient to maintain the river water, on the other hand there is a practical solution to obtain a quick harvest, probably developed because on the Guinea coast most agricultural labor occurs between the start of the rainy season and the harvest (June to December in the Casamance region; shorter on the Petite Côte). Trade, on the other hand, was concentrated in the dry season, which tended to be the only time European traders came to the coast.²³ In the rainy season there was no commerce and the mortality rate from malaria was, for the visiting merchants, frightfully high. Activities aside from trade that were pursued during the dry season – e.g. textile production and cotton cloth dyeing – are noted in detail and in positive context by Almada.

Em toda esta costa, terra dos Jalofoz até os Mandingas, há muito boa roupa de algodão, panos pretos e brancos, e de outras muitas maneiras de preço, e os tintos são tão finos que cegam aos que os vêem, os quais se tiram para os outros Rios adonde os não há.²⁴

Peres (ed.), *Duas Descrições Seiscentistas da Guiné de Francisco de Lemos Coelho*, Lisboa, Academia Portuguesa da História, 1990, p. 226.

²⁰ A. DONELHA, op. cit., p. 144.

²¹ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., pp. 18, 96.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²³ But Almada states that “*os Negros*” are not really skilled in trade, and “*os nossos*” are the best traders. This, one may interpret as referring to the crucial role as mediators the Luso-Africans played with the Atlantic market.

²⁴ Almada provides exceptionally detailed description of the dyeing process used on the Upper Guinea Coast. This reflects the fact that cloth was the main commodity traded in the

Interestingly, pottery and basketry production – women’s activities – appear not to have been considered work or, more likely, to have been invisible to Europeans. Support for this explanation may be found in this statement by the Cape-Verdian trader André Álvares de Almada about the Bijogo: “As mulheres fazem as casas e as searas, pescam e mariscam, e fazem todo o mais serviço que fazem os homens em outras partes.”²⁵

This passage is particularly meanful because the author was describing the division of work by gender, beginning with men: “Os homens não fazem mais que três coisas: guerra, e fazer embarcações, e tirar o vinho das palmeiras; andam mui disciplinados na arte militar ao seu modo.”²⁶

Portuguese narrators do describe, sometimes in considerable detail, both weapons and their production, including the iron, and they describe the production for market of various commodities, including a detailed description of the manner of extracting and preparing kola and the use of basketry to transport it, which can be found in Lemos Coelho:

Em este rio he o primeiro porto de que os brancos trazem a fruita de colla, e pois cheguei ao seu nassimento, direi como he e se beneficia e compra.

Primeiramente as colleiras que dão esta fruita são arvores como nogueiras, e dão a fruita assim em capulhos, os quais colhidos, enterraõ os negros em parte cenagoza e humida, e assim os deixaõ estar outo e des dias, athe apodrecer o capulho, que lavaõ muito bem, e tiraõ de cada hũ des e dose collas, e assim limpa a vendem ao branco, a qual vendem por hũa medida que chamaõ molla, que he hũa alcofinha de palha, que leva quatrocentas e quinhentas collas, conforme he a novidade, e destas dão tres medidas por hum panno branco; e assim vaõ sobindo de preço, conforme a melhoria do panno; e ha panno que dão des molas, que vem a ser as vezes sinco mil collas por um panno; e hum barril, como dice, he de tres mil collas.²⁷

Since kola were exchanged directly for a range of goods, including slaves, the fruit was of great interest to Luso-African traders in Senegambia. Hence, preparation of kola for trade was part of the merchandise-related work that the Portuguese sources describe.

Free and unfree labor

What was the significance of slave status within the Luso-African communities? Close reading of contemporary sources suggests that, in some circumstances, it was possible for individuals to be both slave and free.

Gambia and was important throughout Guinea of Cape Verde, serving as a medium of exchange. See A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., Oporto Ms., 1594, pp. 19-20. See also the 1592-1593 Lisbon Ms. version quoted by Brásio, p. 20, n. 4.

²⁵ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., p. 89.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 88-89.

²⁷ F. L. COELHO, *Discripção*, cit., pp. 211-212.

Grumetes were not always free. They were part of the Luso-African community, and one of their (contradictory) identities was that of being “slaves”. From the biased pen of Father Baltasar Barreira, the Superior of the Jesuits’ mission, writing to King Philip III of Spain [Philip II of Portugal], we have a glimpse of this free/unfree situation in early seventeenth century Serra Leoa, which had an impact on the local African societies. The sixteenth-century Portuguese term “Serra Leoa,” corresponding to part of present-day coastal Guinea, and current-day coastal Sierra Leone as far south as Sherbro Island, even reaching Liberia, should not be confused with “Sierra Leone.”

Com os portug[u]ezes destas partes, e com seus escrauos e christãos forros, que viuem entre elles, se tem feito pola bondade de Deus muito fructo, seguindo-se tam grande mudansa em sua vida e costumes, que já comesaõ a pareser cristaõs, porque antes avia muy pouca diferenca delles aos gentios.²⁸

Barreira was an experienced missionary who had dealt with slavery and enslavement in the Angolan context. As other sources confirm, he seems to have accurately interpreted the presence of unfree Africans among the Luso-African group, which included some European-born individuals, and status mobility among the other members of the group. A number of slaves purchased by Luso-African traders, the latter being either European-, Euro-African- or African-born, were not sold and became trusty traders or translators for their masters or even converted to their religion, as happened in other contexts of Afro-Portuguese contact. This double situation, free/unfree, within the “Portuguese” community, is also confirmed by Almada in Serra Leoa: “Salvador Homem da Costa, que se achou nesta batalha da parte dos Manes, e levava três escopetas, que carregava e levava um escravo seu.”²⁹ Also about the village of Guinala in Rio Grande, Barreira writes: “Hoje saindo os nossos fora da aldeia tratam-nos os negros mal, e não são seguros como dantes [...]; chamo tratar mal fazerem [a]os nossos ou seus escravos qualquer desaguisado.”³⁰ And in the Casamance: “[...] e oje ha negro gentio da terra q mandão os seus filhos á doutrina cõ os escravos dos nosos brancos”. The *grumetes* could be slaves, as is also clear from Lemos Coelho’s words (about the Susu region in present-day Republic of Guinea):

achou há muito poucos annos hum Bras da Costa de Saldanha natural da cidade de Lagos no reino dos Algarves, homẽ que andava em hũa lancha velha com bem pouco cabedal, consistindo o mais delle em algũs escravos gurutemetes [*sic*], que andavaõ na lancha.³¹

²⁸ Letter of Father Baltasar BARREIRA to Philip III, 13rd May 1607, ARSI, *Lus.*, Cód. 83, fls. 357-358, in António Brásio (ed.), op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 263-264.

²⁹ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., p. 145.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

³¹ F. L. COELHO, *Descrição*, cit., p. 220.

Lemos Coelho is clear about the origin of some of these slaves. Frequently African village elite (“*os grandes*”) gave their sons to be raised and made Christians by the “whites”. Lemos Coelho claims he himself raised many of them and used them as slaves, to serve as his translators (“*chalonas*”).

He a gente mais apta para receber a Fé Catholica de toda quanta ha em Guine, dão os grandes das aldêas seus filhos aos brancos para que lhos criem, e lhos fação christãos, e eu lhe criei muitos, e os trazia em minha companhia como escravos e me servião de chalona em suas mesmas terras.³²

Before 1669, Coelho had spent twenty years travelling in the Rivers of Guinea, so his experience of the local social situation is meaningful. The frontier between the status of an African given as a free man to a white to be raised, and a slave, must have been fluid or dependent upon the contrasting representations Africans and Portuguese would make of slavery and freedom.

The status situation of the *grumetes* would also depend of the political context. In 1612, the king of Bussis (in present-day Guinea-Bissau), D. Sebastião, was the most powerful slave trader associated with the port of Cacheu. When Luís Fernandes Duarte (alias Joshua Israel), one of the main public Jews of Porto d’Ale (see below) asked him to give his son, he argued that the latter would be respected (“*falará mantenha*”) by the other rulers of the region.³³ In such a context, if the king would agree with the proposal, his son certainly would not be given a slave status. What the religious education of his son would be is another matter.

The existence of slaves clearly does focus on their status as unfree laborers. However, some of these same individuals also lived as free men, hence as free laborers, when they worked in their local African society. It is significant that this movement between free and slave status was not a simple case of enslavement and consequent loss of freedom or, conversely, a manumission, which the word “*forros*” in Barreira’s passage indicates. Some of these “slaves” actually reconnected with their previous identities as free men, specifically, in more than one documented instance, as members of the local elite. They seem to have done so by the simple expedient – freely undertaken, not as flight – of returning to their home communities.

³² F. L. COELHO, “Descrição da Costa de Guiné desde o Cabo Verde athe Serra Leoa com Todas Ilhas e Rios que os Brancos Navegam” (1669), in Damião Peres (ed.), op. cit., p. 43. In the version of 1684, when the same passage is rewritten, we have no doubts that the slaves constituted part of the same group: “Os senhores das aldeas dão seus filhos aos brancos para que os tragão em sua companhia e os doutrinem e fação christãos, e a mim me derão dois, que ensinei e mandei baptizar, e os trouxe muitos annos em minha companhia, e me servião como escravos com grande fedelidade e amor, levando-os muitas vezes as suas terras donde fazião o officio de interpretes e linguas” (p. 179).

³³ ARQUIVO NACIONAL DA TORRE DO TOMBO [ANTT], *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Liv. 205, fls. 544-544v.

The mechanism remains to be investigated. It may have been available only to members of the local African elites, but it was not available to all enslaved “chiefs” or “rulers”. For obvious reasons, we focus on this double identity, and the implications of being, in turn, free laborer and then unfree laborer, and then again free laborer.

We know little about attitudes towards work among the members of the Luso-African community, and even less about attitudes towards work within the local African communities. In a strict sense, although it is clear that people worked and often worked hard, we cannot even say with certainty that these African communities had a concept corresponding to what we today call “work”. Linguistic clues are only available for the nineteenth and twentieth century. For example, with regard to the Jola, the dominant ethnic group in the Casamance region in what is today southern Senegal, the term “burok” may be translated as “work”. It exists also as a verb, “erók”, which one could translate as “to work”. Recently, one of us spoke by telephone with a friend who lives in rural Casamance. Asked “where are you?”, he replied: “indjomé burók” – “I am working/at work.” It is dry season, so he was not working in the rice fields. We did not ask what the work was. Probably, he was engaged in one of the forms of labor that were invisible to early European visitors. But we cannot make such evaluations with regard to sixteenth and seventeenth-century populations. In other words, whose concept of “work” are we using? There are questions we may never be able to answer for lack of suitable sources.

We return briefly to the first question: “What does local belonging look like through the prism of work?” From the moment of first trading contact with Europeans on the coast of Senegambia shortly before 1450, but undoubtedly pre-dating that contact, in the Mande-speaking zone (the immediate hinterland) and to a lesser degree along the Upper Guinea Coast itself, ethnic identity was defined in part by one’s profession. So, for example, to be a “*Dioula*” (alt. “Juula” – no relation to the Jolas) was to speak a Mande language, to be a Muslim, and to be a long distance trader. (This necessarily excluded Christian European merchants, some of whom were actually Jewish.)

When Portuguese sailors and merchants arrived along the coast in the mid- to late- fifteenth century, the prevailing local model of identity, based on language, religion, material culture, and profession, was applied to them. To be Portuguese was to fulfill these criteria. In the course of the sixteenth century, the offspring of Portuguese *lançados* and local African women also met these criteria: Portuguese-speaking and later on Crioulo-speaking, they considered themselves Christians; they lived in Portuguese style houses; and they were professional traders. Thus, they came to form the local Afro-Portuguese, or “Portuguese” communities. As such, they constituted what we may term a newly-formed ethnic group. Their work as merchants played a central role in defining them as “Portuguese”.

We know, furthermore, that several of the Luso-Africans were born as Africans. They changed their identity and their status during their lives. How did they do so? According to the four broad parameters: religion, material culture, language and... their occupation. One could become “Portuguese” – that is, Luso-African – by converting to Christianity, or to Judaism as we will see, sometimes in the process becoming literate; by speaking Portuguese or Crioulo, which developed by the mid-seventeenth century;³⁴ and by taking on certain professions, primarily commerce.

Significantly, to adopt these cultural elements did not preclude one’s continuing to be, or to identify as, a member of one’s original community and/or ethnic group. Some individuals moved back and forth between African and “Portuguese” identity. Occasionally, this entailed changing from Muslim to Christian to Muslim again. But in some cases, it also meant changing one’s status between free (noble) and unfree (“slave”). This also enables us to say something about these individuals’ status with regards to work. The change in status is stunning. The implications for our conceptions of the boundaries of slave status are significant. What did it mean to be a “slave,” if one could become a non-slave by the simple expedient of moving from the Cape Verde Islands to the adjacent mainland?

The prime example is one Gaspar Vaz. Vaz had lived on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands, where he was a Christian. There, he worked as a tailor. But for some part of this time he had not been free.³⁵ His friend, the Cape Verdean-born Portuguese merchant André Donelha, while on a trading voyage up the Gambia River, stopped at the Manding village of Cassão/Kassang,³⁶ which was the most important commercial center on the River from the 1560s.³⁷ There, to his astonishment, he ran into Gaspar Vaz – who was wearing robes and using amulets identifying himself as a Muslim. Donelha was taken aback, but his friend, taking him aside and out of public view, reached inside his “boubou”... and brought out a rosary of Our Lady.

³⁴ Recent scholarship, notably by Bart Jacobs, demonstrates close linguistic ties between Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole and Papiamentu, in Curaçao. Jacobs shows that Creole arrived in Curaçao in the second half of the seventeenth century; hence, a form of Creole must already have been relatively widespread in Upper Guinea by that date. See Bart JACOBS, “The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Senegambia and the Emergence of Papiamentu”, in T. Green, *Brokers of Change*, cit., pp. 193-216. These conclusions confirm the ones of other linguists dating the birth of Creole on the Guinea Coast: Jean-Louis ROUGÉ, “Uma hipótese sobre a formação do crioulo da Guiné-Bissau e da Casamansa”, *Soronda. Revista de Estudos Guineenses*, 2, Jun. 1986, pp. 28-49; *Idem*, “A propósito da formação dos crioulos de Cabo Verde e da Guiné”, *Soronda. Revista de Estudos Guineenses*, 20, Jul. 1995, pp. 81-97; Hildo Honório do COUTO, “Lançados, grumetes e a origem do crioulo português no Noroeste Africano”, in Ernesto d’Andrade and Alain Kihm (ed.), *Actas do Colóquio sobre Crioulos de Base Lexical Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Colibri, 1992, pp. 109-122.

³⁵ A. DONELHA, op. cit., p. 148. The Portuguese reads “*fora escravo*”, which literally means “had been slave.”

³⁶ “*Casão*” is Donelha’s orthography; “*Cação*”, Almada’s; non-Portuguese of the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century use “*Cassan*”.

³⁷ See Avelino Teixeira da Mota, in A. DONELHA, op. cit., pp. 148-149, n. 252, p. 300.

Vaz assured Donelha that he was still a Christian. More significantly, Vaz told him that he was also the nephew of the local village ruler, or “Sandiguil”, and he stood to inherit that office, and added that if he should inherit the house of his uncle he would send some slaves to Santiago and would return to Santiago to die among Christians.

How did a supposed slave come to travel back to the mainland, to reclaim his position among the nobility? Would it be enough to claim he had obtained his manumission? We do not know. It is possible – there were precedents – that Gaspar Vaz was able to convince his owners³⁸ of his noble status and perhaps was also able to promise them and the Portuguese authorities on Santiago that, if allowed to return home, he would be a reliable trading partner... as indeed he became for Donelha... and that he would serve as a powerful ally in a critical trading center. He was also useful to Donelha as an interpreter (“*chalonga*”). Members of the African elite – Donelha himself refers to them as “Kings” (“*Reis*”) – who arrived in the Cape Verde Islands, including several Sape refugees from civil conflict in Serra Leoa during the 1550s, sometimes had difficulty establishing their status as free once they arrived on Santiago. Generally, however – there were exceptions –, royalty were not enslaved³⁹. Vaz may have been in this situation. Nevertheless, his ability to go from “slave” to free and noble status would appear to be exceptional.

Certainly Gaspar Vaz’ dealings with Donelha reflect at least the beginnings of a commercial network. His promise to send slaves to Santiago and his rhetorical desire to live there may be interpreted as a sign of Vaz’ intention to establish such a network and at the same time an affirmation to Donelha of his present free status.

As a group, or “ethnic group,” the Luso-Africans established themselves, during the sixteenth century, as both commercial intermediaries and cultural bridges between the European and local African communities. Like the Luso-Africans, African-born individuals such as Gaspar Vaz also bridged the two cultures. As cultural brokers and commercial middlemen, and sometimes in terms of their own lives led in two cultures, they were part of this broader Luso-African community.

Marriages, whether formal or, in most cases, informal, between Portuguese “*lançados*” and African women followed patterns of alliance that were common in African societies and that were not unfamiliar to Europeans (although generally, in Europe, such marriages were characteristic of the nobility). For both parties, these unions afforded access to the other group’s complementary commercial network. One may say that these patterns of marriage alliances between Portuguese and Senegambians re-produced and

³⁸ “Seu senhor e senhora” wanted to have news about Vaz from Donelha. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

³⁹ See J. S. HORTA, “Trânsito de africanos: circulação de pessoas, de saberes e experiências religiosas entre os Rios de Guiné e o Arquipélago de Cabo Verde (séculos XV-XVII)”, *Anos 90*, Revista do Programa de pós-Graduação em História da Universidade Federal de Rio Grande do Sul, Portalegre, vol. 21, n. 40, dezembro de 2014, pp. 23-49.

extended the scope of existing networks. The conjoining of what were initially Portuguese and, by the early 1580s, French⁴⁰ networks, to which by about 1610 were added Sephardim resident in Amsterdam, with Senegambian kinship-based networks, had a lasting impact on European choices of trading centers. Furthermore, in at least one instance, which we will now address, this led to the implantation of a community of European traders who settled on the coast for more than a decade and who themselves founded Euro-African families that existed for at least another generation.

Joal and Porto d'Ale

We refer to two communities of Portuguese Jewish traders who settled, between 1606 and 1611, at Joal and Porto d'Ale on Senegal's Petite Côte. These men, numbering about 30, publicly proclaimed their Jewish identity, something they could not have done in Portugal due to the presence of the Inquisition. Their choice of these two trading centers was, we believe, based in part on the existence of earlier family ties in the form of marriages or, sometimes, *marriages à la mode du pays*. Evidence of these earlier marriages is provided by the fact that a few of the Portuguese Jews are described in contemporary Inquisition records as *mulattos*, or Euro-Africans. In other words, we suspect that the Portuguese Jewish traders chose to settle in the villages of Joal and Porto d'Ale because this is where some of them already had maternal kin. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the ports of the Petite Côte – including Rufisque, another trading center settled by seventeenth-century port Jews – were described as early as the late sixteenth century as the locations where *lançados* had strong alliances with non-Portuguese Europeans.⁴¹ It is tempting to relate the establishment of these coastal Jewish networks to earlier Jewish trade networks in the Sahara. A direct connection has yet to be established, however, and our own work only enables us to hypothesize that such a link may have existed.

The two Sephardic communities may be described as somewhere between transient and permanent. Written documentation, primarily in the form of records from the Lisbon Inquisition, indicates that the Jewish settlements on the Petite Côte flourished between about 1606 and 1620, and that both Joal and Porto d'Ale had a synagogue. While there was a constant coming and going of both Jewish traders and non-Jewish seamen from

⁴⁰ The *Relação* de Francisco de Andrade, from 1582, makes clear the very close links and cultural exchanges between French and Africans on the Petite Côte. This allows us to talk about Franco-Africans already in that early period. English traders joined the French in the second half of the sixteenth century, but we do not have clear evidence of the same level of connections. F. ANDRADE, ["Relação das ilhas de Cabo Verde e da Guiné"], [Santiago], 26 Jan. 1582, ARCHIVO GENERAL DE SIMANCAS, *Guerra Antigua*, leg. 122, Doc. 180, in António Brásio (ed.), op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 97-107.

⁴¹ F. ANDRADE, op. cit., p. 103; A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., pp. 21-24.

Amsterdam to the Petite Côte,⁴² a core community of Sephardim settled there during this period. Most were young men, early in their careers; not all can be traced beyond 1620, but several of them, after leaving Senegal, settled in Amsterdam's rapidly growing Portuguese Jewish community. A few (see below) remained permanently on the Petite Côte. Thus, the Jewish population of Joal and Porto d'Ale seems to illustrate rather a typical migration pattern associated with the life cycle. In Senegal, however, the marriage⁴³ issue is rather more complex (see below).

The second of the questions that we wish to address, "Did work and labor produce or transform... kinship alliances," draws our focus to a crucial group of local actors, specifically to women traders on the Upper Guinea Coast. The Jews who lived in Joal and Porto d'Ale between 1606 and about 1620 converted their servants to Judaism. Some of them, in keeping with Portuguese practice, also contracted marriages with local women. They, like earlier generations of European merchants, were able to obtain access to existing local trading networks in part by marriage alliances.

However, from the perspective of the local *signares* or *ñaras*, who already controlled commercial networks,⁴⁴ the picture is somewhat different. These women were the major commercial actors in many coastal communities. Especially in matrilineal societies, marriage enabled them to extend their economic interests to incorporate foreign traders. Furthermore, given the high mortality among Europeans on the coast, many local trading women were able to follow a strategy of marrying two or even a succession of European traders, each time gaining access to the commercial contacts that these short-lived husbands represented. Occasionally, the European trader survived and the marriage lasted.

It is clear that some of the Sephardic merchants who settled on the Petite Côte followed this marriage practice. These Europeans were fortunate; the climate on the Petite Côte is drier than at Portuguese trading centers like Cacheu, less than 200 kilometers further to the southeast in a sub-tropical forest area. Especially during the long dry season (roughly October/November

⁴² On contracts between Sephardic merchants and non-Jewish insurers and businessmen in Amsterdam, see Filipa Ribeiro da SILVA, "Dutch Trade with Senegambia, Guinea, and Cape Verde, c. 1590-1674", in T. Green (ed.), op. cit., pp. 130-131.

⁴³ By definition, marriage with Christian merchants was an innovation, since there were no Christians on the coast before the arrival of Portuguese traders (non-Jewish *lançados*). But the practice of marriage with potential trading partners was surely not an innovation. See the mid-sixteenth century case of the Jewish trader called Ganagoga, who married a daughter of the "Gran Fulo" (reported by André Álvares de Almada in a well-known passage of his *Tratado Breve dos Rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde*). There is, furthermore, plentiful evidence of shifting identities from Jewish to Muslim in the late medieval Sahara. Is that not *a priori* evidence of intermarriage? One could argue that the marriages only occurred after conversion, but it was a situation of marriage between local and immigrant trading networks.

⁴⁴ See Philip HAVIK, *Silences and Soundbytes. The Gendered Dynamics of Trade and Brokerage in the Pre-colonial Guinea Bissau Region*, Münster, Lit, 2004; see P. HAVIK and T. GREEN, "Introduction", in T. Green (ed.), op. cit., pp. 21 ff.

to June) the Petite Côte is largely free of malaria – most of the Sephardic merchants survived their years in Senegal.

Our information on the subject of Jewish-Senegalese marriage is, however, fragmentary. A few of the men, when they returned to Amsterdam around 1620, were accompanied by their African wives and children. Others may have followed the more common practice of leaving their wives and children behind, when they returned to Europe. Circumstantial evidence bears this out, in the form of a reference, two decades later in a travel narrative, to an African man, living on the Petite Côte, who bore the name of one of the prominent Jewish traders – Mesquita. That Sephardic merchant, Moisés de Mesquita, had long since settled in Amsterdam, where he married a Sephardic woman.

Inquisition records and a 1635 French travel report⁴⁵ enable us to trace one lasting marriage in Senegal between a Sephardic merchant and his Senegalese wife. The husband, named Peregrino, was the leader of the scattered Jewish settlements then existing on the Petite Côte. The Jewish community in Joal, where Manuel Peregrino and his wife lived, was composed of Africans whom he had converted and Euroafricans, presumably including his own children and the offspring of other Sephardic merchants who had returned to Amsterdam. Peregrino, incidentally, was the son of Jacob Peregrino, spiritual leader or rabbi of the Jews on the Petite Côte during the heyday of their settlements, from 1612 to about 1620.⁴⁶

During a trip to Amsterdam in 1620, Jacob Peregrino was taken to court for non-payment of business debts. Manuel Peregrino also ran into legal difficulties,⁴⁷ accused of taking sexual liberties with women both in Amsterdam and in Senegal. For him, the return to Senegal may have provided escape from his legal problems. It is conceivable that Manuel's later elevated status on the coast was primarily due to his wife's economic position as a trader in the trading center of Porto d'Ale.

Ties across generations are another matter. The few families of Euro-African Jews who remained on the Petite Côte clearly retained a tight kinship structure – and note that both the local Serer and Wolof people and the Portuguese Jews followed primarily matrilineal rules of succession. Nevertheless, one must ask how Jewish identity in these families was passed on to the children. Either this occurred through the unorthodox practice of considering children of a Jewish father to be Jews, or else the mother had formally converted. The practice of passing identity through the father, while inconsistent with Jewish legal precedent, was not unknown. It was followed in other

⁴⁵ See Alexis de ST. LÔ, *Relation du Voyage du Cap-Vert*, Paris, François Targa, 1637.

⁴⁶ On Manuel Peregrino, see P. MARK and J. S. HORTA, op. cit., pp. 178 ff; see also T. GREEN, "Further considerations on the Sephardim of the Petite Côte, *History in Africa*, Vol. 32, 2005, pp. 165-183.

⁴⁷ T. GREEN, "Further considerations", art. cit.

diasporic settlements where a disproportionate majority of the Jewish population were men, as in eighteenth-century Suriname.⁴⁸

Over time, however, and certainly by the end of the seventeenth century, these families lost both their Portuguese and their Jewish identity and were assimilated back into the local Senegalese society. Nevertheless, forms of mixed and even multiple religious identity reflected the continued, if attenuated influence of Jewish religion on some Euro-African descendants of Sephardic merchants.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, however, those Jews who, by the 1620s, had left Senegal and moved to Amsterdam (we can enumerate five such families but there may have been more), became fully integrated into the Amsterdam Sephardic community. We have found no evidence that any of these Jews maintained either commercial or personal contact with the people of Joal or Porto d'Ale after they settled in Amsterdam. So the production of extended kinship systems, or the joining of two such systems, while it certainly facilitated inter-continental and inter-cultural commercial relations, was of relatively short duration.

We conclude by addressing the question "What did local belonging mean in terms of work?" For these Europeans living on the Petite Côte of Senegal, we can say what it meant in terms of religious affiliation... It afforded them the possibility to be practicing Jews. And those religious ties defined in large measure – though not completely – one's commercial network.⁵⁰ The religious and the work-related aspects of local identity were intimately conjoined, to the extent that they were almost one and the same. The Sephardic traders who, in 1612, defended themselves before the *buur* Siin, the Muslim ruler at the port of Joal, against the attempt of Portuguese Catholics from Cacheu to arrest them, demonstrate this association. They developed a discourse and behavior that stressed religious convergence and developed a sense of proximity with local Islam, to avoid an adverse decision by the king.

Local belonging had a strong effect on work in terms of the protection Jews obtained from local rulers. The acknowledgment of their invaluable status as traders for local political and economic interests was a key to their survival and to the success of their activities. The local status of Sephardic Jews on the northern Senegambian coast in the early seventeenth century was similar to the status of Portuguese and Luso-African traders in neighboring

⁴⁸ Aviva BEN-UR, "A Matriarchal Matter; Slavery, Conversion, and upward Mobility in Suriname's Jewish Community", in Richard Kagan and Philip Morgan (ed.), *Atlantic Diasporas, Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 159-169.

⁴⁹ These forms were already noticed in 1666 by Nicolas VILLAUT, Sieur de Bellefond, at Rufisque, the third Jewish community in the region. See *Relation des costes appelées Guinée; avec la description du pays, mœurs et façons de vivre des habitants*, Paris, D. Thierry, 1669, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁰ On these Sephardic networks, see, *inter alia*, F. R. Silva, art. cit. See also P. MARK and J. S. HORTA, op. cit.. See also Linda NEWSON, "Bartering for Slaves on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Early Seventeenth Century", in T. Green (ed.), op. cit.

Saalum, whose ruler called himself “Father of the Whites” (“*Pai dos Brancos*”). According to the oral will of a *buur* Saalum named Lagatirbalhana, written down in the late sixteenth century by Almada, his successor was pressured to:

trates muito bem aos *meus brancos*, como sempre os tratei e os Reis deste Reino; e a mesma obrigação tens, pois hás-de ser Rei, como nós tivemos, porque são filhos de Deus, e não fazem mal;⁵¹

In this precise context, “sons of God” effectively underlines the connection of religion with work. “Whites” belonged to the local king as a son belongs to a father, and, as such, deserved his protection. The same discourse of protection and belonging, with consequences in social status and economic activity, was found in the case of Ñagor, the *teeñ* or ruler of Bawol who controlled Porto d’Ale. He too fiercely protected the Jewish traders against Catholic enemies, which meant to protect his trade in his land.⁵²

Did kinship ties also provide lasting commercial advantages for Euro-African “Portuguese” or for Africans who had, perhaps temporarily, joined the “Portuguese” community as servants or as *grumetes*, men like Gaspar Vaz? Clearly the ties associated with Vaz’ (former) identity on Santiago Island remained available to him when he returned to the Gambia. This is evident from the business agreement that he worked out with André Donelha. But, once he returned to his identity among the local Manding elite of Cassão, Vaz undoubtedly benefitted more from the connections, kinship and otherwise, that he enjoyed with his community of origin.

If, as he explained to Donelha, Vaz was indeed to assume the role of “Satigui” in Cassão upon the death of his uncle, then he would be the second highest-ranking official in the community.⁵³ He would also be, in a sense, the chief merchant there. He promised Donelha that, as “Satigui”, he would ship slaves to Santiago. However, we have no documentation that this ever came to pass. We cannot be sure that Vaz was not embellishing his social standing when he told his story to Donelha, as a means of re-establishing the mutual trust that had been compromised by Donelha’s discovery that his erstwhile Christian friend was now, at least ostensibly, a Muslim. But in Senegambia, identities were multiple and flexible and they were often, as here, contextually determined. Again, religious affiliation played a role in establishing the personal relationships that were often central to commercial relations.

⁵¹ A. A. ALMADA, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵² ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Liv. 205, fl. 296. See P. MARK and J. S. HORTA, op. cit., Appendix II, p. 222. The Canon António Lourenço, leading a group of “Catholic men and people of confidence”, also tried to arrest the Jews. Lourenço had written a letter to Ñagor in May 1, 1612, naming the Portuguese traders as “your whites” (“*hos vossos branquos*”). See ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Liv. 205, fl. 296v.

⁵³ A. DONELHA, op. cit., p. 148: 40 years after their meeting, Donelha presents his recollection of Vaz’s words to him: “Eu trago, senhor, este trajo porque eu sou sobrinho do Sandequil, senhor desta aldea, o qual os tangomaos chamam duque, por ser a segunda pessoa do rei.”

Both Gaspar Vaz's religion and his language are crucial to an analysis of his identity. The identity in turn confirms his profession as a merchant. The "Satigui", in western Manding⁵⁴ society, was the local authority in charge of trade and the local market. Both Vaz and his uncle thus belonged to the Manding political elite of the upper Gambia. As Mande-speaking Muslim traders, they were also "Juulas", a professional/ethnic identity that denoted the long-distance merchants of the Greater Senegambia region. Their identity as "Juulas" may be deduced from – one may consider it to be coextensive with – their identity as merchants, as Muslims, and as Manding.

Conclusion

A word of caution is in order, lest we conclude this paper by giving the impression that we can neatly answer the questions posed above. In this paper we have taken the liberty of referring to the act of two merchants transacting trade as "work". But is it culturally and historically accurate to term this activity "work"? In the case of these seventeenth-century Senegambian and Luso-African traders, might this not be an anachronism? At the least, one should consider the possibility that trade ("*negócio*") was differentiated from work ("*trabalho*"), which was associated with other "visible" economic activities that would generally lead to commercial profit. Trading was integrally related to the identity of the groups discussed here: the Luso-Africans or "Portuguese," the Sephardic merchants (who were, in fact, part of the Luso-African communities for all the reasons written above; they shared all the features, including having mestizo families, with the difference that they raised their mestizo sons as Jews and not as Christians). Were they not Luso-Africans? Some of them were even "*lançados*" in the sense that they arrived and then resided on the Rivers of Guinea illegally. Were they a *third* group?... We believe we should place them as a "variant" of or a specific case within the coeval Luso-Africans. Finally, there were the Manding Muslims of the Gambia. Trade certainly provided them their means of livelihood. In this respect it is not inappropriate, at least in our own contemporary understanding of the concept, to term their commercial activity "work". We conclude with two questions of our own: Would they have used this terminology? And if not, does that matter for our analytical purposes, in writing the history of commerce on the Upper Guinea Coast?

⁵⁴ The terminology to refer to the Mande-speaking peoples of the Gambia is not consistent; it partly depends on the European language referenced. The French *Mandingue* and the English Manding or Mandingo or Mandinka are all alternate spellings for this westernmost population of Mande speakers.

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