

Part V. Guiné Bissau

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Chapter 6. Socio-ritual structures and modern migration among the Manjacos of Guiné Bissau

Ideological reproduction in a context of peripheral capitalism

Within a wider institutional and policy setting prompting research into the therapeutic – particularly psychiatric – effectiveness of autochthonous West African religion, theoretical considerations in the neo-Marxist study of religion informed my field work among the Manjacos of Northwestern Guiné Bissau. Against the background of presentday village society, its productive system, social organisation and political structure, my research was directed at modern economic and symbolic structures involving deities' and ancestral shrines, and oracles as administered by specialists who often combine divination with somatic curative action.

The limitations of a neo-Marxist perspective will be highlighted in the next chapter, 7. In the present chapter I shall remain within the chosen theoretical paradigm, and concentrate on the position and religious activities of Manjaco labour migrants who, hailing from the administrative divisions of Calequise and Caió in Cacheu district, Guiné Bissau, spend very substantial portions of their lives in urban centres in Senegal and France, while maintaining close ritual and therapeutic ties with their area of origin. These ties involve a spectacular expenditure of time and foreign-earned money on the part of the migrants, and bring out clearly the exploitative nature of local gerontocratic power.

Against a more general background of the articulation (linkage) between capitalism and several non-capitalist modes of production, I shall attempt to answer the following question: *to what extent can these migrants' rituals be interpreted as ideological reproduction?*

We shall briefly consider to what extent the ritual structures under study can be meaningfully relegated to such an underlying pattern of relations of production. Could they not simply be considered (as in Mart Bax's 1987 theory of religious regimes) as *religious* structures of exploitation *sui generis*, without depending upon specific and detectable links with such material structures of exploitation as make up, outside the obviously religious domain, the local economy and social organisation?

Finally, while a change in ideological content and function (such as the institution of divination, and the specialists administering it, appear to have undergone among the Manjacos the 20th c. CE) represents an obvious case of ideological production, one major group of data gathered in the course of my research will largely remain outside the present chapter: the way in which the Manjaco rituals at shrines and oracle huts can be said to assume therapeutic effectiveness, by creatively presenting to their migrant clients revelatory insights and guidance that may contain solutions for the spiritual predicaments the migratory experience had landed them in.¹

¹ For the structure of my argument in this chapter this omission has the unfortunate effect that the emphasis, in the theoretical introduction, on ephemeral and praxeological aspects of ritual (as distinct from analysis in terms of enduring social, economic and ritual structures) will not yet be backed, within this chapter, by an extensive case study, but should merely be read as a statement of intent for future work. Rereading this text after more than thirty years, I am appalled by its lack of flow and of life – as if in my efforts, at the time, to emulate the fashionable Marxist idiom, I could only produce stereotypical phrases, and cramped ones at that. Yet, by and large (and despite a brief episode in which I nearly died of cerebral malaria and was saved in the nick of time by my co-field-worker Joop de Jong MD), the Manjaco field-work was delightful, with its interesting shift from social organisation (the central focus of my Tunisian and Zambian work) to a psychiatric and existential level, in a situation where week after week I was completely and hospitably immersed in family life within the region's senior land priest's *long house*, had soon sufficiently mastered the local *lingua franca*, Creole; and even, greatest benefit of all, in the final month my new love Patricia joined me, from Belgium, adapting admirably to the field-work, learning much of our hosts' *lingua franca*, and through the considerable challenges of the field-work (we lived through a major famine, and Patricia greatly suffered from all sorts of insect-spread infections) the firm foundations were being laid for our marriage and family, still going strong after 34 years. In other words, the argument in this chapter still largely stands, and it turns out to be slightly less reductionist than I feared, yet from my present-day perspective I am inclined to distance myself from this chapter's ethnographic style and hermeneutical objectives. This chapter unpleasantly suggests that religious anthropology is all about structure and about the mechanical and Faustian application, not to say imposition, of a ready-made analytical scheme; in stead of driving home the message that this beautiful sub-discipline is in the first place about humble and mutually rewarding interpersonal and intercultural encounter (cf. van Binsbergen 2003b, 2011f, 2015). Chapter 7, below, is an early attempt at such autocritique.

6.1. Theoretical introduction: religion as ideological reproduction and as ideological production

In the wake of Marx's classic analysis of the ideological dimension of the capitalist mode of production (Marx 1973, 1975a-1983a; Marx & Engels 1975b-1983b), a number of leading ideas have developed in the Marxist approach to religious phenomena: religion is seen as

- (1) ideological reproduction,
- (2) a structure of material production and exploitation *sui generis*, or
- (3) as a structure of ideological reproduction (cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere, 1985a: 270 f.).

Ideological reproduction has received the most attention in theoretical and descriptive analyses so far. From this perspective, religion is seen as the ideological projection, into the celestial and the unreal, of processes of control, appropriation and exploitation that constitute Man's social life – and particularly relations of production such as actually existing between humans. By reflecting these relations, and by endowing the phantasms (ancestors, deities, spirits of the wilds, *etc.*) that constitute these reflections, with a unique, exalted sense of reality and power,² the relations of production are underpinned and carried over to new generations (*e.g.* in rites of passage), and to other parts of the world (*e.g.* through the spread of world religions, in conjunction with the spread of capitalist and bureaucratic secular structures).

In the simplest form of this pattern there exists a certain correspondence between the relational structure underlying the relations of production, and the relational structure defining the religious sphere: *e.g.* authority relations between elders and youths, or between the sexes, in real life, may be reflected in local ideas concerning the relations between deities and human beings. Here the Marxist approach³ differs only in idiom from classic structural-functionalist approaches as developed in mainstream anthropology of religion.⁴

However, relations of production in modern societies are usually complex and internally differentiated. They tend not to pertain to one unique mode of production, but to combine a limited number of different modes, each with its specific internal logic as revolving around the central relation of exploitation

² This clearly is a Marxist rephrasing of Geertz's famous definition (1966: 4), to be discussed in some detail below, in chapter 15. In *The Reality of Religion* I return to this definition and present an argument proposing to replace it by a better one.

³ For Marxist analyses of the religious dimension of pre-capitalist modes of production, cf. Bonte 1975; Houtart 1980; Augé 1975; and Bare 1977.

⁴ A classic statement of correspondence along structural-functionalist lines is Fortes 1959. On the significance and limitations of the correspondence thesis in the anthropology of religion, cf. Werbner 1977; van Binsbergen 1981b.

that constitutes that mode of production; modes of production are linked to each other through a social and historical process of articulation. In such articulation the central relation of exploitation that characterises a dominant mode of production seeks to impose itself upon other, pre-existing modes in such a way as to make the latter subservient to the reproduction of the former. Class alliances between the exploiting 'classes' in each of the various modes of production at hand constitute a standard form through which articulation is effected.⁵ In this complex situation (for which often the term *social formation* is used; cf. Terray 1969) religion has many options besides simply reflecting, in some one-to-one correspondence, the relations of production that make up one of the constituting modes. Various articulated modes can be reflected within one religious system, which then becomes virtually as heterogeneous (in terms of socio-ritual organisation, conceptualisation and history) as the relations of production that are involved; if this is the case, not one set of symbols, collective representations concerning the unreal, causality, misfortune *etc.* permeate the total religious sphere, but a limited number of different sets.⁶

These sets are mutually irreducible, and the logic of each may tune in with the logic underlying one particular constituting mode of production within the social formation. However, besides such 'multiple correspondence', the religious sphere may contain elements which question, protest against or negate, rather than reflect, relations of production in any of the constituting modes. Finally, in a social formation religious elements may not just display specific relations (of reflection, protest or negation) with specific constituting modes of production – such ideological relations may also be developed *vis-à-vis* the total structure of articulation that makes up the social formation as a whole. Thus, certain religious institutions and religious movements in nineteenth and twentieth-century CE Africa have been claimed to reflect, within a given social formation, neither an encroaching capitalist mode of production, nor preexisting modes upon which capitalism tried to impose itself, but *the very process of the articulation of these modes* in itself (van Binsbergen 1981b: 42 f., 258 f.).

However, to the extent to which the religious sphere is not a simple ideological reflection of relations of production, but often assumes a great deal of autonomy *vis-à-vis* such relations, religion can be more than ideological reproduction. It may take on an impetus of its own, and (in the hands of elders, kings, priests, cult leaders) may stipulate a circulation of producers and an appropriation of their surpluses which begin to constitute relations of exploitation in their own right, *sui generis*. Territorial and regional cults in South Central Africa have been described in such terms, both by Marxist and by non-Marxist

⁵ Cf. Rey 1971, 1973; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b; for limitations also cf. ch. 7 of the present book.

⁶ Cf. van Binsbergen 1981b; van Binsbergen & Geschiere (1985a: 274-278) succinctly propose an ethnographic and historical method (such as used in van Binsbergen 1981b) for the analysis of religion in complex social formations.. For an extensive application on Nkoya history, S.C. Africa, cf. van Binsbergen 2022a.

writers;⁷ but hundreds of other examples from many historical periods and other parts of the world could be quoted as cases in point.

This capacity of religion to give rise to forms of production and exploitation that do not manifestly spring from non-religious relations of material production and that more or less create their own (semi)autonomous field, or 'region' (in Werbner's sense; cf. Werbner 1977) could only be realised because religion is not only a structure of ideological *reproduction* but also a structure of ideological *production*: it is not only reflecting and reiterating the logic and the concepts that underlie material relations of production, but is also eminently capable of producing new logics, new concepts, new notions of causality, – or presenting such existing ideological elements in a new light.

This form of ideological production is well documented, in Africa and elsewhere, for the case of exceptionally gifted religious innovators, prophets, preachers.⁸ Attempts to relegate the latter's activities in the field of symbolic and conceptual production (*i.e.* innovation) to their specific class situation within complex and changing social formations may have been illuminating, but they do contain a certain oneness.⁹ Contrary to such structure-centred determinism which abounds both in Marxist and non-Marxist social science, religious innovation represents forms of experimentation and free variation which are inherent in the very nature of symbols and the religious order, and not to be explained away by reference to whatever broad groups, classes and historical processes the individuals involved may belong to.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that ideological production in religion only occurs in the context of the inimitable activities of these great religious personalities. Ideological production is a constant and ubiquitous aspect of religious phenomena. All members participating in a religious system are involved in such ideological production in a variety of ways. It is already a case of ideological production when the standard, overall causal explanations of misfortune as defined within a certain religious system, are invoked by the participants in their attempts to explain the details of a specific case that befalls them. Since religion by definition deals with the unreal and is largely concerned with non-empirical referents, the participant's interpretations of particular empirical facts in the light of culture-specific religious notions tend to display much more divergence, individual idiosyncrasies and creative vagaries than is commonly assumed by anthropologists of religion. Given the human tendency for symbolic and philosophical experiments, consensus and hence uniformity and unanimity in the religious sphere are mainly achieved (as a more or less exceptional state – cf. Fabian 1984) when *religious elements are publicly subjected to social control*. Admittedly the medium of internalisation safeguards a measure of

⁷ Cf. Werbner 1977; Schoffeleers 1979; Ranger 1985a; van Binsbergen 1981b.

⁸ From among the massive literature on prominent African religious innovators, cf. Sundkler (1961), Mitchell & Turner (1966). Major S.C. African prophets are discussed in van Binsbergen 1981b.

⁹ This theoretical *caveat*, representing a different position from the one I took earlier (cf. van Binsbergen 1981b), ties in with such work as Buijtenhuijs (1985) and Coulon (1985).

uniform reproduction of religious form and content by a participant without necessitating the constant scrutiny by other participants. It is my contention, however, that the bulk of religious uniformity is achieved, in the African case at least, as an effect of the *ad hoc* social control mutually exerted by participants upon the overt, interactional, empirical expressions of their religion: verbal and musical utterances that (as forms of interaction involving more than one participant) are publicly made, commented upon, and possibly sanctioned; concrete material objects (shrines, paraphernalia, offerings, coins and bills used in payments) and dramaturgical arrangements (rituals, seances) that can be seen and discussed by others. Such continuity and uniformity as a local religious system may display, is primarily anchored in these empirical referents. This is why my case study of Manjaco religion, in the present chapter, will primarily describe these empirical, visible aspects. Most of a religious system however goes beyond them, in the way of implicit meanings, symbols, imagery, notions of causality that are only imperfectly phrased (if at all), and that underlie the material objects and dramaturgical arrangements in ways most participants would be unable to spell out – and most researchers would be unable to grasp except through several years of field-work. In these intangible ideological aspects there is – to the distress of anthropologists looking for structure – room for immense free variation and lack of continuity – creativity, in other words. In the field of divination, we may find that the participants apply, simultaneously, rival interpretations of the same empirical referents (illness, death, ecological and meteorological disaster); and even if we succeed in explaining this rivalry as a reflection of various individuals' or groups' antagonism in the economic or political field, the essential leeway provided by the very nature of ideological production should not be explained away in the analyst's attempts at social-structural 'contextualisation'. Likewise, the modern study of ritual would stress the creative communicative patterns in ritual, where officiants and clients – often belonging to different linguistic and ethnic groups – struggle to arrive at some revelatory or therapeutically effective message which, while partly using a recognizable selection of pre-existing symbolic means, in its specific combination and dramaturgical presentation could be called unique to the event at hand, and therefore essentially new and unpredictable.¹⁰

On the face of it, there would be little that is specifically Marxist in such an approach to religion in terms of ideological production. It is rather in the mainstream of cognitive and symbolic anthropology, particularly in the praxeological variant. On closer analysis, however, a number of particularly interesting research themes open up here: the relationship between ideological and material production; the relationship between ideological production and ideo-

¹⁰ My emphasis on such experiments might seem to introduce, idealistically, an autonomous field of human intellectual activity, independent from the constraints of material production. But on the contrary, Man's ability to experiment and to create provides the very basis for technological and organizational innovation, and hence for the emergence of new relations of production and new modes of production; just as everyday material production provides the most obvious context (in the way of models, contexts, challenges) for symbolic and philosophical thought, experiment, and innovation.

logical reproduction; the conditions under which the ideological sphere either manages to realise its autonomy or becomes dependent upon such forms of material production as would physiologically, if not logically, appear to form a precondition for all symbolizing; the extent to which the laws that may turn out to govern ideological production (some of these laws have been discussed, under totally different headings, by praxeologists, or by structuralists seeking to formulate something like a universal grammar of symbols and their transformations) are comparable to the laws which Marxist analysis has sought to formulate for material production and exploitation; the extent to which changes in the ideological field may historically be related to changes in material production and reproduction.

6.2. The Manjacos in their ethnic, political, religious and economic environment

The Manjacos (Manjak(s), Yagos) ethnic group is found on the peninsula defined by the Cacheu river, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mansoa river.¹¹ They are the dominant ethnic group in the districts (seccaõs) of Calequisse and Caió, both belonging to the Cacheu region. Occupying the central part of the peninsula, they are virtually closed off from the Atlantic by their neighbours the Feloop (a subgroup of the Diola) to the West and Northwest, while the Braam (Mancagne) form the Manjacos' neighbours to the southeast. Further eastward, the Braam give way to such ethnic groups as the Papél, Balanta, Mandinka (Malinké) and Fula (Peul, Pular). To the northeast, beyond the old harbour town of Cacheu (once the colonial capital of Portuguese Guinea), lies the logistically fairly inaccessible area of the Coboiana ethnic group whose major shrine Mama Jombo nonetheless attracts a constant trickle of national and international pilgrims.

There is a close affinity between the Manjacos, Braams and Papéls, in language, agricultural production, religious system and hierarchical sociopolitical organisation. All three ethnic groups display the remnants of small precolonial kingdoms that used to enjoy considerable colonial protection in the Portuguese era and that were dissolved after the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independencia da Guiné e do Cabo Verde) proclaimed territorial independence in 1973. Significantly, the Manjaco area was among the latest to be liberated from Portuguese occupation.

¹¹ The ethnographic present refers to my main local field-work in 1983. For an interesting account of Manjaco migration as seen from France, cf. Diop 1981. Regrettably, that author has never, to my knowledge, set foot in the Manjaco area of origin; yet his reconstruction, based on data gathered in France, of present-day Manjaco village society is basically sound. A spate of publications provide a background on West African labour migration to France; cf. Bergues 1973; Diarra 1968; Diop 1968; Mince 1973; Papyle 1973. Van der Klei 1984 is a penetrating and inspiring analysis of migration and modes of production in a neighbouring area not unlike that of the Manjacos; also cf. van der Klei 1989.

Given a similar ecology, the Feloops' system of production has many common features with the Manjacos', but the former lack a history of statehood; their language is not intelligible to Manjaco speakers. Neither is the Coboiana language; while the Coboiana group remains one of the least studied ethnic groups of the country, and no definite pronouncement could yet be made concerning their historical forms of sociopolitical organisation, there are indications that they form a surviving pocket of an older population preceding Manjaco and Feloop settlement in the area.¹²

On the peninsula, the Coboiana area was liberated at an early stage of the liberation war, and from here considerable guerilla activity was waged against Portuguese strongholds at the town of Cacheu and that of Canchungo (then called Teixeira de Pinto). The rural areas in the rest of the peninsula, and foremost the Manjaco population, have since retained a certain aloofness *vis-à-vis* PAIGC politics. Office in local party branches is largely held by non-locals, and also in national level politics are the Manjacos underrepresented. The onetime activities of a Dakar-based political party, opposed to the PAIGC and mainly organised along Manjaco ethnic lines, has however not led to marked animosity or antagonism on the part of the national political centre *vis-à-vis* the Manjaco.

In the religious domain, such autochthonous forms of religion as will be discussed in this chapter still form the dominant idiom – with a remarkable degree of interethnic participation across linguistic and socio-political boundaries. Of the world religions, only Christianity (in the form of Roman Catholicism) has managed to superimpose itself upon (rather than replace) these autochthonous forms. The inroads of Islam, so conspicuous elsewhere in Guiné Bissau and neighbouring countries since the nineteenth century, on the peninsula have remained limited to a handful of trading families at the district centres, although Muslim presence in the town of Canchungo has already warranted the building of a mosque there.

Agricultural production among the Manjacos combines a number of main types of cultivation: an annual cycle of paddy-rice cultivation on irrigated fields adjacent to brackish, mangrove-covered rivulets cutting deeply inland (a spectacular form of cultivation found, with minor variations, all over the Upper Guinea Coast stretch-

¹² A 1950 census estimated the number of Manjaco in Guiné Bissau at just over 70,000, or 14.3% of the territory's population of just over 500,000 (Poelhekke 1979-80: 21). Allowing for a substantial increase of the national population as well as increased Manjaco migration to Senegal and France, the 1983 Manjaco population in Guiné Bissau could be estimated at 90,000-100,000, most of whom live in the Cacheu region. In addition, an increasing number of Manjacos have come to form a permanent (as distinct from migrant) population in Senegal (Casamance and Cap Verde regions, including Dakar), especially since the Guinean liberation war. The ethnographic literature on the Manjacos is remarkably abundant and rich; cf. Brito 1952; Carreira 1946, 1947a, 1947b, 1948, 1953, 1956, 1960, 1961a, 1961b, 1965, 1967; Correia 1958; Crespo 1955; Diop 1981; Lopes 1943, 1945; Meireles 1948, 1968b, 1949, 1952, 1960; Mota 1954: 308 f.; Nogueira 1947; Pires 1948; dos Reis 1947; Santos Reis & Courinho da Costa 1961; Gable 1996, 1998, 2003, 2006. On the Manjacos in Senegal, cf. Diallo 1964; Mbengue 1971; Mendy 1969; Sow 1969.

ing from the Gambia to Sierra Leone); annual cultivation of dry forest gardens and small garden plots inside the village, on which bananas, cassava and yams are cultivated; and finally orchards, situated in or near the villages, and yielding palm kernels (from which palm oil is prepared), palm wine, cashew nuts, cashew wine and lemons. Fowls (chickens, guinea fowls) form the main domestic animals. Nowadays goats and pigs are rarely raised in the villages. The few head of cattle found there today are invariably owned by the elderly male heads of extended families. There is only an underdeveloped local, regional, national or international market of agricultural produce. Most families experience great difficulties in keeping up their daily food supply in which rice is the staple. The near-famine conditions which around 1980 existed in Guiné Bissau for a number of years, are also encountered here. Fish and shellfish, either caught by female members of the household or bought at the local market, form the most frequent source of animal protein. Hunting is insignificant nowadays.

Stores, either state-owned or private (and in the later case mostly run by Muslim traders from the eastern part of the country), very occasionally offer rice for sale and act as local marketing venues for cashew nuts. A trickle of local (*i.e.* district level) trade in food crops, palm wine and domestic fowl (exclusively used for ritual purposes, which however may include human consumption; see below) as a source of cash is somewhat supplemented by petty commodity production: pottery, basketry, band-weaving (especially for funerary blankets), the preparation of salt, cashew wine and palm oil. A varying but significant proportion of the local households are involved in this petty commodity production at a small scale. In addition to the local market concentrated at the *praça* (the district centre's main square, which also serves as physical marketplace and where all state services are located: school, clinic, party branch office, staff houses *etc.*), these products sometimes find their way to the region's central market held at five-day's intervals in Canchungo, to the national capital of Bissau, and via, the smuggling circuit, to Senegal (especially palm oil). Allweather dirt roads ensure the communication between Canchungo on the one hand and Calequisse and Caió on the other; between the latter district centres, which are only 15 km apart, the only direct connection is by canoe. Excellent tar roads (and a ferry) connect Canchungo with Cacheu, Bissau and the rest of the country, – the eastern part of which has a much more developed economic circulation in the hands of Muslim, primarily Fula, traders. Transport at the peninsula is provided by Manjacos and Fula-owned pickup trucks, which (except in the frequent times of national petrol shortage) run regular services across the country, and of which at least one comes to either district centre every day.

In this way a significant volume of commodities is brought into the Manjaco area: canna (rum, produced mainly in state distilleries in the capital and further to the east); clothing, utensils, furniture, building materials, medicaments, and some rice and preserved food stuffs, from Bissau, the east, or Senegal; pigs, goats and cashew wine primarily from the Balanta-dominated Bula region north of Bissau; and some cattle from the east again. Although my research did

not include a quantitative assessment of production and circulation, it seems safe to conclude that much more is being imported into the districts of Calequisse and Caió than is exported; and most of the imports serve a local consumption instead of being an investment in local production.

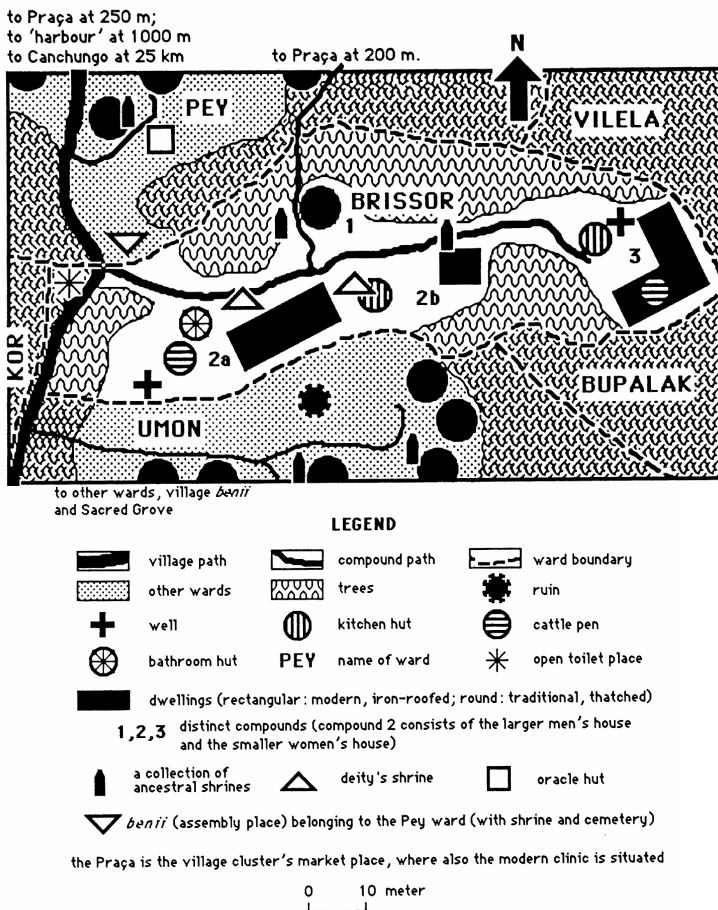


Fig. 6.1. Map of research area in Calequisse, Guiné-Bissau, 1981-1983.

To some extent, this import / export imbalance might be attributed to intervention on the part of the national state. On the one hand the state has peopled the two district centres with officials whose modest salaries are locally spent, primarily on items of consumption; on the other hand the state operates (via some of these

officials: the local *Comité d'Estado*) a system of price control which, especially with regard to such vital commodities as rice, textile and *canna*, may influence the balance of rural trade (although not, as a rule, in the interest of rural areas). However, the number of resident state officials is very limited (it lies in the range of one hundred for both districts combined); and much of the local flow of trade is effected outside state control. Migrants' cash income, realised outside the Manjaco rural area but spent inside, is therefore the main explanation for the imbalance.

The Manjaco area has long been recognized in the literature as remarkably migrancy-prone, as compared to other parts of Guiné Bissau.¹³ People from Calaquisse and Caió are found, in capitalist employment or in 'informal sector' relations of production leaning on to capitalism, in all urban centres of Senegal, as well as in France, where they are particularly numerous in the automobile industries around Paris. Today, especially on weekdays outside the planting season (June-September), Manjaco villages do in many respects convey the impression of a typical labour reserve: a preponderance of the elderly and of young children, a slight underrepresentation of women in childbearing age and a marked absence of youths and adult men. While permanent inhabitants of the village go about their daily productive activities, they contrast strongly with a leisured minority of visiting migrants, conspicuous in their blue jeans, fancy shirts, fine shoes and sun glasses if they are men – their elegant Senegalese *boubou* dresses and turbans from the same bright material if they are women. Surrounded by choice symbols of their migrant status (a wireless set, a stereo cassette recorder, an industrial worker's hard hat or a wrist wallet), they recline under the eaves of a house, engaging in conversation with such local relatives as can be spared from domestic or agricultural work. Or, – even more typically – they are seen performing a ritual at one of the ancestral shrines or deities' shrines with which Manjaco villages abound, or carrying full bottles of *canna* to the sacred groves just outside the village, or waiting at the *praça* for a roundtrip by pickup truck to Canchungo, where they will buy another sacrificial animal and yet more *canna* for rituals at their home village. On weekends, this small outlandish group is eclipsed by the more numerous locals who, from their jobs or secondary school in Bissau, Canchungo or elsewhere in Guiné Bissau, take every opportunity of visiting their home village. These weekend commuters are on the average younger, their much shabbier attire leaves no doubt as to their residence within the national boundaries, and once back home they are much more readily reintegrated into the social and productive activities of the family. It is not from them, but from the distant migrants to Senegal and France that Manjaco villages finance their import imbalance – largely used for the purpose of ritual obligations as we shall see.

¹³ Cf. Carreira 1956; 1960; Diop 1981, and the references cited there.

6.3. Social and ritual organisation of Manjaco rural society

The production described above is realised in a rural society whose most conspicuous unit is the village; local social organisation further comprises, at levels above the village, initiation regions (each consisting of a handful of neighbouring villages), and the now defunct kingdoms (each consisting of several initiation regions). Internally, each village is segmented into up to a dozen ward, each consisting of compounds occupied by extended families. Manjaco ritual organisation largely revolves around shrines distributed over these social units at their successive levels, and therefore both social and ritual organisation will here be described in the same section of my argument.

6.3.1. *The initiation region, the Sacred Grove, and the dismantled kingdom structure*

The main feature of the initiation region is a Sacred Grove: a stretch of meticulously preserved virgin forest access to which is restricted to men who have gone through the initiation rites which are held, for every initiation region, once in about twenty years. In the Sacred Grove the initiation region's central deity is venerated. While that deity has a specific proper name for each initiation region, its essential identity is that of the Land in general. In everyday verbal usage, this deity is equated with the sacred grove where its shrine is located. The central concept in the Manjaco religious system, *uchaay*, commands a complex semantic field comprising, among others, such meanings as God, Land, deity, spirit, demon, devil, sacred grove, forest; in the remainder of this chapter, I shall translate the term by Sacred Grove, implying however all the nuances spelt out here.¹⁴

¹⁴ In Creole, the Manjaco word *uchaay* is usually translated by 'irañ', while some informants, extensively exposed to Roman Catholicism, may prefer the Creole translation 'shatan'. The latter word plainly means 'devil', while 'irañ' in Creole refers to any spiritual being that represents a mode of existence independent from humanity (therefore, souls of the departed are not *irañs*): the word *irañ* however does apply to the spirits associated with sacred groves, clan shrines and diviner-priests' shrines, but also sorcery familiars. Situated, geographically and taxonomically, at the far other end of the range of languages of the Niger-Congo macrophylum to which both Manjaco and (as branch of Bantu) Tswana belong, the Tswana word *modimo* has a very wide range of application comparable to that of the Manjaco *uchaay*: from High God to land spirit, demon and ancestor. Usually however, among the Manjacos, the concepts *uchaay* and *irañ* are not supposed to encompass the notion of a High God, called *Deus* in Creole, and *Nasin Batsi* ('King of the Sky') in Manjaco. This local distinction between 'any spiritual being' and 'High God', so well geared to Christianity, may well be due to Christian influence. Likewise, Roman Catholic missionaries have equated Christ with the Cassara figure from the Manjaco pantheon. Cassara is the messenger of Nasin Batsi who once a year (in April) visits the world in order to expose, chase and kill the witches. Cassara's material incarnation is a ceremonial bier covered with cloth in a colour peculiar to each village. During the week of Cassara, villagers enjoy collective meals at the dancing-ground adjacent to the headman's house. Cassara's bier (with which entranced youths dance and run about on this occasion) is considered to be an oracle capable of

The cult of the Sacred Grove reaches its paroxysm during the two months' period of initiation, when all uninitiated young men above the age of seven or eight years go through a training ordeal inside the Sacred Grove under the direction of a number of initiation specialists recruited from among the mature and elderly men of the initiation region. Not only uninitiated actual inhabitants of the initiation region but all uninitiated youths hailing from the villages concerned and presently living in other initiation region, in towns in Guiné Bissau, in Senegal and even in France are called upon, and an amazing number still heed the call.¹⁵ Moreover, all initiated men from the initiation region are expected to be present and to make substantial offerings of *canna* and sacrificial animals during at least some days of this two-months' period. The villages then teem with hundreds of returning relatives and visitors, and all resources are drained in order to provide these masses with meals and shelter.

The cult of the Sacred Grove is however far from confined to the time of initiation; instead, it is a continuous, daily concern of all initiated men in the villages of the initiation region. Elderly men convene at the Sacred Grove virtually on a daily basis, in order to pour libations, to sample the palm wine and *canna* left over once the Land has had its libatory share, to sacrifice animals and consume their meat, and to perform chicken oracles. They converse on social and ritual matters, and in general have a good time together. In these congenial surroundings, sheltered from the gaze of women and boys, the mature men daily engage in a process of social interaction in which honour and power are assessed and redistributed, and claims to office are made, supported or rejected. The high frequency of social and ritual action at the Sacred Grove is guaranteed by the fact that any officering at a lower shrine wherever in the initiation region (*i.e.* royal shrine, village shrine, ward shrine, a compound's ancestral shrine or an oracle hut) must invariably be reported at the Sacred Grove, along with a suitable gift of palm wine or *canna*. The very many rituals which can be seen to be performed in a village from day to day always have a complement at the Sacred Grove, inaccessible to the uninitiated. Initiated men visiting a village will always first retire, with their hosts and a suitable libation, to the Sacred Grove, which thus in many ways forms the ritual equivalent of a traditional men's club or public house in Western Europe. When particular important matters are at hand, *e.g.* rain ritual or the election to a major office within the community, activities at the Sacred Grove also take on a clublike, corporate aspect in that all men concerned are under the obligation to be present there, failing which one has a considerable fine to pay,

detecting and chasing witches. Anyone dying in this period will not be mourned: he or she is considered a witch slain by Cassara. There is (Thoden van Velzen & van Wetering 1988, 2004) a remarkable parallel with portable shrines and concepts among the Njuka of Surinam, many of whose ancestors must have hailed from Upper Guinea. Cassara's descent to earth is reminiscent of Christ's mythical descent to hell after death, and has parallels in the Iberian Old and New World.

¹⁵ Thus, during the initiation ceremonies in the Sacred Grove of BoTimat, near Calequisse, in April / June 1983, at least fifty youths participated, including a considerable number from Senegal, and even a few boys flown in straight from France where they had been born.

again in the form of *canna* or palm wine.¹⁶

The most important rituals however, involving the most expensive sacrificial animals (fullgrown pigs, heads of cattle) tend to be directed exclusively at the Sacred Grove, without lesser shrines being involved. Women and non-initiated men (*e.g.* non-Manjacos, in the Portuguese era – and in the course of my research – even Europeans) who are not entitled to enter the Sacred Grove, may appeal to a local elder to sacrifice there on their behalf. These rituals invariably have to do with the discharge of contractual relationships humans enter into with deities, foremost with the Sacred Grove. The form and rationale of these rituals is best described when, below, I discuss Manjaco oracles and sacrifices.

While in the older works on the Manjacos the kingship is presented as the pivot of socio-political organisation (*cf.* Carreira 1947a), the dismantling of this institution since 1973 has been so effective that little more than vestiges of it remain in the sphere of production and land tenure. The kingship still has specific incumbents, and in at least one case a traditional king has managed to attain a formal position of power within the new political and judicial structures controlled by the PAIGC. In the ritual sphere, royal families continue to attend to their royal shrines, which are lavishly embellished with (often multi-coloured) royal statuettes, and located not in the Sacred Grove but in a less secluded place adjacent to their compounds. This royal cult however no longer mobilises people from all over the territory of the former kingdom, and such partial control as the kings appear to have had over the cult of the Sacred Grove in the past, has now vanished.

6.3.2. *The village*

Under the luscious beauty of their giant kapok trees and mango trees, Manjaco villages stand out as extensive and well-shadowed park-like arrangements, separated from the surrounding forest by a broad circle of paddyfields affording wide views. In addition to this physical delineation, a village is characterised by the following features: it has a village headman; a part (*kor*; *cf.* Nkoya *kara*, ‘royal shrine?’) traditionally set apart to accommodate this official; and a central open place (*benii*). At the *benii*, always marked by some particularly imposing sacred kapok trees, we find the village shrine, likewise called *benii*: a thatched hutlike construction without walls; in its centre we see a small miniature palisade within which the shrine’s spirit (*uchaay*) is said to dwell – although at other times this spirit is said to house in the surrounding kapok trees. Earth from within this palisade is the main substance used in amulets worn by the villagers.

¹⁶ Palm wine is extremely perishable (it becomes undrinkable within a day) and only available during part of the year (October-May). Rituals are performed the year round, and therefore *canna* is an essential substitute for palm wine, even though the latter, as direct, unadulterated produce tapped straight from the trees, is held to be symbolically superior. For ritual purposes one liter of *canna* (a standard minimum quantity for most ritual occasions) is equated with five liters of palm wine; as a commodity, palm wine is somewhat cheaper than this ritual equation suggests: while a liter of *canna* sells at peso 180–200, a liter of palm wine only fetches peso 20–25. For the peso exchange rate, *cf.* note below.

Although there do not appear to exist corporate rituals focussing on the *benii* (as there are for the Sacred Forest / Grove), the *benii* is the scene of important rituals staged for individual villagers (in times of illness, or when twins come of age). Also is the *benii* the scene of the village's major burial ground. Here the highly respected members of the guild of gravediggers perform their duties; administering the final ritual interaction between a human being and the Land (notably: burial), they are best seen as a prominent type of land priests (*cf.* ch. 7, below). After a burial, inquests are also held at the *benii*. The empty bier, carried on the heads of bearers supposed to be in trance, is then used as a divination instrument answering questions concerning the cause of death, possible sorcery connotations, and the distribution of the inheritance.

Since major ritual, judicial and local-political functions are discharged at the level of the men's assembly in the Sacred Grove (catering for several neighbouring villages), the social significance of the village as a social unit today appears to be less central than its conspicuous delineation in the landscape would suggest. The village headman used to be prominent in the old royal hierarchy before it was dissolved. Even today this officebearer is the guardian of the Cassara shrine (see above) that, covered with cloth of a colour peculiar to each village, features in annual ritual competitions between villages belonging to the same ancient kingdom. The allocation of land, a privilege of the king as the greatest landowner, and the organisation of royal tribute labour, used to take place primarily at the village level; and still today, after the dissolution of the kingdoms, a village's fields lie next to one another, quite distinct from the fields of neighbouring villages with whose inhabitants the village in question may entertain very close social, marital and ritual ties. All this suggests that as a unit of social organisation the village lost much of its functions with the breakdown of the ancient political system, which in terms of control over land and the appropriation of surplus labour could well be considered a tributary mode of production.

6.3.3. *The ward, the extended family and the marriage system*

With the abolition of tribute labour, the virtual dissolution of the ancient royal hierarchy and the appropriation of ancient royal land by individual elders, the vital unit in the production system today has become the *pekiin* or ward. Each ward (*cf.* figure 6.1) occupies a contiguous stretch of land within the village's residential area; boundaries between ward are marked by roads, orchards, gardens or fences. The ward is a strictly exogamous unit.¹⁷ The recruitment of its male members has vague patrilineal connotations, but there is no claim of common apical patrilineal ancestors shared by all members of the ward. It is usually possible to point out one agnatic core within a ward, but this does not preclude that other inhabitants generally and publicly known to be matrilineal

¹⁷ The only case of intra-neighbourhood marriage that came to my attention was in the village of Bajob, in a context dominated by Christian and cosmopolitan influences which did not preclude that rumour attributed such great misfortunes as befell the spouses, to their breach of marriage taboos.

or even affinal relatives of the members of this agnatic core enjoy full rights of membership of this residential unit. Except for ritual purposes (the veneration of ancestral shrines, and the very restricted rights of pouring libations there) little stress is laid on genealogical knowledge.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the *pekiin* is a productive unit in that the cultivation of the main crop, paddy rice, is realised in collective labour by all *pekiin* members under the forceful direction of the *pekiin* head – who, it must be admitted, usually prides himself in being an untiring cultivator himself. The planting season (June–September) has a major rallying aspect: not only do all actual residents of the *pekiin* take part in production, but in addition virtually all migrants normally dwelling elsewhere in Guiné Bissau, and a large proportion of those in Senegal, in this period return to the *pekiin* and (as young men and women) take a lion's share in the inconceivably heavy toil in the flooded paddy fields.

Finally, the *pekiin* is a socio-ritual unit in that it tends to have its own central place, called *benii* like the central place at the village level, and physically and functionally hardly distinguishable from the latter: sometimes major rituals are performed at the *pekiin's benii*, and people may also be buried here.¹⁹ The main difference between village *benii* and ward *benii* is that the latter turns out to cater for a much smaller group of people. At the ward *benii* also the slid drums are kept which, collectively owned by the members of that social unit, play an important role in funerary ceremonies, including, several years or decades after someone's demise, the public erection (accompanied by a major sacrifice and extensive libations) of an ancestral shrine (in the form of a short vertical stick) at one of the compounds in the ward.

Although the fact that the village is segmented into wards is unmistakable at the most superficial inspection of the residential space, the functional distinction between these two levels of social organisation (village and ward) is so blurred that as a researcher one is tempted to regard the village simply as a maxi-neighbourhood, or the ward as a mini-village. In a continuous process of fission and fusion, waxing and waning, wards would appear to grow into villages and villages to decline into wards, with supposedly a redistribution of social, ritual and political features which however is not adequately documented in my data – and which may have become just as blurred due to the dissolution of the old kingdom organisation. In all these details of spatial organisation and attending shrines, a remarkable continuity (perhaps ultimately Pelasgian?) may be observed with rural North Africa, *cf.* ch. 1, above).

In addition to the type of open, thatched, shrine described above for the *benii*, at the ward level two other types may be found. First there are shrines of land deities located away from the central place and lacking the corporate connotations of the *benii* shrine; these shrines may look like miniature huts, but they may also have a more rudimentary shape: marked by nothing more than a shrub, a wood log, or a simple shallow hole in the ground suitable for libation.

¹⁸ The Manjaco *pekiin* may be an example of the *deme*, a concept Murdock tried rather in vain to introduce in social anthropology (Murdock 1965).

¹⁹ It is unclear which factors govern burial at either the village *benii* or the ward *benii*.

Guardianship of these shrines is owned by individual by virtue of their being *pekiin* headman. Sometimes such a shrine's deity is merely considered the special guardian of the ward in which the shrine is located; others however are venerated far beyond the ward, as benevolent spirits specialising in granting rain or human fertility in exchange for animal sacrifices.

Secondly most wards contain one, and seldom more than one, oracle hut (*pubol*), constructed and owned by an individual oracle priest (*napene*), who usually is not the *pekiin* headman. These oracle huts and the divination that takes place there are so crucial to the religious system of the Manjacos that they deserve a section of their own (see below).

With regard to the other forms of agriculture than paddy-rice cultivation, and to petty commodity production as summarised above, Manjaco relations of production are regulated not at the level of the *pekiin*, but at that of the extended families. Each *pekiin* consists of up to half a dozen of such families, each characterised by their own dwelling compound. The extended family is bound together by coresidence and commensality. It is headed by a male elder, who owns the family's livestock if any, and who administers the family's rice granary. This elder also officiates at the ancestral shrines that are found in every Manjaco compound.

Women make a vital contribution to production (agriculture, petty commodity production, and domestic work in general) at the level of the extended household, and since marriage constitutes the main procedure to gain control over an adult woman's labour power, some remarks about the Manjaco marriage system are in order at this point.

While the ward is exogamous, there is a marked degree of intravillage endogamy, and most marriages are contracted within the initiation region. Given the extent of migrancy, this statement must be modified so as to include marriage partners not actually dwelling in the rural area, but having their village home in a particular village and initiation region. Continuity in marriage patterns, and the tendency for initiation regions to coincide with matrimonial areas (Meillassoux 1964) within which the biological reproduction of the population largely takes place, is reflected in the practice of daughters marrying into their mother's village, thus, as the Manjacos say, 'returning the gourd'.

Marital payments are slight, often not exceeding a few liters of liquor presented by the son-in-law to his wife's father or guardian. After a transitional period (up to a few years) in which the wife stays in her father's ward where her labour (and part of that of her visiting husband) is controlled by her family, marriage is virilocal; rapidly the wife is incorporated into her family-in-law, to such an extent that she will stay there until her death, even in times of absence of her husband, and after his death. Her labour power is controlled by the elder of her husband's ward – who delegates most of this control to his senior wife. Under conditions of migrancy, husbands aspire to the creation of neolocal nuclear households away from home: in Bissau,

but particularly in Senegal and France; polygamy, as is widely practised, enables men to combine urban and rural marital interests and aspirations.

6.3.4. Oracle huts, divination and sacrifice

Oracle huts are located at some distance from their owners' compounds, often set apart from the latter by a fence. They are very different from *pekiin* shrines: they have thick clay walls and a narrow entrance, and in their dark main compartment (the other, smaller compartment being reserved for the invisible oracle deity) easily up to six people may be seated. Here also the altar is found, where surrounded by a collection of shells, antelope horns, gourds *etc.* One or two libation basins can be seen, retaining a semifluid sediment of earlier libations of palm wine, canna and blood of sacrificial animals.

The diviner-priest (*napene*) caters for individual clients from anywhere except his own ward. There are considerable differences between *napenes*. Some only act as diviners revealing the causes of a client's misfortune and stipulating necessary ritual action (sacrifice at the Sacred Grove, the erection of an ancestral shrine, *etc.*), without themselves engaging in somatic treatment. Others combine divination and treatment, thereby laying a personal claim on the client's material resources in excess of the chicken and the bottle of *canna* that are the inevitable expenses of divination. Although in theory the diviner-priest should spend all revenue from treatment (often a considerable sum per case) on sacrifices and libations for the benefit of the oracular spirit, in practice much of this money is invested on such secular items as a corrugated-iron roof, clothing and electronic consumer goods. Methods of divination also vary: while divination always includes a chicken oracle (the inspection of a fowl's entrails), some *napenes* combine this with direct pronouncements allegedly uttered by the spirit in some ventriloquial spirit language unintelligible to ordinary human beings. Some diviner-priests require the client to come to the oracle with already a clear assessment of his own predicament, while others do not want the client to give any personal information on the case, and instead base their diagnosis and direction solely on divination and revelation. But whatever the specific forms (whose description and analysis falls outside the present argument), the *napene's* art occupies an absolutely central function in the religious system of the Manjacos. In order to explain why this should be so, more should be said about the Manjaco view of ritual obligations.

With the exception of simple greeting rituals which travellers and migrants perform at the local shrines, most rituals are a response to specific misfortune, and form part of the following chain of interpretation. First the problem at hand (drought, epidemic, infertility, unemployment, illness) is to be interpreted as the manifestation of a specific deity or ancestor seeking ritual attention. If an ancestor is thought to be involved, it is usually one who has not yet been honoured by the erection of an ancestral shrine – a costly affair which is always postponed until the ancestor shows his impatience through the send-

ing of misfortune. If a deity is thought to be involved, the misfortune is most often attributed to that deity's impatience to see one living up to the terms of a contract one (or one's forbears) has entered into with that deity: in the past one has asked health, fortune, offspring, a nice job in Senegal or France, from the deity, in exchange for the promise of a major sacrifice; and even if the deity can be said to have granted the request, the promised sacrifice is never made before several years have gone by and before a specific case of grave misfortune or ill health has convinced one that the deity is getting impatient.²⁰

Whatever somatic treatment a *napene* may offer (and such treatment implies that he induces his client to enter into a sacrificial relationship with his own oracular deity – in addition to any other deities with which the client may already be engaged in contractual relationships), the *napene's* first task is invariably to provide an answer to the question as to which specific deity or ancestor causes the client's specific misfortune, and to stipulate how this invisible being can be placated. Since every human being is entangled in a close web of ritual obligations *vis-à-vis* several members of the preceding generation, and in any number of (partly long forgotten) contracts with deities, such a diagnosis is no easy matter; but at any rate it can safely be assumed that no human being is ever completely innocent of ritual neglect.

Napene cater for misfortune that is considered to be the personal affliction of one individual. The secluded intimacy of the oracle hut allows for private conversations where, in addition to the client, only the latter's spouse and/or very close kinsmen are allowed to be present. *Napene* consultation poignantly reflects Manjaco notions of privacy and secrecy (which at times may drive a researcher to his wit's end).

However, in some cases (covering only a definite minority of all sacrificial events going on in a village or family), one can dispense with the *napene's* services. Prominent elders (particularly the officiants of the cult of the Sacred Grove, the priests of lesser land spirits that have their shrine in some ward, and ward headmen in general) are sufficiently competent and confident in ritual matters to stage rituals without first consulting a diviner-priest. This pattern applies in the following cases: collective instead of individual misfortune (drought, epidemics); minor sacrificial contracts and/or minor cases of ritual neglect typically involving junior members of the village; and more serious cases of individual misfortune involving an elder himself. In these cases, the bypassing of the *napene* does not mean that no divination is carried out. Rather, the elders stick to the minimal divinatory requirements that attend all sacrifices (including those stipulated by *napenes*): a chicken oracle has to assess whether the deity's or ancestor's general feeling in the matter at hand is posi-

²⁰ For sacrifice prompted by sacrificial obligations stemming from a human's contract with a deity, the Creole language uses the apt expression *torna boka*, 'to return the mouth (which has made the promise)'.

tive ('white', in the Manjaco oracular symbolism – the colour black signifies the alternative case); after which the urine oracle has to show whether the deity or ancestor, having already expressed his overall agreement, subsequently accepts or rejects the specific sacrificial animal selected for him (in the case of acceptance, the animal urinates immediately before one proceeds to killing it).

These minimal divinatory requirements may indicate the uncertainty, powerlessness and tediousness that pervade relations between Man and the supernatural among the Manjacos. The supernatural is difficult to approach.²¹ While many sacrifices are rejected (as shown by the animal's failure to urinate), some sacrifices may be, at best, just tolerated by the supernatural, but they never ingratiate Man with the supernatural – there is always the danger of falling short to unknown and demanding expectations on the part of some forgotten deity in distant parts. *Ritual among the Manjacos is a thoroughly joyless, miserable duty, in which one never reaches a state of blissful accomplishment.* Although humans engage in contracts with deities as if they were equals, these relations ultimately convey a sense of onesided dependence on some whimsical and tyrannical power – a striking reflection of the model that underlies Manjaco gerontocratic relations between youth and women on the one hand, and elders on the other. Therefore, for Manjaco women and youth ritual contains a double bind: it does not release them from the clutches of everyday life (in which they are dependent upon and exploited by gerontocratic elders), but rather reinforces their predicament, first because no ritual can be completed without an elder officiating in it, secondly because the relations with the supernatural can be said to be an ideological reproduction of gerontocratic arrogance. This is the reason why I do not consider Manjaco rituals to have much therapeutic value for others than the elders themselves.

There are historical indications²² that when elders stage rituals without consulting a *napene*, we have to do not with elders usurping the *napene*'s professional prerogatives, but with elders insisting on their historical ritual competence in the face of a recent expansion of the *napene*'s competence and prerogatives. Of old, the *napene* formed part of the kingdom hierarchy; as members of a hereditary guild, their activities were to a considerable extent controlled by and subservient to the politico-ritual powers of the king. Elders at the village and ward

²¹ Mama Jombo, the main Sacred Grove of the Coboiana ethnic group (cf. Crowley 1990), although logistically difficult to reach, turns out to be much more easily approachable than the Manjaco equivalents, e.g. the Sacred Grove of Calequisse. The minimal divinatory requirements as discussed, for the Manjacos, in the text, scarcely apply at Mama Jombo's shrines (she boasts five, all situated closely to one another). This accessibility may be an important reason (but what causes it in the first place?) for Mama Jombo's very extensive inter-ethnic and international clientele, including not only Guineans from the peninsula (among whom Manjacos) and beyond, but also Diola villagers from Senegal, and Europeans. Efficiently, the priests deal with the clients in the Creole language – while Manjaco is the only language tolerated by the Manjaco deities at their shrines. On one occasion, I found the waiting area of the Coboiana shrine so crowded that the impression was conveyed of a large modern bureaucratic institution.

²² My own oral-historical data, in conjunction with Carreira's account (especially 1947b, cf. 1961b).

level were also part of the same hierarchical differentiation of functions. With the dissolution of royal power the hierarchical structure collapsed (no doubt under the additional influence of individualising tendencies brought by ever increasing capitalist encroachment – through labour migration and the cash economy), and the *napene* more than ever before took on the characteristics of divinatory and therapeutic entrepreneurs, catering for misfortune that was more than ever before conceived as a strictly individual matter. In this they were less than before checked by the cult of the Sacred Grove (which was no longer associated with royal power), while also the social control exercised by the *napene* guild organisation was slackened.

6.4. Migrants' ritual activities and the articulation of modes of production

6.4.1. Migrants and gerontocracy

Having thus summarised present-day social, economic and ritual structures among the Manjacos, we may now ask ourselves what is the place in this village society, of migrants who have their places of work in Senegal or France. This discussion will highlight migrants' rituals as a major form in which the articulation of capitalism to pre-existing modes of production presents itself in this West African periphery – in a way that reproduces not so much capitalism, but the local modes.

Manjaco rural society, even in the late 20th century, can still serve as a textbook example of a viable gerontocracy. The codes of gerontocratic power continue to be respected not only by young men residing in the village but also by those living as labour migrants at distant places of work under relations of production and under social conditions very different from those prevailing in the village. An amazingly large proportion of these migrants keep up contacts with home. They send remittances, clothes, building materials and electronic consumer goods, try to attend the local initiation festival as held once every twenty years, and also in other years visit their elders, bringing *canna* and more endurable gifts. This vitality of the Manjaco gerontocratic system is puzzling. Marriage payments among the Manjacos are too insignificant to form the basis of the elders' power over young men, as they do in many other African societies. (*cf.* Rey 1971; Geschiere 1983). One could further invoke in this connection a number of socio-economic explanations which have been advanced for other African cases involving a high rate of migrancy: 'the elders control the youths' access to land, and the latter cannot risk rural ostracism given the insecurity of their urban footholds as migrants'; 'the migrants' wives and children are left in the care of the village elders, in a subtle captivity ensuring the migrant's continued respect and financial remittances', *etc.* In the Manjaco case explanations of this nature appear to lack conviction. Many Manjaco migrants have acquired

Senegalese or even French citizenship, and have thus a rather secure foothold abroad. Many are less than committed to the independent state of Guiné-Bissau, its disaster economy, and its ruling party the PAIGC, and would not dream of retiring in their home area although many ultimately do retire there. Many consider village life an ordeal that one can only endure for a few weeks a year, if that; and although many have left (some of) their wives and children at home, others have their dependents safely outside the elders' control, in relatively comfortable houses in Senegal and France (*cf.* Diop 1981).

It is therefore not simple economic necessity that drives Manjaco men back into the arms of their elders. The initiation, as youths, into the cult of the Sacred Grove, their more gradual and less dramatic exposure to the cults of lesser deities and ancestors, and the ensuing socialisation into notions of obligation, neglect, dependence and fear, may have much to do with the migrants' continued observance of rural ties that are not an obvious asset to them. However, I would shrink from invoking such an ideological factor as an independent variable, and would rather admit that my exploratory research among the Manjacos does not yet allow me to provide a full analysis on this point. Social control mutually exerted by Manjaco migrants at their distant places of work, sometimes taking a formal organised form, may provide part of the explanation, particularly as regards those migrants who keep up such intensive ties with their village that every year they participate in the planting season.

Many migrants in Senegal, and all migrants in France, fail to retain productive rural ties of this nature, and their home visits tend to be at intervals that are much longer than one year. What is very striking in those cases is that, when a home visit finally occurs, there is invariably a major ritual obligation that in the migrant's mind forms the most obvious reason for the arduous and expensive trip. Migrancy is of course a condition conducive to all sorts of somatic and mental trouble.²³ When (often after vain appeals to Western doctors, psychiatrists, social workers *etc.*) these complaints are put before some Manjaco diviner residing at the distant place of work,²⁴ they are interpreted as spiritual or ancestral manifestations due to ritual neglect or obligations. Sometimes money sent home for the purchase of *canna* and sacrificial animals may be considered a sufficient remedy, but in most cases the migrant sees no alternative but to return home personally. He will bring gifts for his living rural kinsmen, but his main expenditure apart from his return ticket will be ritual: literally dozens of liters of *canna*, several pigs and / or goats, a considerable number of chickens to be used for oracles. Most of these items are only available at Canchungo if at all. One does not buy them all in one go, but item after item, making the ex-

²³ *Cf.* Collomb & Diop 1969; Diarra 1966.

²⁴ Such diviners are found in the major centres of Manjaco migration both in Senegal and in France, and not by accident. Thus, in April 1983 I personally witnessed, in the town of Canchungo, part of the initiation (*bupene*) of a diviner who was specifically initiated so as to take up, immediately afterwards, a divination practice in France.

pensive and tedious taxi ride to Canchungo time and again, in the course of weeks that may easily become months, as one's ritual obligations find ever new and unexpected extensions through the divinations at the oracle huts and the Sacred Grove of the home area.



Note the long cultivation spade (*kanyando*)
 Fig. 6.2. A Manjaco cultivator in his paddy fields, 1983.

The expenses incurred would be truly astronomical if the migrant were to abide by the official exchange rate of the Guiné Bissau currency. Many migrants however manage to change their French or Senegalese currency at the black market (the border town of São Domingo, where long-distance taxis enter from Senegal and deliver the migrants at the pedestrians' ferry to Cacheu, is famous in this respect), thus reducing their costs very considerably.²⁵ But even so, the migrant's home visit is traumatic. He is constantly aware of being at the mercy of oracle priests, elders, taxidrivers, Canchungo traders, and the Guinean economy as a whole – a painful contrast with the relative comforts of his distant place of work. As his ritual obligations turn out to ramify in unexpected directions, his time budget and finances begin to give out. Nor do the many rituals in which the migrant is involved, in any symbolic and psychological way seem

²⁵ According to the official exchange rate, one Guiné Bissau peso equalled c. US\$ 0.025 (first half 1983); exchanged on the black market for French and Senegalese currency, its value is said to decrease to c. US\$ 0.003. Full-grown pigs, priced at peso 10,000 and more in Guiné Bissau and even heads of cattle, which may be twice as costly, may thus come within the reach of the average returning migrant.

to create a marked catharsis, some redeeming re-immersion in the culture and society he was born in. On the contrary, the prolonged dependence, for the fulfillment of ritual obligations, on both human and supernatural authority figures against whose whims and directions not the slightest appeal is possible, in addition to rural health conditions and the effects of ritual overconsumption of alcohol, create a state of stress from which the migrant can only recover after having left his village home again. He is discharging a painful and costly duty which has little intrinsic gratification to offer. The fact that his coming home has primarily been defined in terms of ritual obligation and neglect, spoils what might have been a rural vacation into a race for spiritual and financial survival. The migrant's gain seems to be not so much that he is confirmed as a member of the rural society and culture, but that he earns the right to leave again and to stay away for some years at least...

6.4.2. The identification of a structure of articulated modes of production in the Manjaco social formation

It is no longer necessary to argue that labour migration is a particularly effective form in which the articulation between capitalism and noncapitalist modes of production is brought about.²⁶ It is more opportune here (concluding a descriptive argument that started out with a theoretical statement on religion as ideological reproduction and production) to ask ourselves how, precisely, and primarily at which point, do migrants' rituals in Manjaco society today affect the structure of articulation of modes of production – and from there to proceed to an assessment of the limitations of the answers the preceding argument will suggest.

My summary of rural production and economic circulation in modern rural Manjaco society had a purpose beyond ethnographic *couleur locale*: it enables us to distinguish, albeit tentatively, the articulated modes of production that make up this social formation. Obviously the encroaching capitalist mode of production, whose local protagonists are the migrants, does not confront one monolithic non-capitalist Manjaco mode of production, but a complex of articulated structures, in which at least two constituent modes of production are immediately manifest: one more properly 'domestic' mode, revolving on the central exploitation of youth and women by elders; and another one, revolving on the exploitation of producers engaged in a domestic mode of production, by royal courts. The latter type of exploitation, amounting to a tributary mode of production, used to be effected through the appropriation of both land and surplus labour.

Both modes of production have their structures of ideological reproduction peculiar to that mode: ancestral shrines underpinning the elders' authority in the case of the domestic mode; and royal shrines underpinning royal legitimacy and exalted power over the fertility of the land in the case of the tributary mode. But this does not ex-

²⁶ Cf. Amin 1974; Amselle 1976; Gerold-Scheepers & van Binsbergen 1978; van Binsbergen & Meilink 1978b.

haust the complexity of Manjaco religious structures – the cult of the Sacred Grove, the cult of the *benii* shrines, of other lesser deities at the ward level, of the oracular spirits associated with the *pubols*, and finally the cult of Cassara, are not easily fitted into such a suspiciously attractive picture of one-to-one correspondence between production unit and ritual expression.

Underlying these several cult complexes, two major types of idiom can be detected: a ‘land’ idiom and a ‘sky’ idiom. The sky idiom is only represented by the cult of Cassara; its features are the notion of a High God, emphatic moral concern (a preoccupation with sorcery), elaborate colour symbolism, movable shrines, an annual calendar, and association with the village level which – as I have argued – is more a social and political than a productive unit. The land idiom is represented in the other cults mentioned; its features are a pantheon of lesser deities localized in the landscape, virtual absence of moral concerns (deities are allegedly prepared to enter into any sort of contract, harmful or not to humans, with or without connotations of sorcery,²⁷ and when they punish they do not do so for moral indignation but for wounded pride), restricted colour symbolism (the only significant colours are black and white in which divination is encoded; further the greyish red colour of clay pervades everything connected with these cults), immovability, a twenty-years cycle (in the case of the Sacred Grove) or no conspicuous cycle at all (in the case of the other shrine cults), and rather than the specific association with one specific level of sociopolitical organisation, a hierarchical structure encompassing all levels. The latter feature is further brought out by the fact that all rituals at lesser shrines have to be backed up by ritual at the Sacred Grove. Manjacos believe, moreover, that the lesser deities themselves report all rituals directed at them, to the Sacred Grove. The difference between these two idioms is so striking that one might be surprised to find them in one and the same culture. We have here a clear example of two ideological logics that are mutually so irreducible that one would be tempted to connect each with a different logic of production and exploitation within a social formation composed of several articulated modes of production.

It requires no great effort of imagination to identify paddy-rice cultivation as the counterpart, in the sphere of material production, of the ‘land’ idiom. The objection that we have already identified a domestic mode of production underpinned not by the Sacred Grove and lesser deities but by ancestors, is easily resolved when we call to mind the striking distinction, in the regulation of agricultural production, between paddy-rice cultivation (nowadays organised at the ward level), and other forms of agricultural production (organised at the com-

²⁷ On closer analysis, many cases of misfortune involving lesser deities may turn out to have rather more extensive sorcery connotations than would meet the eye at first. In a way, sorcery interpretations would seem to form an embarrassing and hidden secondary layer underlying the participants’ more overt (but still rather secretive) interpretations in terms of ritual neglect. But even so the deities involved are largely considered to be morally indifferent – except the Sacred Grove of Bekasha, near Caiomét (between Caió and Calequise), which punishes sorcerers and whose priest provides a somatic treatment for bone fractures thought to be caused by sorcery.

pound / nuclear-family level). This distinction will appear to be even more relevant once we realise that irrigated rice cultivation (although these days organised at the ward level) requires the concerted efforts of a much larger community even than the ward, not so much for the annual preparation, planting and harvesting at the individual paddy-fields, but particularly for the maintenance of the complex irrigation system. These concerns go far beyond the very small group that is bound by common ancestors, and must ultimately be attended to at even a higher level of social organisation than the village: the initiation level, normally composed of villages whose paddy-fields are located in the same valley or at the same rivulet. There really seems to be a case for the identification, in the Manjaco social formation, of a third mode of production, similar to the properly domestic one based on the exploitation of women and youth by elders, but differentiated from the latter in that the 'classes' involved in the 'rice' mode of production are not primarily defined by kinship and domestic roles as discharged in closely-knit extended families, but by membership of broad age groups with specific tasks in the rice-growing process. The elegance of this argument is further enhanced by the fact that, on the ideological level, the paroxysm of the cult of the Sacred Grove is initiation, which regulates the relationships between age groups.

I do not think that we have to construct, within the local economy, again a fourth mode of production for which the 'sky' idiom of Cassara could then be argued to serve as a structure of ideological reproduction. The Upper Guinea coast has been exposed to intercontinental circulation for many centuries. During the sixteenth century the coastal area was a major source of slaves for the transatlantic trade (*cf.* Rodney 1970; Curtin *et al.* 1978: 231 *f.*). Although much more specific data are needed, I would suggest that the Cassara complex should be taken, not as a reflection of a separate mode of production, but as an ideological expression of the articulation of the local social formation to an encroaching mercantile capitalism.²⁸

Migrants, in this picture, represent the articulation of the emerging social formation with a later development of the capitalist mode of production: industrial capitalism, revolving on the exploitation of labour by capital. Born and bred in the Manjaco villages but selling their labour power at a distant capitalist labour market, they perfectly fit in the picture of peripheral capitalism: their labour is overexploited (Meillassoux 1975), first because its surplus value is appropriated by capital, and secondly because their own domestic community does not enjoy the full interest on the investment it has made in the biological reproduction of these workers since they were conceived and born.

Through autochthonous rituals, these migrant workers are brought to spend a large part of their capitalist wages in their home communities. At first sight, it would look as if thus the overexploitation of their labour is reduced: after all, in

²⁸ For a related argument, *cf.* van der Klei 1984.

this way the domestic community reaps some of the fruits of its investment in these migrants' unproductive years as infants and boys. One could even attempt to estimate the value of pigs and *canna* involved, but unfortunately the migrants' exchange-rate fiddles make this a spurious exercise.

6.5. Conclusion: Migrants' rituals as ideological re-production – and beyond

Such a financial cost / benefit analysis would, however, distract us from the crucial question: what, in the sphere of material production and the attending relations of production, is really being reproduced by the ritual structures in which the migrants are so active?

Part of the *canna* and most of the sacrificial animals' blood runs away in the ground, and the rest of drink and meat is consumed by the elders, – with some limited share for other villagers if the ritual happens to take place not in the Sacred Grove but inside the village. Biological or physiological reproduction of the labour power of the elders and possibly other villagers hardly seems to be the point here – although the nutritional value of meat and *canna* cannot be denied. What these rituals reproduce, to an excessive extent, is a relation of gerontocratic exploitation.²⁹ They make the elders and their prerogatives eminently visible, both in a direct form (elders officiate at the rituals and consume drink and meat), and in a symbolic form (yielding to the demands of deities and ancestors means yielding to powers that closely resemble living elders). Giving in to the demands of deities and ancestors, the migrants in their rituals in fact ideologically reproduce the two local modes of production that, after the dismantling of the tributary mode, are still viable: the 'domestic' mode and the 'rice' mode. Instead of being the local propagators of capitalism in any direct sense, or even becoming the agents of modernisation and liberation, the migrants apparently have no choice but to be the overzealous servants of the ideological structures (including such concepts as deities and ancestors, and such attitudes as fear and insecurity) upon which the ancient modes of production are partly based. It is as if the migrants' relative and temporal immunity from gerontocratic control during their stay at distant places of work, has to be bought by ostentatious symbolic submission to this control during the short time they spend at home.

Peripheral capitalism in itself is not being manifestly reproduced in this context – or it should be that the migrants' potlatch-like (*cf.* Diop 1981) ritual displays of wealth and ritual zeal induces other potential migrants to actually depart for Senegal and France, or induces elders to grant their permission for such departure more readily. This however is again a wrong interpretation. The migrants are not welcomed home as people

²⁹ For theoretical elaboration, and descriptive parallels from Zambia, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1981a, and in press (a).

who have made the grade abroad, but as pitiable patients who come to seek ritual redress, and as negligent observers of ritual obligations who come to make up for their shortcomings. There is no triumph whatsoever in the migrants' excessive ritual action. Moreover, a ritual display of wealth is scarcely necessary: the material display in the form of expensive outlandish clothes, stereos, pictures showing well-dressed people in a well-furnished home abroad, does already enough to create incentives for potential migrants and their elders.

A further look at the *napene's* role in the migrants' ritual activities might suggest that such an interpretation in terms of ideological reproduction of ancient but still vital modes of production might yet have its limitations:

The *napene's* art today is not totally subservient to the upkeep of the ritual structures of the 'land' idiom and the ancestral idiom. In addition to ushering people into chains of ever more expensive rituals directed at the Sacred Grove, the *benii*, the ancestral shrines *etc.*, the diviner-priests try very hard to make the client enter in a specific, expensive relationship with his own oracular spirit, with whom the client usually had no previous relationship or contract. In this way, the oracular spirit becomes not the servant and messenger, but the business rival of the Sacred Grove and the other, lesser spirits. Since the middle of the 20th century CE, diviner priests' fees seem to have increased, their private secular investment of these fees has become common practice, and a number of diviner-priests are alleged to have begun to experiment with lucrative types of somatic treatment for which they do not have the proper traditional training nor the solemn initiation, and which is no longer effectively controlled by the *napenes'* guild. In the hands of the *napene*, Manjaco ritual structures appear to have taken on the characteristics of an exploitative structure *sui generis*. Of course this structure can only thrive at the fringe of the more general religious notions and actions that make up the various cults, but it is no longer wholly dependent upon the latter but has taken on a dynamic of its own. Migrants caught in this structure are not just engaged in the ideological reproduction of ancient modes of production – they are also, in part, directly exploited by (and thus can be said to reproduce) specialists' ritual structures that no longer bear a particularly close relationship with the ideological dimensions of Manjaco modes of production.³⁰

³⁰ While locally the ritual structures of the Manjacos bear close resemblance to those elsewhere on the Upper Guinea coast, *e.g.* among the Felupes, other Diola groups, the Balanta, Braam *etc.*, only the Manjacos seem to incorporate these structures so effectively in the context of migrancy. Apart from the fact that Manjacos are more than the other groups in Guiné Bissau (but not much more than *e.g.* the Diola of Senegal) involved in labour migration, (*cf.* de Jonge *et al.* 1978; van der Klei 1989) I cannot explain this state of affairs; and of course, this explanation is too partial as long as their relatively excessive rate of migration itself is left unexplained. A comparative analysis of migration and ritual on the Upper Guinea coast would be most illuminating in this connexion. It would also help to assess the present-day situation of migrants' rituals among the Manjacos as either transitional and ephemeral (with the *napenes' sui-generis* exploitation as a development that may increasingly dominate the Manjaco ritual scene in future), or rather (as I suspect) as more ancient and permanent. Diop 1981 does give a history of Manjaco migration, showing that it is by no means a phenomenon that started only a few dec-



Fig. 6.3. View of the Umon ward, Calequisse, Guiné Bissau, 1983.

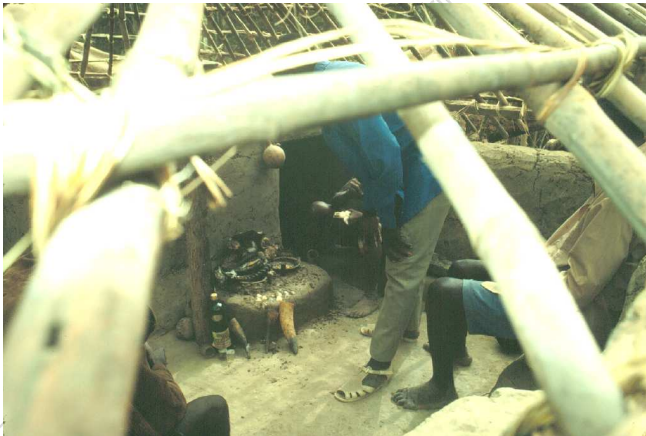


Fig. 6.4. An unfinished oracle hut (*pubol*) is being consecrated by the owner's fellow-priests (*napenes*), Calequisse, Guiné Bissau, 1983.

Finally, in order to do justice to the serious therapeutic concerns of some of the *napenes* with whom my research has brought me into close and prolonged contact, I should like to stress that this 'divinatory racket' variant is not the only possible limitation that the notion of ideological reproduction encounters in

ades ago. The case material I collected also suggests that the migrants' rituals as described here have a considerable history, going back to at least the mid-19th c.CE.

the Manjaco case. As a client, even more than as a researcher, I have seen certain *napenes* creatively manipulate the symbolic and dramaturgical material that is present in the Manjaco religious system today, with such virtuosity and profound human concern that, rather than confirming their clients in some form of exploitation (by elders, *napenes*, distant capitalists, or some articulated combination of them all), they bring about genuine revelation and liberation.³¹ A Marxist approach ultimately supposed to be aimed at the liberation of consciousness, should be prepared to acknowledge such similar potential in other, African, forms of ideological production.

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³¹ Meanwhile it is remarkable that my data do not reveal the slightest trace of prophetism, which elsewhere in Africa is such a significant ideological response to labour migration, and which has been recorded in the nearby Casamance region of Senegal (Girard 1969).

Chapter 7. The land as body

Interpreting ritual among the Manjacos of Guiné Bissau

After my neo-Marxist book on *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981b), the same paradigm informed my field-work on the therapeutic effectiveness of rituals among the Manjacos of northwestern Guiné Bissau. Yet the explanatory value of materialist models more and more turned out to be disappointing, especially from a medical-anthropological and psychiatric perspective. Far from collapsing under the impact of capitalism because of migrant labour to Senegal and France, Manjaco society seemed to have retained an intact symbolic order. Migrants continued to interpret their physical and mental disorders in local terms and to participate in expensive rituals that absorbed their earnings from the distant capitalist sector. Thus they submitted to the gerontocratic order, restoring their roots in a cosmology in which the orificeless Perfect Body ultimately coincides with the ancestral Land itself. Spatio-temporal belonging, filiation, domestic kinship power, and bodily functions thus merge, influencing many aspects of illness behavior and its expression in ritual and everyday life. Neo-Marxism, epistemologically linked to societies under capitalism, scarcely explains this repertoire of symbols, yet helps us to pinpoint its unexpected vitality.

7.1. Introduction

Relations between the symbolic order and the political economy of any social formation are unmistakable and often throw an interesting light upon the specific structure and dynamics of the symbolic order. But the potential of such analysis is soon spent, and after initial illumination it turns out that fundamental research questions remain unanswered (if they do not become obscured and misdirected). The reasons that made some of us adopt a political-economy approach in the first place remain valid (van Binsbergen 1984c). These reasons do not lie primarily in the academic market incentives to theoretical innovation (contrary to Droogers 1985), but in the following considerations which together epitomize the neo-Marxist inspiration.

- (1) Philosophical idealism, which under the impact of Durkheim has dominated social anthropology in general and religious anthropology in particular for almost a century, has been rejected. In addition, claims that cultural and symbolic phenomena have an independent dynamic or are *sui generis* have been repudiated.
- (2) Neo-Marxists attempt to share, albeit vicariously in the form of scholarship, in significant forms of protest and struggle (between classes, ethnic groups, generations, sexes; against state, colonial, and/or racial oppression) in the present or the past by adopting the cause of subordinate groups. Once we have understood that oppression always has roots in the political economy, our good intentions might easily lead us to concentrate entirely on those roots alone, projecting a political economy of exploitation and oppression onto any situation involving any of the social groups listed above and materialistically assuming the primacy of that political economy over whatever symbolic or ideological expressions pertain to that social group. Ultimately the relative powerlessness of our social-scientific academic production in North Atlantic society may contribute greatly to our vicarious desire to liberate distant peoples – if only on paper.
- (3) In the prolonged struggle between cultural imperialism (as propounded by North Atlantic society since the 19th century) and cultural relativism (the main stock-in-trade of classic anthropology), neo-Marxism has proposed new answers. The neo-Marxist position has helped us to understand how the logic of capitalism (mediated through bureaucratic formal organizations) is one of the major structural implications and conditions of cultural imperialism, although we do not yet fully understand the place of anthropological intellectual production in this structure (van Binsbergen 1984c and references cited therein).

More important, the paradigm of the articulation of modes of production – one of the major contributions of neo-Marxism – has allowed us to see a limited number of broad patterns of structural correspondences cutting across the dazzling multiplicity of cultures. Moreover, these patterns have been recognized as anchored in a few basic forms of exploitative relations of production that have repeated themselves in time and space: exploitation of women by men, of youths by elders, of villages by unproductive aristocrats or royal courts, of labour by capital. The assumption that each of these basic forms of exploitative relationship (each of these modes of production) represents a unique logic of its own, expressed in recognizable and repetitive economic, social, political, and ideological forms (however superficially different), enables us to view the manifold contradictions that characterize all social formations (particularly those of the modern world) as the dynamic interplay between modes of production seeking to impose hegemony over other modes in the same social formation.

7.2. Between materialist and idealist anthropology

Our understanding of the capitalist mode of production – its logic of commodification and the contradictions it generates in contact with other modes – has reached considerable maturation (after all, it is the mode of production that has produced, somewhat antithetically, our own discipline and has largely dictated the patterns of our personal lives). The problem is that our appreciation of other modes of production and their logics within the same materialist framework is still very tentative, exploratory, and intuitive. What stores of knowledge anthropology has built up about other modes of production are cast largely in a non-Marxist, idealist idiom. Despite individual attempts,¹ we have not yet set out systematically to recode this knowledge in a neo-Marxist framework. Perhaps we may never succeed in doing so entirely, because of the constraints of our capitalist life world. As a result, classic and neo-Marxist anthropology continue to constitute largely separate realms of meaning and explanation, sometimes at dagger point, often simply incapable of relating to one another and of illuminating one another's analyses. The awareness of a vast, occasionally rich, profound, and beautiful edifice of classic description, analysis, and theory leaves the neo-Marxist anthropologist uneasy about the abstraction, generality, and superficiality of his own tentative approach. Yet one hesitates to trade the bad conscience this generates for the false consciousness an idealist classic approach would constitute.²

The relevance, heuristic potential, and illuminating power of the neo-Marxist position has been demonstrated time and again, particularly with regard to the analysis of the innumerable social situations in the modern Third World that are characterized by peripheral capitalism. In the specific field of medical anthropology, many modern topics bear witness to the relevance of a neo-Marxist perspective: the ubiquitous commodification of health care, along with the commodification of the overall productive and consumptive experience of its Third World users; the increasing dominance of formal bureaucratic organizations in the medical domain, partly through the impact of the colonial and post-colonial state (the logic of which cannot be understood except by reference to capitalism) and partly because bureaucracy is the organizational format in which First World capital is structuring the production and marketing of pharmaceutical and other health commodities; the emergence of the medical domain as a separate identifiable sector in peripheral Third World societies; the effects of these processes on indigenous healers, who exchange time-honored local forms of practice for innovations mimicking the cosmopolitan doctor's office, bedside manner, techniques, remuneration, and professionalization.

¹ *E.g.*, Bare 1977; Houtart & Lemerclinier 1977; Raatgever 1988; van Binsbergen 1981b.

² I have pursued a materialist approach for a number of years (van Binsbergen 1981b; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985a, 1985b). I have repeatedly stressed the need for synthesis of Marxian ideas and the sophisticated insights of mainstream symbolic anthropology (1981b: 68 *f.*; van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985).

Yet this heuristic success of neo-Marxism should scarcely surprise us: of course an approach that started out as an analysis of capitalism in the first place may be expected to be capable of gauging the impact of peripheral capitalism in a selected social domain such as medicine. Our analytical problems, as medical anthropologists seeking to apply a neo-Marxist paradigm, really begin when we turn to historical societies that predated capitalism or to modern societies where, for one reason or another, the inroads of the capitalist mode of production have been slight, ineffective, or blocked. Is a neo-Marxist approach capable of analyzing societies without capitalism? Or is neo-Marxism only an epistemological echo of the capitalist ideological make-up of North Atlantic society, capable only of discerning whatever is fundamentally, ontologically kindred to it? Considering the amazing impenetrability of Manjaco society to capitalist encroachment, the Manjaco health system to be discussed in this article represents a promising test case for these questions.

Neo-Marxist materialism formed the context of my research among the Manjacos in northwestern Guiné Bissau. That country's liberation struggle has had great symbolic and emotional value for radical North Atlantic academics ever since Basil Davidson (1981 / 1969) adopted it; for better or worse, it still stands as a creation of one of Africa's main radical theoreticians, Amílcar Cabral. When the Bissau Ministry of Health needed anthropological information on the psychotherapeutic potential of local, noncosmopolitan healers, the request appealed to me not only because it offered the opportunity for an inside view of and a personal contribution to that country, but also because it would force me to confront my theoretical views with new field-work in which symbolic phenomena and their practical effects on people's lives would be so central that I could not easily take refuge in superficial political-economy generalizations but would have to look for neo-Marxist interpretations as rich and profound as the best classical anthropology.

7.3. The research setting

Research took place in the Manjaco area, where autochthonous cults are still immensely powerful and where world religions (especially Christianity and Islam) have penetrated only superficially. In some respects this was the most intensive and 'direct' field-work of my career. For the first time I worked without an interpreter during most of my research, and I did not have my own household but stayed with a local family, whose head was the senior Land priest. Even with all this rapport, a free flow of information was checked by the extreme secretiveness of the Manjacos. Within the villages and their various constituent wards, I could readily participate in ongoing social processes and in collective ancestral and other rituals at the multitude of local shrines (Fig. 7.1). However, the Sacred Grove just outside the village (center of the Land cult and of adult male ritual and social life in general) remained closed to me. Only sporadically could I accompany individuals when their personal quests for healing

and good fortune led them to *napene* priests, who are officiants of a cultic complex loosely associated with the Land cult. Along with the Land shrines, many *napene*'s oracular shrines (*pubol*) were also found all over the villages. It was mainly as a client or patient myself that I managed to gain frequent access to the rituals of the *pubol* and of the region's most important cult, that of Mama Jombo in Coboiana, at a distance of about 50 km. In doing so, I merely followed in the footsteps of the many Portuguese and Senegalese strangers whom these shrines have accommodated over the years.³

After field-work in Tunisia and both urban and rural Zambia, the Manjaco situation was my first personal experience not only with an African society where the flow of information was so utterly restricted and privacy so highly valued, but also with a viable gerontocracy that had successfully withstood the eroding effects of both capitalism and the modern state. The latter aspect I found difficult to appreciate. In day-to-day interaction it was brought home to me that I (in my mid-30s) did not qualify as an elder (in a society where age and age differences formed a constant obsession for the participants, and even men in their 60s still recognized their junior status *vis-à-vis* the 'real' elders, their seniors). In addition, I was constantly reminded of the fact that as a non-initiate my status was much lower even than that of my local age-mates. But beyond this personal experience (influenced by my own position as a son, father, and senior academician in Dutch society), there was the neo-Marxist paradigm, which had taught me to consider the relation between elders and junior members of society (both women and young men) as essentially exploitative.⁴ Was not such exploitation the pivot on which the 'domestic' mode of production hinged?

Instead of the post-revolutionary society I had been prepared for and with which I might easily have identified – one where young people had come to formulate a new and inspiring social order (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1981b, 1974b) – I found myself in an unexpectedly archaic social order fully dominated by elders. The proceeds of the region's massive and prolonged labour migration to Senegal and France seemed mainly to be controlled and appropriated by elders, not so much in the form of bride wealth or other local capital investments (as is common elsewhere in Africa) but in the form of relatively expensive ritual offerings of rum and animal sacrifices. These were imposed by elder cult leaders, and after the Land had its libatory share, largely consumed by these elders. Contrary to current insights, migrants' participation in the capitalist mode of production did not seem to serve the reproduction of that mode, but that of the local modes of production under gerontocratic control. From this tentative analysis I proceeded to develop my research plan for investigating the therapeutic effectiveness of the various cults in which Manjaco participants, including migrants, were involved.

³ My oral historical data, tying in with the exceptional position of the Coboiana central deity of Mama Jombo as described by Carreira (1961b); also *cf.* Crowley 1990.

⁴ *Cf.* Meillassoux 1975; Rey 1971, 1973, 1979; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985a, 1985b; Gerold-Scheeper & van Binsbergen 1978.

7.4. Manjaco rituals and their effectiveness

One of the striking features of Manjaco rituals (which are invariably prompted by illness) is their lack of dramaturgical and symbolic elaboration.⁵ The rituals have a low degree of formality and no histrionics of tension and relief. They are usually limited to a few minutes of pouring, drinking, sacrificing, praying briefly and incoherently, and more drinking, after which follows a hasty retreat to productive activities in the paddy field or cashew and palm groves. This applies to most ancestral and Land ritual. Only the most important ancestral ritual (the erection of a shrine for a deceased kinsman, a relatively infrequent occurrence for reasons of human demography) may be more elaborate in involving the monotonous drumming of praises on talking drums and a collective meal or drink shared with neighboring wards and villages. Commensality is also an aspect of the occasional rituals staged by priestly and other occupational guilds.

Despite the very considerable amount of alcohol consumed at these rituals, they are invariably very sober, simple, matter-of-fact, and direct. Concern and tension entirely concentrate on the material requirements that must be met even before a ritual can be staged. Celebrants, especially returning migrants, rush up and down the long all-weather road to the market town of Canchungo for ever more rum and animals in order to discharge the constantly increasing ritual obligations imposed by the divining and officiating elders, against whom they have no appeal. They spend a fortune (an estimated 50% to 100% of their accumulated savings from migrant labour), yet do not seem to enjoy the process in the least. Nor do they appear to derive any catharsis from it, at least not such as could be observed in my intensive day-to-day contact with them, using the *lingua franca*. On the contrary, what did come across was their mounting state of stress when confronted with their powerlessness in the face of the officiants' demands, with their own dwindling resources in terms of time or money, and with the fact that the declining post-revolutionary Guiné Bissau economy often makes it impossible to find a taxi or to buy sacrificial items, even if the money is available.

I tended to interpret these rituals as primarily the financial and symbolic submission of women and young men to their elders, both as officiants and as representatives of the supernatural agents venerated in the cults, who were thought of as being just as demanding and forbidding as the elders (after whom they would appear to be shaped; cf. Marx 1941 / 1845, "Thesen über Feuerbach"). How could such submission ever be healthy? I was prepared to accept that when elders were both officiants and clients / sponsors in these rituals, the result might benefit them emotionally and spiritually, reinforcing the gerontocratic dominance they were also enjoying outside the ritual sphere. But I tended to deny all therapeutic effect when women and young men experienced this domination yet again in a cultic setting, at the hands of elders who already

⁵ Carreira (1947a, 1947b, 1961b) has also described Manjaco ritual. De Jong's (1987) general discussion of Guiné Bissau's religious and medical concepts (under the embarrassingly hegemonic title *A descent into African psychiatry*; also cf. de Jong & Buijtenhuijs 1979) is partly derived from Manjaco culture, which he and I studied jointly (1981-1983), although most of his specific descriptions deal with other parts of Guiné Bissau.

dominated their non-ritual life. The cost of ritual participation, and the clients' lack of enthusiasm in the religious sense of that word (*i.e.*, divine rapture), all seemed to corroborate such a conclusion.

I was, however, prepared to make an exception for the *napene* cultic complex. Clearly it was loosely associated with the Land cult, even though no ritual could take place at the *pubol* that was not immediately complemented by a similar offering at the Sacred Grove. The *pubol*, thick-walled, dark, secluded, equipped with libation basins and crammed with paraphernalia (shells, horns, animal skulls), was of a very different construction from the Land shrines outside and inside the Sacred Grove, which were miniature thatched huts without walls or other specific features or paraphernalia. The *pubol* officiants were specialist ritual entrepreneurs who had no *ex officio* status either in their wards of residence or in the Land cult. From my frequent own experience as a client of *pubol* rituals of divination and healing, I can attest that, even across cultural and linguistic boundaries, these were intimate, full of subtle dramaturgical and symbolic effects, and unmistakably cathartic.

Obviously, however, neither a field-worker's esthetic appreciation, nor his projection of personal or theoretical views as to what constitutes a pleasant sort of society, nor even his personal existential experiences with divination and healing, provide sufficient clues to approach that crucial but ill-studied aspect of African religion, *therapeutic effectiveness*. What is needed is an assessment of occurrences of physical and spiritual disorder in an attempt to trace the structural conditions under which people had fallen ill, the various local and cosmopolitan therapies they had pursued, and the outcome of these efforts in the short and long term. To achieve these goals, I studied symbolism and practices concerning the body, illness, and healing, mainly through general observation and participation, in my host family, in the village, and at the local dispensary of cosmopolitan medicine. My psychiatric colleague in this project enabled us to conduct in-depth, diagnostic interviews and observations as well.

Not surprisingly, in the West African context the Western distinction between somatic and psychic disorder was found to have no local equivalent. Instead, all forms of discomfort and misfortune were interpreted (at least on one level of discourse) as affliction by supernatural agents. Every person afflicted was supposed to have ritual obligations toward such agents, who might be deceased kinsmen, minor land spirits, the Land itself, or the *pubol* healing spirits. Some ancestral obligations were inherited by birth, while others stemmed from any number of contracts that the patient himself or a kinsman acting on his behalf had once entered into with those agents. Humans would always be behind in fulfilling their part of the bargain (*i.e.*, paying for and staging expensive sacrifices), and illness was a sign that the agent was becoming impatient. This etiological system was applied to virtually all serious complaints, usually in peaceful coexistence with cosmopolitan medicine as administered at home, at the migrants' distant places of work, at the rural clinic in Calequise, and in the regional and national centers of Canchungo and Bissau.

This nonspecific etiology could initially be studied using whatever complaint my main informants happened to experience. However, since the project's emphasis was on therapeutic effectiveness in cases of mental disorder only, I collected and analyzed, together with a Western-trained psychiatrist with several years of clinical experience in Guiné Bissau, those cases we could find of what, by any cosmopolitan or transcultural-psychiatric standards, would have to be considered grave mental disorder. In a population of just under 100,000 Manjacos, severe mental cases turned out to be rather rare. Some of our best-studied ones are listed in Table 7.1.

Far from corroborating my initial hypotheses about the onerousness and stressfulness of local rituals, this material suggests that modern Manjaco society, however much it may be considered a backward labour reserve in the capitalist world system, *is characterized by a remarkably wholesome balance between its internal symbolic and authority structure and its relations with the outside world.* Combining migrancy with very strong and persisting ritual ties with home appears to prevent, rather than generate, insanity. Incipient mental problems appear to be redressed and corrected at an early stage, invariably by invoking a combination of local rituals that always includes the cult of the Land. The data strongly suggest the therapeutic effectiveness of this ritual complex. Severe mental distress seems to occur or at least to persist primarily in cases in which the patient is fundamentally incapable of communicating effectively with the cult of the Land as mediated by the elders.

I would submit that here we have uncovered the mainstay of Manjaco medical culture. Blockage that appears to lead to persisting mental distress always involves factors external to Manjaco society, and in most cases appears to consist in the disruption of the balance between symbolic rootedness in Manjaco society and economic participation in the outside world. Typically this participation in cases of therapeutic failure involves prolonged employment in bureaucratic formal organizations, often in distant urban areas under a capitalist mode of production (*cf.* Collobomb & Diop 1969; Diarra 1966). Manjacos fall mentally ill if the outside society takes excessive control at the expense of ties with home, with Manjaco culture, and with the central symbolic role of the elders.

The following example appears to bring out the essence of the therapeutic role of elders in Manjaco society.

In her mother's compound Ndisia,⁶ a young woman of the Ucacenem ward, awaited her migrant husband's annual return from Senegal. Alarmed by a series of earlier sudden infant deaths in the family, she panicked at the first signs of fever and apathy in her two-year-old son Antonio, whom she was still breastfeeding. Without delay she reached for the most powerful healing strategy that Manjaco culture provides: she took Antonio to the house of the village's most senior Land priest, Fernando, to whom her family was not related and whose ward (called Brissor) was in a different ward of the

⁶ All proper names are pseudonyms.

village. Ndisia was given a room in the priest's men's house⁷ and stayed for over a week, until her son showed definite signs of improvement. The old man did not have to treat the child explicitly: his personal, invisible emanations as an elder were considered to be eminently effective. Through this action, Antonio also gained lifelong honorary membership in the elder's ward, which even involved rights of libation in the ward's ancestral shrines (which are generally guarded assiduously, and often disputed). Such 'therapeutic adoption,' which does not affect the patient's rights in his own ward of origin, is the only way in which libation rights can pass on to non-kin. In the neighboring Vilela ward two young adult women had once gained similar rights under similar circumstances, and they regularly shared in the collective rituals of the Brissor ward.

	Patients				
	Fernando	Carlos	Arguetta	Bajudessa	Politia
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
Born	1918	1953	1942	1957	1967
Complaint began	1983	1972	1980	1982	1981
Residence	is family head	with F	with MZS	with paternal kin	with F
Complaint (provisional)	psychotic	chronic schizophrania	hysteria	extreme apathy	psychotic
Anamnesis	<i>ex-napene</i> , junior partner took over practice; now involved in modern Basic Medical Care project	wartime separation from M; extreme mobility, aspirations imposed by F; rejected by colonial patron when schooling in capital; still sexually assaults FW	when a child, placed by F in household of M's ideal marriage partner; forced by F to marry non-Manjaco in distant region of Guiné Bissau; H and D died subsequently	improper marriage; accompanied migrant H to France; H long imprisoned there on criminal charges; H failed to live up to kinship obligations <i>vis-à-vis</i> both eonsang, and affinal kin at home	F traditional 'king' demoted in Independence struggle; extreme status loss in family of orientation; patient could not stand humiliation by schoolmates
Cultic treatment?	+	+	+	+	+
Cosmopolitan psychiatric treatment ?	+	+	+	+	+

The Fernando in col. 2 is not the same as mentioned on p. 280.

Table 7.1. Some severe mental cases among modern Manjacos.

Part of the underlying model is not difficult to reconstruct: illness is seen as uprootedness, as a disrupted relationship between the person and the Land, and when the social and genealogical aspects of this condition are redressed through active re-affiliation, the link with the Land is restored and improved. The Land's life-giving force, as mediated by the elder, once more flows freely to the patient.

All this does not sound particularly original. If the Manjaco socio-ritual system had been consciously engineered by an anthropologist familiar with the classic

⁷ Visiting daughters of the house are also put up here (and not at the women's house), when the occasion arises.

work of Fortes (1969a / 1945, 1969b / 1949), one would hardly have noticed the difference. The most idealist, culture-centered symbolic analysis might have arrived at the same sort of conclusion in terms of a wholesome communion with the essence of a culture. Personally, I would have distrusted it for that very reason, had not my detour along a materialist approach given me plenty of opportunity to arrive at a less mainstream and more materialist interpretation.

7.5. The Land as body

7.5.1. *The existential economy of gerontocratic control*

Trading a materialist interpretation for a more symbolic one does not reveal to us the underlying mechanism that may be said to govern the link between the individual, on the one hand, and the socio-ritual structure on the other. The next question to be asked, therefore, is what, in the symbolic and/or material structure of Manjaco society, allows rituals controlled by senior men to have such a strong impact on both mind and body? I believe that the answer can be given, and that it lies not in the sort of material structures that a political-economy approach would reveal, but in the amazingly consistent Manjaco system of symbolism of the body. This system posits a parallelism reminiscent of various idealist philosophical systems in the European tradition (Plotinus, Leibniz), in which the body is conceived as the world in microcosm or, in the Manjaco case, the Land in microcosm.

When I tried to formulate Manjaco notions of bodily and sensory functioning and experience in health and disease, I was at first struck by an extreme rigidity and reticence, which reminded me much more of peasant culture in North Africa and civil society in Europe than of any sub-Saharan African traits that I expected on the basis of personal field-work in Zambia, other ethnographic studies, or current North Atlantic and *négritude* stereotypes of 'the' exuberant, utterly corporeal, rhythmic, and sensuous 'African.' Among Manjacos, it was as if everything that could be socially and physiologically functional and stimulating about the human body had become very highly restricted. With the exception of children (up to non-initiated young adults), Manjaco villagers would hardly touch each other and (despite the utterly non-secluded nature of local toilet places) would perform their digestive and sexual bodily functions in the greatest secrecy, so that not even the merest suggestion of these needs or drives would enter into public life and conversation. With averted gaze people would engage in a series of monologues rather than in dialogues; this would be true particularly of the interactions between members of different generations, but even age-mates would tend to fall into this pattern. The meagerly developed cuisine was meant to fill the stomach but hardly to cultivate (by means of food exchanges, festivals, or commensality) social relations beyond the extended family. The local music's simple, monotonous structure was wholly subservient to the abstract requirements of the talking drums. Representational arts ap-

peared to be absent, except the stylized cylindrical wooden sculptures that, as images of the deceased, featured in ancestral shrines (with sporadic, more grandiose, colourful variants for royal ancestors). The most beautiful items their culture produced – band-woven cloths of intricate, abstract, multicolored designs – were not meant to be worn and seen, but to be hoarded in chests until the owner, at his or her dying day, would be sown into them and thus committed to the grave. That is, they were displayed only for a few minutes at the time that marks the culmination of a human being's life, the time of his or her most intimate and consummative communion with the Land – burial.

While these few and disconnected impressions may suffice to indicate the general atmosphere of everyday life, in illness behavior a similar pattern seemed to be at work. Illness had to be denied, dissimulated, or repressed, both by the patient and by his or her social circle. Patients could claim no dispensation from daily chores around the house nor from the immensely heavy productive activities in the paddy fields. The sickbed was always a burden and never a relief. As a result, people were inclined to give in to their 'weaknesses' only occasionally, with very little social recognition in the way of nursing, special privileges, and so on, and then only for an amazingly short time. Publicly acknowledged illness was a state measured in hours rather than weeks or months!

In a society so prone to migrancy directed at capitalist places of work, a materialist anthropologist would be tempted to explore the extent to which this rather unexpected pattern might be attributed partly to the internalization of the ideology of capitalism. Had not, in the North Atlantic region, extreme commoditification and exploitative labour conditions under intensive capitalism produced somewhat similar notions of the human body and its 'uses' in the official codes of formal bureaucratic organizations, in employers' dreams, and in the health standards applied by their companies' doctors?

Further research and reflection, however, convinced me that such an interpretation is spurious. Manjaco bodily symbolism is not in any sense a product of capitalist encroachment, but, on the contrary, is another manifestation of an all-pervasive, integrated cosmological system that protects its bearers from the alienation inherent in the peripheral capitalist experience.

To project current (*i.e.* pre-1985, before the digital and Internet revolution!), enlightened notions of North Atlantic culture would at first make the human body of Manjaco culture appear extremely constrained, denied, and repressed. But when we go through the psychiatric case material, we find very few indications of such repression in the mental symptoms of patients. Instead, the fundamental underlying notion seems to be that of the Perfect Body, which is whole and fertile, closed unto itself to such an extent that it no longer has orifices which necessitate the passing of external substances from outside to inside and *vice versa*, and by virtue of this perfection, places itself outside the chain of human and social exchange, dependence, and manipulation, and at the apex of filiation. Mental distress means separation from the Perfect Body; mental health means emulating that Perfect Body and anxiously but wholeheartedly concealing the extent to which one's own physical body reflects that ideal only imperfectly.

Among the living, the male elder comes closest to this ideal. Although he may not be beyond the consumption of food and drink, his eating and drinking are largely confined to the inner recesses of the house and the Sacred Grove, shielded from the common gaze. His bodily needs are thus denied, and he cannot allow himself to be ill. If still involved in chains of social and bodily exchange, it is others who need to receive from him (rice, cattle, sperm, healing, *etc.*), and never the other way around. His being is whole and closed, closed also from the stream of information and gossip; Manjaco secretiveness perfectly fits this model. His body is almost exalted above its human limitations, and so long as no publicly witnessed passage across orifices occurs, he can be allowed to be fully displayed in a mere loin cloth.

Young men, women, and children are way beneath this ideal and therefore may indulge, in varying degrees, in all the imperfections of the human and social condition: they may devour, defecate, fornicate, be nude, receive, beg, steal, adorn themselves, disclose secrets, and so on.

One step above the elder is the ancestor, so close to the Ideal Body that he or she may be represented in the ancestral shrine by a mere short, featureless stick protruding from the ground. Although locally recognized as an anthropomorphic image, not even facial openings are cut, and only a slight suggestion is given of a neck or a reclining shoulderline. Even more so than an elder, the ancestor is outside the chain of exchange, can no longer ask, and need not ask, since his living descendants are supposed to do everything they can to anticipate his desires and fulfill their obligations (hence their embarrassment and shame when illness publicly reveals that they have failed to do so).

The Ultimate Body that incarnates this system of symbolism and carries it to its final consequence is Land itself. As the universal source of life, in the material sense of rice and palm wine, it may give,⁸ but it cannot be allowed to receive. Humans may try to impose upon Land with their gifts (when pouring alcoholic drinks and animal blood) and with their dead bodies (which are buried in the Land), but Land has no orifices through which to receive. Its shrines are inconspicuous, without elaboration. They may be marked by a shrub or a piece of tree trunk but are often just a totally unmarked spot. They particularly lack formal libation basins, the equivalents of bodily orifices. Moreover, graves can only be dug by senior Land priests, who force ordinary mourners to look chastely away when the body (already rendered orificeless in its thick, mummy-shaped layer of funerary blankets) is lowered into the ground and who attempt to conceal the exact location of a grave through digging secret underground extensions.

To an amazing extent and degree of detail, both the ritual and the medical system of the Manjacos can be subsumed under the formula of the orificeless Perfect Body. Without exaggeration, the human body can be said to be the

⁸ The Land gives (yields produce) not through orifices in highly localized spots but over extensive land areas.

dominant symbol in Manjaco culture, and it has been applied and transformed in such a consistent way as to surpass and surmount everything corporeal. Of course the relationships involved are not always those of direct transposition. For instance, in many aspects of Manjaco symbolism the topological inverse of the human bodily shape (a hollow conical or cylindrical space) is encountered, and modern glass bottles, which happen to fit this description rather well, are among the most conspicuous material items in Manjaco ritual and everyday life, dominating conversations and actions to an incredible extent.

Confronted with such continuity between mind and body, macrocosm and microcosm, one can only guess at the psychosomatic implications of a cosmology that presents the human body, with its constant flow in and out of corporeal and social matter, as the imperfect incarnation of the perfectly closed, life-giving Land, the principal deity of the society. One suspects possibilities of symbolic and corporeal transfer and transposition in which symptom and economic action, exchange and well-being merge to an extent that may well be deemed capable of eluding anything but the most brutal confrontation with the logic of capitalism. Whether this symbolic system in itself has been a principal factor in keeping capitalism out, or whether the overall nature of the political economy of this part of the African Atlantic coast has merely facilitated the emergence and persistence of this symbolic system, remain questions for further research; but see the Postscript 2016, below

7.5.2. Back to political economy

The *pubols* of the *napenes* and their rituals occupy a curious position in this structure by combining elements of the overall idiom with their opposites (e.g., elaborate womb-like shrines and conspicuous libation basins, which tend to occur in pairs and particularly suggest a topological inversion of human breasts). Here, the supernatural (which, in its material manifestation, as *Land*, is so unapproachable, forbidding, and masculine in other aspects of this cosmology) suddenly appears as approachable, bodily, and maternal. And it is here, in divination and ritual, that mortals can attempt to have direct communion with the Land (through the sacrificial dregs – the decayed and smelly remains of many earlier offerings of blood, palm wine, and rum from the shrine’s altar and libation basins – that the priest, with bare hands, smears directly onto the client’s naked body). In participating in this ritual, the client seeks to manipulate and set limits to its formidable powers – a poor man’s version of the exalted ideals of the dominant Land cult. As a distorting mirror of this cult’s aspirations and negations, this aspect of Manjaco ritual can and does lend itself to ritual entrepreneurship and innovation. Here clients’ expenses are at a level comparable to that of the ancestral and Land cult, but they are seen as payment and, in addition to prestations in kind, involve considerable amounts of money. The etiological repertoire of the *pubol* attendants is no longer non-specific and general, but identifies particular complaints and their proper remedies. The relation between healer and patient is no longer cast in the idiom of belonging to and venerating the same local Land (although the Land cult does claim its

share from every transaction going on in the *pubols*), but rather in the idiom of contract. In other words, at the oracular shrines we encounter a type of transformation of the dominant Manjaco symbolic idiom that is not only feminine, routinized, and eroded, but that also begins to develop the well-known traits of commoditification and constitutes the locus of capitalist encroachment in this otherwise impenetrable socio-ritual system.

Little wonder, perhaps, that this is the aspect of the Manjaco ritual scene that accommodated me more than any other, to which I could relate most, and that even appeared to offer partial but usable answers to my own existential needs.

Here we are operating at the very periphery of the Manjaco socio-ritual and medical system. Reference to capitalism does not begin to explain the patterns of symbolism, continuing gerontocracy, migrant participation, and therapeutic effectiveness that constitute the core of Manjaco society. Yet why should a Marxist-inspired approach to religion confine itself to the capitalist mode of production? A closer look at the noncapitalist relations of production on which Manjaco village society continues to depend may suggest alternative ways to break away from the religious anthropologist's fixation on cosmology and ideology and lay bare the patterns of economic action and exploitation that are really at work. Are not the youth, through their expensive ritual participation, investing in the sort of ideological capital that one day, when they have become elders themselves, they may claim as their own? Are not the elders transmuted capitalist capital into Manjaco capital, laundering proceeds from labour migration that otherwise would remain utterly devoid of meaning and value, even for the young migrants themselves? Rather than conceiving of the body as Land, could we not try to reverse the equation and spell out what it means – both symbolically and economically – when the human body, locus of productive force *par excellence*, is symbolically externalized, slighted, and denied?

When a noncapitalist society scarcely seems to yield to capitalist encroachment, it is tempting to resort to a neoclassic, idealist interpretation, thus reconstructing and making explicit what is implied in the local ideology. In the long run, however, it would be more rewarding to seek and formulate a specific political economy that is cut to the measure of that society. It is in this vein Peter Worsley (1956) materialistically reinterpreted Tallensi society as analyzed by Fortes (1953, 1969a / 1945, 1969b / 1949).

7.6. Postscript 2016

At the time of my Manjaco field-work, I still subscribed to the popular Africanist rule of thumb which stipulates that we should *explain things African by exclusive reference to Africa*. Much later I have criticised this central ideological stance of modern Africanists, e.g. van Binsbergen 2012e. As the more recent chapters in this book demonstrate, I have continued to reject the common Africanists' view. But even in the 1980s I was intrigued by local suggestions of

distant connections, such as the numerous references to maritime navigation in the forest (in what looked like forest shrines) near the Atlantic coast; the rumours of shipwrecked strangers having had a long-standing impact on local culture and society; strange coincidences (e.g. the Sacred Forest or Grove, in Dutch, Spanish / Portuguese), *Bos / Bosque*, 'forest', is called *Mbos* in the Manjaco language); the apparent parallels between Manjaco irrigated rice cultivation and that of East and South East Asia; and the apparant similarity between *pekiin* as the Manjaco term for the main unit of local social organisation, and Chinese 方 *fang*, 'square, a regular thing, pattern; side; quarter, place, region, direction; just, just then, then, just now, now'; *Karlgren code: 0740 a-f*.

Chinese 方 *fang* is a very interesting word, whose long-range etymology links it with half the world but in such a way that if Manjaco *pekiin* may have any connection at all with Chinese *fang*, it can only be via Chinese directly, and not via some higher-order etymological substrate such as Sinotibetan, Eurasiatic (a different macrophylum from Sinocaucasian > Sinotibetan) or (even in the context of possible Sunda connections) Austric:

<p>< Proto-Sinotibetan: *pǎŋ < Proto-Sino-Caucasian : *pǝn(x)ǰ_ō / *pǝnǰō (~ -xǰ-) 'back, side' cf. Proto-Eurasiatic : *pVŋV, 'shoulder, shoulder-blade' cf. Proto-Austric: Proto-Austroasiatic (NMK) *poŋ 'buttocks'; ? Proto-Austronesian *sabaŋ 'shore' < Borean (approx.) : PVNV 'back, side'</p>
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Table 7.2. Long-range linguistic connections of Chinese 方 *fang*.

I could not approach any of these topics directly in interviews, because of Manjaco society's tendency to extreme secrecy, which for instance made even the collection of demographic basic data an accomplished exercise in diplomacy; cf. the Manjacos' related tendency to forever withdraw from circulation the only items of artistry, beauty and wealth to be locally produced (funerary blankets).

Even given the accumulated evidence (some of which is presented in the present book) for transcontinental connections on the African Atlantic coast, I am prepared to consider most of the above transcontinental suggestions, in the Manjaco case, as red herrings. Despite the superficial correspondences between West African and East Asian irrigated rice cultivation, modern research scarcely entertains the idea of the former (utilising a different species of *Oryza*) being a borrowing from the latter in recent centuries; instead (apart from the possibility of Mediterranean or Sunda origins of West African rice) there is a considerable consensus in the literature (cf. Dresch 1949; Mohr 1969; Linares 1981; Second 1982; Khush 1997; Anonymous, 'History of rice...'; Carr 2016) of rice having been around in West Africa for at least 3 ka and being based on the domestication of a local wild plant – which however (especially in the light of the potentially distortive 'Africa for the Africans' doctrine among Africanists,

van Binsbergen 2012e) far from rules out a possible 'Sunda' / Chinese connection going back 3 ka and tying in with several other protohistoric traces of Chinese presence in Africa which have come into view in the course of the present book, especially ch. 10, below (also see *General Index*): bananas (originating in New Guinea, and only transmissible as carefully tended shoots, not as robust seed), cloves in an Anatolian Late Bronze-Age site, the xylophone (generally relegated to Indonesia – Jones 1964 – yet the oldest attestation is in a Bronze-Age Chinese grave – Blench 2014; Anonymous, 'xylophone'), human consumption of dogs in South Central Africa, apparently Chinese-type ornamental swords / halberds in West Africa, etc. In this light it is certainly remarkable that one cultural context in which the elderly male body is ideally without orifices so that ideally no exchange takes place between the body and the outside world, is that of Taoism, whose earliest roots have a similar age. The ideal Taoist sexuality (van Gulik 1961) is that in which the senior male at all costs avoids ejaculation, because the latter would merely dramatically diminish the male (陽 *yang*, 'bright') forces in his body, and threaten the much-desired longevity. However, the elder who cannot receive but only give is more particularly a theme in South Asia (Brahman food practices), with echoes in S.C. Africa (van Binsbergen, in press (a)).

On the African Atlantic coastal region, this case (if it is a case) of suggested Chinese influence is not without parallels: my 2015 field-work on the Bamileke Plateau of Cameroon drew my attention to the fact that some of the central cosmological concepts of the Bamileke people are indistinguishable from classic Chinese ones (van Binsbergen, in press (b)).

Theoretically, it is thinkable that these parallels, *if at all more than mere figments of the imagination*, go back to Eurasian communalities from West or Central Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic – which is also how I would tend to explain in the first place the uncanny parallels between Native North American, and South Central Africa, divination, gaming, female puberty rites, etc. (van Binsbergen 2012d). However, rather than opting for such a very long-range connection over land, I would on second thoughts also suggest a maritime connection during the last two or three millennia, utilising the transcontinental maritime network which then consolidated itself (*cf.* chapter 10 of the present book, Fig. 10.16).

Yet, as we have seen in chapter 6, there is also an interesting possible overland link, one that connects the West African Manjaco *Napene* diviner / healer, with the Southern African Tswana *Nape* god of divination (Brown 1926), and the Ancient Mesopotamian / Semitic *Nabu* as god of divination and as designation for 'prophet, one speaking on behalf of God' (also Arabic: *nab-*). Considering the rich, almost Ancient Mediterranean pantheon which Brown sketches for the Tswana, I am inclined to take the Tswana / Mesopotamian link somewhat seriously. Divination bowls among the neighbouring Venda are another case in point. That link in itself would not directly have included the West African Atlantic coast, nor does it have to, because the work of Dierk Lange (2004a, 2004b, 2011) has sufficiently demonstrated Mesopotamian / Israelite inroads into West African historical times – supported by extensive comparative work of the Egyptologist Wainwright (1949, 1951), and taking us to solid empirical ground far beyond the highly ideological, and poorly documented suggestions of similar connections, from Diop (1955, 1959, 1974, 1991) and Temple (1976).

Is post-Neolithic Pelasgian transmission at work here? To answer that question we need a digression explaining that term. Elsewhere⁹ I have developed the Pelasgian Hypothesis, according to which a complex package of cultural items (provisionally, and somewhat confusingly, named ‘Pelasgian’, and comprising more than 80 different traits) arose in West Central Asia in the Neolithic, in the process of its subsequent transformation (yielding ‘Secondary Pelasgian’) also spread to the Mediterranean, finally to be transmitted by the end of the Bronze Age in all four directions, largely as a result of greatly increased technologies of communication – foremost the spoked-wheel chariot (invented in Kazakhstan c. 2,000 BCE). Such spread has the form of a cross and I will refer to it by the term ‘cross-model’:

- (a) across the Eurasian Steppe belt all the way to the Pacific, South and South East Asia, and ultimately even Oceania;
- (b) to sub-Saharan Africa;
- (c) to Northern Europe;
- (d) to Western and Southern Europe) towards the end of the Bronze Age, largely as a result of greatly increased technologies of communication – foremost the spoked-wheel chariot (invented in Kazakhstan c. 2,000 BCE).

This pattern can be perceived from such tell-tale ‘index fossils’ (van Binsbergen 2010b) as *e.g.* the transcontinental distribution of the spiked wheel trap, and of the mytheme of the unilateral mythical character (Luwe). But the distribution of many other traits may be interpreted in the same light, *e.g.* when the wagtail appears in cosmogonic situations both in Japan and in South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2010a).

As a less comprehensive alternative to the Pelasgian Hypothesis, do we have in the Nabu / *napene* complex a manifestation of what Frobenius (1931) considered the *South-Erythraean Complex* (with *e.g.* divine and martyred kingship, metallurgy, female puberty rites), linking Ancient Mesopotamia via the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean with Zimbabwe and the rest of South Central and Southern Africa in general? I propose we resign ourselves staring down these unexpected vistas without pretending that as yet we have data and theory enough for proper explanation of these suggestions at transcontinental continuity.

One final suggestion however for further research: towards the end of chapter 6, above, I identified, among the Manjacos, a ‘land’ idiom and a ‘sky’ idiom, and expressed puzzlement that the two should be found within one society. Rather than attempting a systematic timeless interpretation in terms of the articulation of modes of production (in general an excellent, productive tool for the analysis of fundamental heterogeneity inside a culture), could it be that this cosmological heterogeneity has historical roots – the land / rice complex re-

⁹ van Binsbergen 2010d, in press (d); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011,

flecting East Asian influence of c. 3 ka BP, whereas the sky complex would be in continuity with West Africa, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and West Asia?

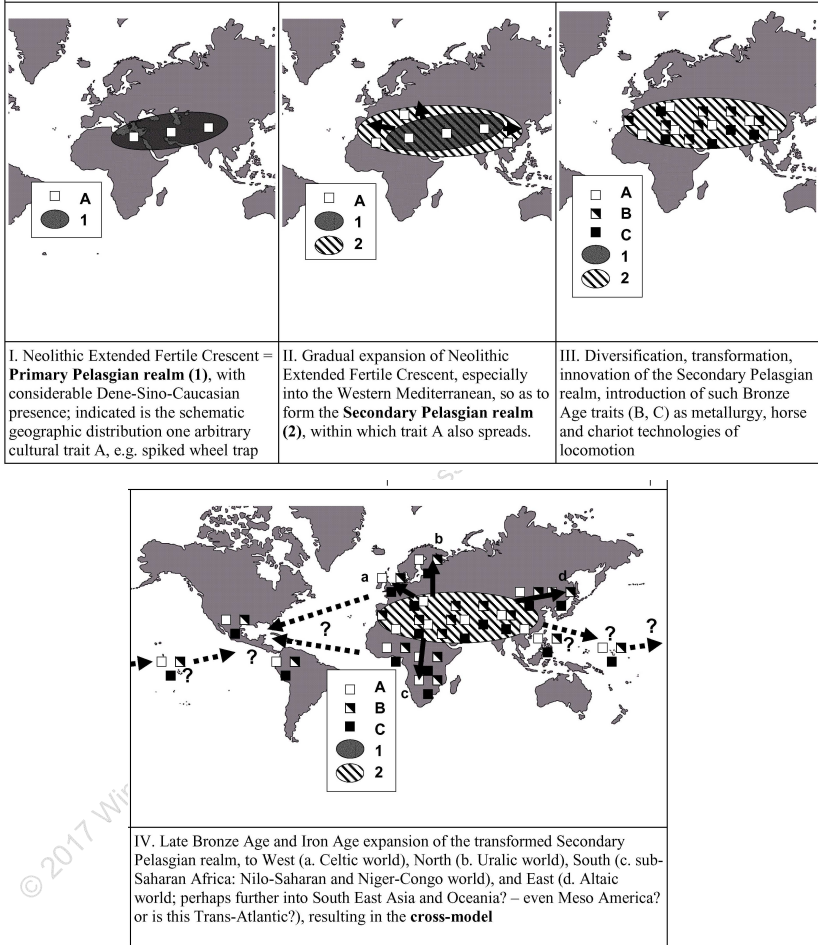


Fig. 7.1. Diagrammatic representation of the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis.