



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **The Dutch and the Portuguese in West Africa : empire building and Atlantic system (1580-1674)**

Ribeiro da Silva, F.I.

### **Citation**

Ribeiro da Silva, F. I. (2009, June 24). *The Dutch and the Portuguese in West Africa : empire building and Atlantic system (1580-1674)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13867>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13867>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## CHAPTER THREE: LOCAL SOCIETIES

Both the Dutch and the Portuguese societies in West Africa were divided into three ethnic groups: Europeans, Africans and people of mixed-descent. However, the composition of these groups and the role they played socially and economically differed.

At the head of these societies were the Europeans, to be more precise the military, administrative and commercial staff. In the Dutch case, the staff of the Company were the only representatives of the Republic's political and diplomatic interests and the Company's commercial and military policies. The officials of the Portuguese Crown, for their part, were mainly instruments of the royal decisions for the West Africans settlements and often failed in their missions, due to great opposition by the local elites. They therefore played a minor role in the development of the settlements.

In the Portuguese West African societies, the colonists of European and mixed-descent, organized in local elites, played a key role in the development of the local economies. These elites sponsored intensive agricultural production for the export and local consumption markets, enabled the coastal commercial circuits linking the Archipelagoes with the African coasts and participated partially in the trading routes connecting the islands with other Atlantic areas, namely Europe and the Americas. In addition, the high number of mixed-descent members in the local elites helped the Portuguese economic interests by penetrating the interior and having access to the supplying areas for African products, especially in the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola. The formation of these local elites, partly of mixed-descent, also helped to cement the connections between these middlemen and the local African communities.

However, the formation of local elites generated social and economic unrest. On one hand, the economic interests of the local elites differed from the policies of the Portuguese Crown. This situation generated conflicts between the royal officers and the members of these groups. The clashes were often disruptive for trade. On the other hand, the local elites harboured inner conflicts between the various powerful families regarding their struggle for political influence, economic power and social prestige. During these quarrels, the rivals

made use of their personal armies of slaves and clients to impose their will upon their enemies within the elite group.

In both the Dutch and the Portuguese cases, the inter-marriages between the Europeans and the Africans created a third social group. In Dutch contexts, Eurafricans only started to be hired as Company employees in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did they become important brokers with the African hinterland. In the Portuguese settlements, Eurafricans played a key role as a labour force. Mixed-descent people served in the army and the navy on a local level, as well as in posts on the royal, municipal and ecclesiastic administration. Eurafricans were also essential for the development of the coastal and land trade. Therefore, they became especially important for the success of the Portuguese intra- and inter-continental trade. In the Dutch case, the success of the trading activities of the WIC and the Company employees was highly dependent on the Africans, especially the free Africans, who worked for the Company as middlemen, transporters and sailors. The Eurafricans only became an influential group during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Free Africans living in the surroundings of the Dutch and the Portuguese settlements became integrated into these colonial societies, since they were used as auxiliary troops and hired as middlemen in the land trade connecting the coast and the hinterland markets.

In both the Dutch and the Portuguese African societies, slaves were at the bottom of the social ladder and they were mainly a social group in transit between the African hinterland and the consumption markets of the Americas and Europe. However, a considerable number of slaves were to be found in the posts and settlements. Their number was proportionally higher in the Portuguese settlements because of the type of activities they performed. In the Dutch case, slaves played a minor role, since their importance for the Company's economic activities on the Gold Coast were limited. The slaves were used mainly as domestic slaves, and unskilled workers. In the Portuguese settlements, slaves and manumitted slaves were used in agriculture and as soldiers in the landlords' 'personal armies' and the local militias.

In Chapter 3 we will examine these three main social and ethnic groups present in the Dutch and Portuguese societies in West Africa in comparative perspective and will debate the role played by each social group in the economic growth of the posts and settlements and in the building of the Dutch and the Portuguese Atlantic Empires.

## 1. Europeans

At the head of the Dutch and the Portuguese colonial societies in the West Africa were the Europeans, namely the civilian and military personnel employed by the 'Dutch' commercial companies, the WIC, the Portuguese Crown and the Portuguese private traders, as well as the colonists.

Between 1612 and 1623, the 'Dutch' only had a single military base in West Africa: Fort Nassau. Following the military organization of the garrison, a small 'micro-society' developed in this settlement. At the head of this 'micro-society' was a general, and under his command were the military, medical and religious staff. The commercial agents of the 'Dutch' private companies, as well as the skippers and sailors of the merchant vessels doing business in West Africa visited the fort and to a certain extent were part of its social structure, though only on a temporary basis.<sup>1</sup>

After the establishment of the WIC in 1621-1624, the social structure of Fort Nassau underwent some changes.<sup>2</sup> The military ranking remained the basis of the social structure. At the head of the fort's administration was the director, or director-general, and the majority of the inhabitants of the fort were soldiers and sailors. However, due to the commercial purposes of the Company, commercial agents became a permanent group at Fort Nassau. They organized and controlled the trade and headed an administrative staff of book-keepers, clerks and accountants. In addition, to keep the fort and the fleet in good repair, there was a wide range of artisans who were also part of the social structure of the fort.

We may argue that within the social structure of the Dutch forts there were only social groups that were part of the organisation of the Company. These groups were organized according to a military hierarchy followed by the WIC employees. The Company staff were the main people responsible for business matters and the military defence. The

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Samuel Brun's voyages of 1611-20' in Adam Jones (ed.), *German sources*, pp. 44-96; J. K. J. de Jonge, *De Oorsprong van Nederland's Bezittingen*, pp. 16, 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> H. den Heijer, 'Directores, Stadhouderes e Conselhos de administração' in M. Wiesebron (ed.), *O Brasil em arquivos neerlandeses*, pp. 17-43; *idem*, *De geschiedenis van der WIC*; Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, pp. 29-43; Klaas Ratelband (ed.), *Vijf dagregisters*, pp. lvii-xci.

local Africans and the mixed-descent people were kept outside of the fortresses, although there was social and economic contact between the WIC employees and these groups.

In the Portuguese settlements, Europeans were also at the top of the social ladder. The group was small in number and comprised people from different social strata, organized according to the social status quo of the Portuguese Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

In the ‘micro-societies’ of the Gold Coast fortresses, the European group comprised royal officers, soldiers, crews of the coastal fleet, and a small number of artisans responsible for the maintenance and repairing works of the forts and the fleets.<sup>4</sup> The social structure followed the military ranking – as in the Dutch case.

In Cape Verde and São Tomé, the Europeans were divided into two main groups: people from the Kingdom (*reinóis*), and the European settlers (*brancos da terra*, i.e. the whites from the land). Officially *reinóis* constituted the most important section of the Europeans. This group comprised all royal officers, clergymen and members of the religious orders appointed by the Portuguese Crown and the Catholic Church. Many of them were members of the middle and lower strata of the Kingdom’s aristocracy. Their stay in West Africa was temporary, lasting only for the period of their term of employment overseas.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> These Europeans believed in the values of the Portuguese nobility: honour, magnificence, landownership, etc. Although most of these men started as merchants, they aspired to be integrated into the aristocracy, like the wealthiest merchants living in the Kingdom. In order to be accepted as a member, the businessmen had to prove the cleanliness of their blood, adopt a certain social behaviour and a lifestyle identical to that of the members of the aristocracy. Usually, this implied owning land and living from the income of the properties, and holding prestigious offices in the royal bureaucracy, the ecclesiastic structure or the municipalities. These are aspects easily identifiable in the description given above concerning the political, economic and social behaviour of these elites.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on the Portuguese posts on the Gold Coast see: J. Bato’Ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, ‘A Fortaleza de São Jorge da Mina. Testemunho da presença portuguesa na costa do Golfo da Guiné do século XV ao século XVII’, *Oceanos*, 28 (1996), pp. 27-39; *idem*, ‘A instalação de fortalezas na costa africana. Os casos de Arguim e da Mina. Comércio e contactos culturais’ in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo II*, pp. 137-149; Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Contactos e caminhos comerciais na Costa da Mina durante as duas primeiras décadas do século XVI* (Lisboa: s.n., s.d.); C. R. Boxer, *Race relations in the Portuguese colonial Empire: 1415-1825* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 11 & 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the Cape Verde society during the Early Modern Period see: André Teixeira, ‘A sociedade’ in Artur Teodoro de Matos (coord.), *A colonização Atlântica II*, pp. 173-203; Maria Emília Madeira Santos e Maria João Soares, ‘Igreja, Missão e Sociedade’ in Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde II*, pp. 359-508; Iva Maria Cabral, ‘Ribeira Grande: vida urbana, gente, mercância, estagnação’ in Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde II*, pp. 225-274; Ilídio Cabral Baleno, ‘Povoamento e formação da sociedade’ in Luís de Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde I*, pp. 125-177; Maria Emília Madeira Santos and Iva Maria Cabral, ‘O nascer de uma sociedade através do morador-armador’ in Luís de Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde I*, pp. 371-409; Maria Manuel Torrão, ‘A colonização de Cabo Verde: meios e objectivos’ in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo II*, pp. 150-170; António Carreira, ‘Os conflitos sociais em Cabo Verde

The European colonists occupied the second place in the social structure of the Archipelagoes. Initially, the *brancos da terra* were noblemen from the lower strata of the Portuguese aristocracy as well as middle- and small-scale merchants attracted to the islands by the commercial privileges granted by the Portuguese Crown to trade with Senegambia, the Bights of Biafra and Benin, the Loango Coast and the Kingdom of Kongo. However, they were only allowed to take part in the coastal commerce with products produced in the Archipelagoes. This limitation forced the settlers to sponsor the development of economic activities locally, such as agricultural production, cattle breeding and low-quality textiles. Consequently, many of these men became landlords and slave owners. In fact, they owned most of the available land and monopolized the most profitable agricultural crops such as cotton and sugar that were sold in the coastal and the international consumption markets. Hence, the occupation of land and the agricultural production for local consumption and supply of export markets constituted the basis of the Portuguese process of settlement in West Africa, especially in the Archipelagoes, and to a lesser extent in Angola.

Trade was another important backbone of the settlements' economy. The settlers were also in control of the trading routes and markets for their products and slaves between the Archipelagoes and the nearest areas of the African coast. Hence, the settlers had great economic power and social prestige. Through their influence, they gathered a wide clientele of poor white men, convicts, and mixed-descent people. The ownership of farms, plantations and sugar mills put under their control a high number of slaves, some of whom were used as 'private armies' to solve conflicts with other landlords and royal officers.<sup>6</sup> This practice became very common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially among the powerful families of São Tomé.<sup>7</sup>

---

no século XVIII', *Revista de Historia Económica e Social*, 16 (Jul.-Dec., 1985), pp. 63-88; *idem*, *Cabo Verde: formação e extinção de uma sociedade escravocrata*.

<sup>6</sup> Usually, the *fazendas* and *roças* were smaller than the *engenhos*. For the Portuguese terminology, see Glossary.

<sup>7</sup> For further information on São Tomé society during the Early Modern period see: Arlindo Manuel Caldeira, 'A sociedade' in Artur Teodoro de Matos (coord.), *A colonização Atlântica* II, pp. 389-424; Isabel Castro Henriques, 'A invenção social de São Tomé e Príncipe' in *idem*, *Os pilares da diferença*, pp. 207-220; Mónica Ester Pargana Conduto Gonçalves Sousa, *Igreja e Sociedade em São Tomé entre os séculos XV e XVIII* (unpublished MA thesis, Universidade de Coimbra, 2001); Cristina Maria Seuanes Serafim, *As ilhas de São Tomé*, pp. 15-44 & 267-298; Catarina Madeira Santos, 'A formação das estruturas fundiárias e a territorialização das tensões sociais: São Tomé, primeira metade do século XVI', *Studia*, 54-55 (1996), pp. 51-91; Isabel Castro Henriques, *São Tomé e Príncipe: A invenção de uma sociedade* (Lisboa: Vega, 2000); Artur Teodoro de Matos, 'Os donos do poder e a economia de São Tomé e Príncipe no início de Seiscentos', *Mare Liberum*, 6 (December, 1993), pp. 179-187; Isabel Castro Henriques, 'O ciclo do açúcar em São Tomé nos séculos XV e XVI' in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo* I, pp. 264-280; Arlindo Manuel Caldeira, *Mulheres, sexualidade e casamento em São Tomé e Príncipe (séculos XV-XVIII)* (Lisboa: Grupo de Trabalho do Ministério da Educação para as Comemorações dos

The members of the local elites also managed to dominate the municipal governments, the religious confraternities, and the chapters of the cathedrals of the main urban centres.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, due to the high mortality rate among royal officers, the members of these local elites often occupied the vacant civilian, military and Church posts as interims.

The lower strata of the European population in these societies, i.e. small-scale merchants, sailors and craftsmen active in construction, shipbuilding, maintenance and other sea-related activities, and royal and municipal officers such as clerks, sheriffs, jail-keepers and guards were also mainly Europeans.

In the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola, the royal officials and colonists had different positions because of the characteristics and timing of the settlement, and therefore played a different role in the development of the local economy. Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese settlements in the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola had a very simple social structure.<sup>9</sup> These societies were headed by private merchants, skippers and sailors. They formed a heterogeneous group of individuals from different social strata: wealthy merchants, commercial agents, New Christians<sup>10</sup>, adventurers, criminal convicts, etc. Some of them came from Portugal, but by and large they were settlers from the Archipelagoes of Cape Verde and São Tomé, engaged in trade in these areas.

The Portuguese Crown divided them in two categories: the legal traders with royal licences to trade, and the so-called *lançados*, who settled illegally in the area.<sup>11</sup> After some years, some of these men returned to the Archipelagoes or to Portugal.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, a

Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1999); Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *A ilha de São Tomé nos séculos XV e XVI* (Lisboa: Publicações Alfa, 1989); *idem*, 'A colonização de São Tomé e Príncipe: os capitães do século XV' in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo II*, pp. 171-197.

<sup>8</sup> Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, 'Ecclesiastic structures and Religious action' in Francisco Bethencourt & Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion*, pp. 255-282.

<sup>9</sup> George E. Brooks, 'Historical perspectives on the Guinea-Bissau region, fifteenth to nineteenth centuries' in Carlos Lopes (dir.), *Mansas, Escravos Grumetes e Gentio*, pp. 25-54. For further information on Portuguese society in Angola see: Jill Dias, 'Angola' in V. Alexandre and Jill Dias (eds.), *O Império Africano: 1825-1890* (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1998), pp. 319-348 (col. Joel Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques (dir.), *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa X*); António Luís Alves Ferronha, 'Angola - 10 anos de história' I, pp. 24-26, 30, 32, 35 & 95-98; J. C. Miller, 'The paradoxes of impoverishment in the Atlantic zone' in David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa I* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 118-159; David Birmingham, *Central Africa to 1780: Zambézia, Zaire and the South Atlantic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *idem*, *Trade and conflict in Angola. The Mbundu and their neighbours under the influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966); Ralph Delgado, *História de Angola*, 4 vols. (Luanda: Edição do Banco de Angola, s.d.).

<sup>10</sup> New Christians – name given to the descendents of Jews after the forced conversion order by King Manuel I in 1497.

<sup>11</sup> For the Portuguese terminology, see Glossary.

<sup>12</sup> For detailed information on the *lançados* in Angola, see: José da Silva Horta, 'Africanos e Portugueses na documentação Inquisitorial, de Luanda a Mbanza Kongo (1596-1598)' in *Actas do Seminário Encontro de Povos e*

good number remained as part of African society, marrying local women, submitting to the rites of passage and adopting indigenous religious practices. These men were commonly known as *tangomaos*.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Gaspar Gonçalves, was a ‘tangomao’ living in the village of Pompetane on the shore of the Gambia River together with other ‘tangomaos’ and several African women.<sup>14</sup>

Together with their African and Eurafrican partners, these *lançados* and *tangomaos* formed local elites. Their power-base was founded on the control of extensive commercial networks linking the coastal areas to the hinterland markets. In most cases, this control was won through marriages with local African women already involved in these trading activities. Therefore, these local elites played a key role in the development of the coastal trade in the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola and became an essential link for the success of the Portuguese Atlantic economy, since the supply of the international consumption markets depended upon these middlemen. Moreover, in the long run the members of these local elites were often recruited to the middle offices and high positions in the government of the settlements, especially in functions dealing with economic and military strategy. Furthermore, given their status as settlers, they had access to the municipal councils and assemblies of the main urban centres of Cacheu, Luanda, Massangano and São Filipe de Benguela.

The royal officials only became a permanent group of the Angolan and the Guinea-Bissauan colonial societies in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Portuguese Crown initiated a direct administration of these territories.<sup>15</sup> After that, military and civilian royal servants, as well as businessmen from the Kingdom, became part of these two societies. However, as in the Archipelagoes, they were always small in number and the local elites retained a leading role in these two societies and their local economies. In addition, the

---

*Culturas de Angola*, pp. 302-321; *idem*, ‘A Inquisição em Angola e Congo: O inquérito de 1596-98 e o papel mediador das justiças locais’ in *Arqueologia de Estado: Primeiras jornadas sobre formas de organização e exercício dos poderes na Europa do Sul: Séculos XIII-XVIII I* (Lisboa: História & Crítica, 1988), pp. 387-415. See also: IAN/TT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, book 776.

Concerning the *lançados* in the Guinea-Bissau region see: George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*; Jean Boulegue, *Les Luso-Africains de Sénégambie*; Jill Dias, ‘As primeiras penetrações em África’ in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo I*, pp. 281-289; Maria Emília Madeira Santos, ‘Os primeiros ‘lançados na Costa da Guiné’ in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo II*, pp. 125-136; António Carreira, *Os Portugueses nos Rios da Guiné*.

<sup>13</sup> George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> P. Havik, ‘Missionários e moradores na Costa da Guiné: Os padres da Companhia de Jesus e os tangomãos no princípio do século XVII’, *STVDIA*, 56/57 (2000), pp. 225, 228, 230-232 & 249

<sup>15</sup> Eunice R. J. P. L. Jorge da Silva, ‘A administração de Angola’ I, pp. 7-21; Wladimir Brito, ‘Cacheu, ponto de partida para a instalação da administração colonial na Guiné’ in Carlos Lopes (dir.), *Mansas, Escravos Grumetes e Gentio*, pp. 254-256.



arrival of officials and merchants from Portugal brought about some instability. In Angola, for instance, the arrival of the royal servants and of the expeditions sent by the Crown in order to locate the mythical Cambambe silver mines generated military conflicts with the African kingdoms. This warfare was quite disruptive for the trade in the hinterland. Furthermore, the expeditions gave royal servants access to the hinterland fairs and, consequently, caused widespread disruption of the African traders' businesses. Moreover, the growing number of Portuguese merchants in Luanda and in the fortresses along the Kwanza River increased the demand for slaves and the number of middlemen travelling between the coastal areas and the hinterland markets. Therefore, the integration of the *reinóis* in the colonial societies of the Guinea-Bissau region and of Angola contributed partly to the disruption of commerce at the hinterland fairs, which in turn affected the supply of the coastal areas and the international consumption markets.<sup>16</sup>

Within the European group there were two more categories: the *estantes* and the *gente forasteira*.<sup>17</sup> Both groups were temporary inhabitants of the islands and the coast. The *estantes* were Portuguese and foreigners, mainly Castilians and Genoese, working as factors or commercial agents of traders operating from Europe, West Africa or the American colonies, artisans, skippers, shipmasters and sailors. The *gente forasteira* were mainly constituted of the crews of fleets anchored at the main ports, who stayed only for the time necessary for unloading and loading the ships. The presence of these two groups in the ports was directly related to their commercial and sea-related activities. Therefore, the commercial decline of the Archipelagoes in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century drove these temporary inhabitants to abandon the main urban centres. An opposite trend can be found in the ports of the coast. Luanda, Benguela and Cacheu received increasing numbers of ships throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the two aforementioned social groups played an important role in the local society and economy. In 1650s, for example, the municipal council of Luanda, for example, defended the rights of the traders, skippers and the crews visiting the port to conduct trade against the economic interests of the *contratadores* from Portugal.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> For further information on the interference of the Europeans in the Angolan hinterland fairs, see Chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>17</sup> For the Portuguese terminology, see Glossary.

<sup>18</sup> 'Carta da Câmara de Luanda a El-Rei D. Afonso VI: 1659-04-29 in António Brásio (ed.), *Monumenta Missionária Africana* 1<sup>st</sup> series, XII, pp. 231-233; AHU, códice 16, folio 135v: 'Consulta do Conselho Ultramarino sobre queixas dos moradores de Luanda': 1664-11-19. Eunice R. J. P. L. Jorge da Silva, *A administração de Angola* I, pp. 233-237. For further information on this topic, see Chapter 5.

The European contingent was completed by common people from the Kingdom who had freely migrated to the Archipelagoes and by forced migrants. The forced migrants from Europe were either criminal convicts who had had their prison sentence commuted to exile, or religious and ethnic minorities sent by the Portuguese Crown to the overseas areas. The latter situation for instance applied to the Jewish orphans shipped to São Tomé in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Many of these convicts were artisans or manual workers. Their presence was extremely important due to the lack of skilled craftsmen and artisans in these small labour markets (because of the shortage of manual workers often such activities were performed by Africans). Most of these men integrated into the host societies and never returned to Europe.

## 2. Africans

Africans formed the largest group in the colonial societies of the Dutch and the Portuguese forts and settlements in West Africa. There were three categories of Africans: free Africans, slaves, and manumitted slaves.

### 2.1. Slaves and Manumitted slaves

In both, the Dutch and the Portuguese societies in West Africa slaves were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were mainly a group of people in transit from the African hinterland to the selling markets located in the Americas and Europe. However, a certain number of slaves were kept by the Dutch and the Portuguese in their West African settlements. Yet, as we have shown in the previous chapter, the number of slaves employed by the Dutch and the Portuguese differed, as well as the type of activities in which they were engaged. Therefore, slaves played a distinctive role in the local societies and economies of the posts and settlements, as well as in the Dutch and the Portuguese Atlantic economies in general.

---

<sup>19</sup> Timothy J. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans*.

Slaves only became part of Dutch society on the Gold Coast after the 1620s.<sup>20</sup> There were two different categories of slaves: slaves as merchandise, and slaves as workers. The former group only stayed in the forts on a temporary basis, waiting for shipment, while the latter group included the slaves of the WIC and of the Company employees living inside and outside the forts. These slaves performed various activities. In general, the WIC only employed slaves for domestic work inside the forts and in the Company gardens or for fetching water, wood and foodstuffs in the surroundings. These so-called ‘castle slaves’ were mainly used for unskilled work.<sup>21</sup> However, these slaves were essential for the survival of the Dutch posts, since they were in charge of producing and carrying foodstuffs as well as water. The enslaved people who were sold as merchandise also played an important role in the economy of the WIC, but at the other side of the Atlantic.

In the Portuguese case, slaves were part of the colonial societies from the early years of settlement. In Cape Verde, São Tomé, Angola and the Guinea-Bissau region, slaves were used mainly as merchandise to supply the international labour markets, as well as in the agriculture sector in order to produce foodstuffs for local needs and especially export-crops. Sometimes, slaves were also used as ‘warriors’ and were organized into ‘private armies’ to defend the personal interests of their owners. Within this social group there was a clear distinction between domestic slaves, artisan-slaves, merchant-slaves, rural slaves, and slaves as merchandise. The trade-slaves were part of the local societies only temporarily, since their stay in Cape Verde, São Tomé, the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola was short – just the time required to be loaded into the vessels sailing to Europe, the other Atlantic Archipelagoes, Brazil and the Spanish American colonies.

The domestic slaves, the artisan-slaves and the merchant-slaves lived mainly in the urban areas, often in their masters’ houses performing domestic work, such as cooking and cleaning, craftsmanship and commercial activities on behalf of their masters. The rural slaves worked on the farms, plantations and in the sugar mills as well as in the production of

---

<sup>20</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Company usually had 600-800 slaves in service living in or near the forts, serving the Company at the various forts, entrepôts or lodges, as well as on board the vessels sailing along the coast to assure the connection between the forts. Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> These ‘castle slaves’ were also used by the other commercial companies established on the Gold Coast. Examples of the use of ‘castle slaves’ by the Danish West African Company may be found in Muller’s description of the Fetu Country. ‘Wilhelm Johann Müller’s description of the Fetu Country’ in Adam Jones (ed.), *German sources*, pp. 141 & 210. For the Dutch terminology see Glossary.

agricultural products for the local and the international consumption markets. These plantation slaves were also used by the landlords as a warrior force to solve conflicts with rival landlords or royal officers.<sup>22</sup>

In the Portuguese societies of the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola, African slaves were mainly seen as merchandise to be exported. Only a small number was kept by the Portuguese settlers as domestic-slaves and as soldier-slaves. In Angola, slaves were also used in agriculture, mainly in the small farms along the Kwanza River that supplied the foodstuffs to Luanda and other fortresses.<sup>23</sup> However, their number was never as high as in Cape Verde and São Tomé. The higher concentration of slaves in the latter island was due to the number of sugar plantations and, consequently, the higher demand for slaves.

Many slaves escaped from the warehouses where they awaited embarkation and from the farms and plantations, and in so doing acquired the status of fugitive or delinquent, forced to hide in the hills or the bush. This phenomenon occurred on both Archipelagoes, especially in the most populated islands of Santiago, Fogo and São Tomé. However, it was only in São Tomé that these runaways became an endemic problem in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The high number of fugitive slaves – often also designated as *angolares* – became a serious threat to the local sugar planters and the urban population, since they regularly attacked the plantations and towns.<sup>24</sup> These revolts were made possible by the high number of slaves on the island and were fuelled by the harsh working conditions on the sugar plantations. Similar revolts occurred in Brazil and later in the Caribbean Islands and North America.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Isabel Castro Henriques, 'Ser escravo em São Tomé no século XVI' in *idem*, *Os pilares da diferença*, pp. 247-258; António Correia e Silva, 'A sociedade agrária. Gentes das Águas: Senhores, Escravos e Forros' in Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde* II, 275-357; Carlos Agostinho das Neves, Jorge Manuel Flores and Artur Teodoro de Matos, 'A repressão contra os escravos de São Tomé (1595) e a guerra em Ceilão (1587-1617)' in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo* V, pp. 100-112; Rui Ramos, 'Rebelião e sociedade colonial: 'alvorços' e 'levantamentos' em São Tomé (1545-1555)', *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, 4-5 (Jan./Dec., 1986), pp. 17-74.

<sup>23</sup> António de Oliveira Cadornega, *História Geral das Guerras Angolanas* III, pp. 32-175; A. da Silva Rego, *Portuguese colonization in the 16th century: A study of the royal ordinances (Regimentos)* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1965), pp. 97-116.

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>25</sup> J. J. Reis & Fávio dos Santos Gomes, *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil* (São Paulo, Brasil: Companhia das Letras, 1997); R. N. Anderson, 'The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in 17th-Century Brazil', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 28 (1996), pp. 545-566; R. Price (ed.), *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *História de quilombolas: mocambos e comunidades de senzalas no Rio de Janeiro -- século XIX*. (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995); Stuart B. Schwartz, 'Rethinking Palmares: Slave resistance in Colonial Brazil' in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed.), *Slaves, peasants, and rebels: reconsidering Brazilian slavery* (Chicago: University of Illinois

Although there were also runaway slaves in the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola, they never caused as much trouble to the European- and mixed-descent population, perhaps because they were able to go back to their original communities or could be assimilated into a neighbouring community.

In the Portuguese settlements of West Africa, slaves were sometimes manumitted by their masters in their wills. In general, their number was high and most of them stayed under the protection of their previous masters' households, working for them as sailors, interpreters and commercial agents. In some cases, they even got jobs in the lower ranks of the municipal and the royal administration, mainly as jailers and guards. Others were artisans and managed to earn their living as tailors, barbers and locksmiths. Manumitted slaves were especially important for the local defence of the settlements, since they made up the vast majority of the men enrolled in the local militias.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, in both Archipelagoes, the use of manumitted slaves in the military service was common practice.<sup>27</sup> These regiments of manumitted slaves made up one of the main defensive forces of the Portuguese Empire. In Cape Verde, for instance, the number of militia units and the estimated number of volunteers trebled between 1582 and 1620. A similar trend was found in São Tomé in 1672. The island had six military units of manumitted slaves – *gente forra* – a total of 600 men.<sup>28</sup> Of these only 15 to 20 were white – usually the officers of each unit.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, slaves and manumitted slaves were essential for the economic development and military defence of the Portuguese settlements in West Africa and played a key role in the development of the Portuguese Atlantic economy.

---

Press, 1992); I. Alves Filho, *Memorial dos Palmares* (Rio de Janeiro: Xenon Editora, 1988); Carlos Moura, *Rebeliões da senzala* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1988). See also: Louis Sicking, *Frontières d'Outre-Mer: La France et les Pays-Bas dans le monde atlantique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> For the Portuguese terminology see Glossary. For further information on the local militias see Chapter 1, section two. H. Kraay, 'Arming slaves in Brazil from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century' in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Arming slaves: From Classical times to Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 146-179; John Thornton, 'Armed slaves and political authority in Africa in the Era of the slave trade, 1450-1800' in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Arming slaves*, pp. 79-94.

<sup>27</sup> Ilídio Cabral Baleno, 'Pressões externas: reacções ao corso e à pirataria' in Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde* II, pp. 173-188.

<sup>28</sup> Cristina Maria Seuanes Serafim, *As ilhas de São Tomé*, pp. 95-96; Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, hereafter BNP, Cód. 478, folio. 199v: Relação do governador Pedro da Silva: 1672-02-11.

<sup>29</sup> In West Africa, the leadership of the companies and the military districts was granted by the King to members of the local elite, preferably white settlers. However, people of mixed-descent from the elite were also accepted.

## 2.2. Free Africans

In general, Africans of free descent were not a permanent group in the Dutch and the Portuguese colonial societies. However, by living near the settlements and performing key economic and military tasks, they became essential for the survival of the Europeans and the success of their economic activities at local and international level.

In the Dutch case, between 1612 and 1623 both the personnel of Fort Nassau and the private traders in the coast hired free Africans to work on the loading and unloading of the ships.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Akan and the Ga groups were used as middlemen to conduct trade between the hinterland markets and the forts, entrepôts and lodges in the coast. In Elmina, for instance, these activities were performed by the wealthiest inhabitants of the *Aldeia das duas partes* (present-day Elmina), whom the Portuguese called ‘knights of the village’ – *cavaleiros da aldeia*. Another important person in the village’s society and in this mediation between the land and the coastal commerce was the sheriff of the village – *xariife da aldeia*. He had to lead the traders arriving in the village to the fortress and put them in contact with the Europeans, probably by being an interpreter. Therefore, he was responsible for the flux of merchants conducting trade in gold and other products, as well as for their access to the fortress.<sup>31</sup>

Free Africans were also used as guides and interpreters for ‘diplomatic visits’ to local rulers.<sup>32</sup> For example, on May 1612, Pieter van den Broecke travelled from the coast to the town Mbanza Ngoyo in order to pay a visit to the local ‘king’. In this journey, ‘two blacks [...] carried [him] in a hammock’ and ‘two [African] nobles’ joined him ‘for company and protection’.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in Adam Jones (ed.), *German Sources*, pp. 44-96.

<sup>31</sup> From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the role of commercial brokers was played by the wealthiest and most influential members of the African communities around the forts of the Gold Coast. J. Bato’Ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, ‘A fortaleza de São Jorge da Mina. Testemunho da presença portuguesa na costa do Golfo da Guiné do século XVII’, *Oceanos*, 28 (1996), pp. 27-39; *idem*, ‘A instalação de fortalezas na costa africana. Os casos de Arguim e da Mina. Comércio e contactos culturais’ in Luís de Albuquerque (dir.), *Portugal no Mundo II*, pp. 137-149; Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Contactos e caminhos comerciais na Costa da Mina*.

<sup>32</sup> Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, pp. 47-76.

<sup>33</sup> J. D. La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s Journal*, p. 89.

After 1623, the WIC continued to hire the services of the free Africans, not only for sea-related activities and commerce, but also for military purposes. Like in the previous period, free Africans were employed by the Company to perform several tasks on shore, such as loading and unloading canoes and vessels, and working on the repairing of the WIC buildings and ships. Over time, an increasing number of Africans were hired to work as carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, etc.<sup>34</sup>

Free Africans were also recruited by the Company to perform commercial activities. In order to guarantee the supply of African goods to the forts, entrepôts and lodges, both for commercial and logistical purposes, the WIC signed contracts with powerful African traders operating as middlemen between the supply markets in the hinterland and the posts of the Company in the coastal areas.<sup>35</sup> The commercial know-how of the African brokers was essential for both the survival of the Company's civilian and military staff and for the supply of African goods to the international consumption markets in the Americas and Europe.

The WIC took into service free Africans as soldiers and officers<sup>36</sup>, relying heavily on the military aid of the Elminian regiments.<sup>37</sup> Locals were also hired for the coastal shipping. Their knowledge of the shores, the estuaries of the rivers, the wind system of the Gulf of Guinea and their sailing expertise in the small canoes used for coastal navigation were essential for the Company. They guaranteed the transport of employees, information, products and provisions between the different posts.<sup>38</sup> However, many of these free Africans were only employed temporarily by the Company.

---

<sup>34</sup> Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, pp. 65-71.

<sup>35</sup> NA, OWIC 12. Natalie Everts, 'Social outcomes of a trading relationship: Ties between African and Europeans in the hubs of the Slave Trade', paper presented at the Conference *African slave trade and African Slavery in a global comparative perspective* (Leiden, Africa Studies Centre, 18 May 2006).

<sup>36</sup> This practice was also adopted by other European sea powers settled on the Gold Coast. The Danish West African Company had African officials and soldiers in its service. See, for instance: 'Wilhelm Johann Müller's description of the Fetu Country, 1662-9' in Adam Jones (ed.), *German sources*, pp. 141, 161, 164, 168, 172, 175, 190, etc.; and 'Zur Eich's description of the Fetu Country, 1659-69' *ibidem*, p. 262.

<sup>37</sup> The Asafu companies of Elmina gave military support to the WIC, as they did for the Portuguese until 1637. However, it is not clear whether this military help was granted by the regiments due to political-diplomatic agreements with the local rulers, or to contracts signed between the Company and the military regiments, for which the African soldiers would receive a certain payment.

<sup>38</sup> For the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Feinberg gives data regarding the costs of a trip from Elmina to other Dutch forts, factories and lodges paid to the Elminans canoe men. Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, p. 68; and J. Nan, *Rimadoors: een Afrikaans aandeel in de Handel tussen Nederland en de Goudkust, 1602-1872* (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden University, 1981).

Thus, free Africans were recruited to perform mainly commercial and shipping activities that required a specific know-how and, therefore, could not be performed successfully by Europeans. Their expertise in coastal navigation, their know-how of the hinterland trade and their military skills in fighting other Africans and other Europeans, as well as their high resistance to tropical diseases, were essential for the commercial success of the Company, not only in the coast, but in the Atlantic in general.<sup>39</sup> Hence, in order to succeed economically the Dutch had to rely on the cooperation of the free Africans, despite running the risk of being suddenly overwhelmed by the African rulers, as was often the case after the 1660s.<sup>40</sup>

In the Portuguese case, free Africans played a completely different role in the settlements of Cape Verde and São Tomé, the forts of the Gold Coast, and the societies of the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola.

In Cape Verde and São Tomé, free Africans were small in number. Most of them were small farmers or craftsmen. Only in exceptional cases did free Africans become sugar producers, slave traders or commercial agents and factors of Portuguese and foreign merchants. Therefore, their role in these colonial societies and local economies was small.

On the Gold Coast, free Africans were kept outside the fortresses. However, according to Portuguese royal legislation dating back to 1486, Africans living in the surroundings of the castle were also under the jurisdiction of the citadel and enjoyed 'all the liberties, privileges and honours' of its Portuguese inhabitants.<sup>41</sup> In addition, these inhabitants, in particular the wealthiest ones, played a key role in the trade operating as brokers between the merchants coming from the African hinterland and the royal officers at the fortress. Moreover, free Africans, organized in the Elminian regiments, were paramount

---

<sup>39</sup> However, free Africans only performed such activities on the Gold Coast. We could find no evidence of free Africans serving as seamen or soldiers on board Dutch vessels operating in the trans-continental circuits.

<sup>40</sup> For an overview of the power of the Africans authorities on the Gold Coast and their interference in the conflicts between the different commercial companies settled on the Coast, see for instance: 'Wilhem Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country, 1662-1669' in Adam Jones (ed.), *German Sources*, pp. 134-252.

<sup>41</sup> The *Regimento* of the fort, dating from 1529, also gives to the captain of Elmina judicial jurisdiction over the Portuguese inhabitants of the fort and the Africans living in the surrounding area. See: João de Barros, *Da Ásia* I (Lisboa: Regia Officina Typografica, 1778), p. 169; 'Règlement du comptoir de São Jorge da Mina: Règlement du Capitaine (7 février 1529)' in J. Bato'Ora Ballong-Men-Mewuda, *São Jorge de Mina* II, pp. 546-547. See also *ibidem* I, pp. 68-69.



for the defence of the Portuguese strongholds against the attacks of Africans and other Europeans.<sup>42</sup>

In the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola, the number of free Africans was high, and, despite living outside the Portuguese settlements, their impact was quite profound, since they were essential for the access to the hinterland markets and for the military defence of the settlements.<sup>43</sup> The *Grumetes* were free Africans of the coastal areas living in the villages near the Portuguese or Eurafrican commercial entrepôts and along the rivers. Most of them were sailors, factors, commercial agents, interpreters, messengers and soldiers working for the *lançados*. In fact, the group was the strongest link between the skippers and the merchants of the transatlantic trade and the African hinterland markets. The *pombeiros* were the free African merchants dealing in slaves and merchandise in the hinterland fairs (*pombos*) of Angola from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onward to whom the Portuguese merchants of the coast and the fortresses entrusted products to be exchanged for Angolan products.

To sum up, the Dutch hired skilled free Africans, mainly because Africans were considered better prepared for particular tasks. The process of recruitment of the free Africans either as seamen, commercial agents or soldiers resembled the practices in use in the Republic. The Portuguese for their part trained slaves and manumitted slaves to execute similar activities, a practice dominant in the labour market of the Kingdom.

### 3. Mixed-descent population

In both the Dutch and the Portuguese societies in West Africa, a third social group emerged as the outcome of inter-racial relationships between the Europeans and the Africans – the so-called Eurafricans, also mentioned in the Dutch primary sources as *mulatten*; and in the Portuguese as *mestiços*, *mulatos*, *crioulos* or *filhos da terra*.<sup>44</sup> However, the appearance of this

---

<sup>42</sup> For the Portuguese terminology, see Glossary.

<sup>43</sup> The presence of free Africans in the Portuguese settlements was limited. Only a few free Africans lived in the urban centres of Cacheu and Luanda working in maritime activities and as craftsmen.

<sup>44</sup> In general, a child of an African slave woman was legally a slave, unless the European father manumitted his own descendent. Such procedure would make the child free, but would not grant the child the same social status as the European father. To acquire such a social position, the European progenitor had to recognize the child as his. By doing so, the European father entitled his descendent the right to inherit his estate and to have the same social status. Such recognition would make their acceptance and integration in the local society and sometimes in the local elite easier and faster. However, one should stress that the recognition of mixed-descent

mixed-descent group in the Dutch and the Portuguese colonial societies and ‘micro-societies’ occurred at different moments and the two groups played a distinct role in the local and Atlantic economies.

Recent studies on the inter-marriages of WIC employees and African women in the Gold Coast have showed that this practice only became more common in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup>

In general, the mixed-descent offspring of these relationships were integrated in the African communities, via their mothers’ lineages.<sup>46</sup> Over time, European fathers took an active role in the education of their mixed-descent children. In some cases, the European progenitors tried to enrol their sons as Company employees. The access the Eurafricans had to positions in the WIC in Africa depended heavily on the position of their European fathers in the hierarchy of the Company and their power to influence the WIC-decision-making process. Usually, mixed-descent boys were accepted as soldiers. Only exceptionally would they be recruited for higher posts.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, due to their own ‘private commercial activities’ and connections in the coastal trade some European fathers could put their children forward to serve another European trader either as valets or as caretakers. Such

---

children by European fathers was not always a given fact. The vast majority of these children of mixed-descent were not recognized by their European progenitors, and were in a similar social position as free Africans and manumitted slaves. For the Portuguese terminology, see Glossary.

<sup>45</sup> Natalie Everts, ‘Social outcomes of a trading relationship: Ties between Africans and Europeans in the hubs of the slave trade’, unpublished paper presented at the conference: *African slave trades and African slavery in a global perspective* Leiden, 18 May, 2006; Michiel R. Doortmont, ‘An overview of Dutch relations with the Gold Coast in the light of David Nyendael’s Mission to Ashanti in 1701-1702’ in I. van Kessel (ed.), *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants*, pp. 19-32; Michiel R. Doortmont, Natalie Everts & J. J. Vrij, ‘Tussen de Goudkust, Nederland en Suriname. De Euro-Afrikaanse families Van Bakergem, Woortman, Rühle en Huydecoper’, *De Nederlandsche Leeuw. Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Genootschap voor Geslacht- en Wapenkunde*, 117, (2000), pp. 170-212, 310-344, 490-577; Michiel R. Doortmont and Natalie Everts, ‘Vrouwen, familie en eigendom op de Goudkust. Afrikaanse en Europese systemen van erfrecht in Elmina, 1760-1860’ in Corrie van Eijl, *et al* (eds.), *Geld & Goed. Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*, 17, pp. 114-130; Michiel R. Doortmont and Natalie Everts, ‘Onzichtbare Afrikanen. Euro-Afrikanen tussen de Goudkust en Nederland, 1750-1850’ in M. ’t Hart, Jan Lucassen & H. Schmal (eds.), *Nieuwe Nederlanders*, pp. 81-100; Natalie Everts, ‘Cherchez la femme. Gender-related issues in Eighteenth-century Elmina’, *Itinerario*, 20/1 (1996), pp. 45-57; Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, pp. 88-92.

<sup>46</sup> Natalie Everts, ‘Cherchez la femme’, pp. 45-57.

<sup>47</sup> Over time, this situation changed, and by the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Eurafricans could also be found in higher positions. This access of the Eurafrican men to the ranks of the Company was a direct consequence of a change in the Company recruitment policy. The number of European men was supposed to be reduced, and gradually replaced by both Africans and Eurafricans. Everts estimated that the Eurafrican population of Dutch descent on the Gold Coast numbered c.500-600 people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Natalie Everts, ‘Cherchez la femme’, p. 52; Michiel R. Doortmont and Natalie Everts, ‘Onzichtbare Afrikanen. Euro-Afrikanen tussen de Goudkust en Nederland, 1750-1850’ in M. ’t Hart, Jan Lucassen & H. Schmal (eds.), *Nieuwe Nederlanders*, pp. 81-100.

training usually started at a young age and would provide the Eurafrican young man with enough know-how to later become an independent trader himself. The female children, on the other hand, were often taken as wives or concubines of other Company employees and, more rarely, became woman-traders.<sup>48</sup> Whether these girls became wives or concubines of employees of the Company depended once again on the connections of the father within the WIC. However the majority of the Eurafrican men made a living as fishermen, transporters, farmers, etc. Therefore, during the period covered by this book the Eurafricans were an unimportant group in the Dutch 'micro-societies' of the Gold Coast, and played no essential role in the economic development of the fortresses and the Atlantic economy of the Company at large. Eurafricans did not become numerous and influential as a group until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only then were they able to impose themselves as middlemen between the hinterland markets and the coastal trade. This position in the economic and social levels was retained well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In contrast to the situation in the Dutch forts in Africa, in the Portuguese case, mixed-descent people became an important social group and played a key role in the local economies of the West African posts and settlements, with the exception of the fortresses on the Gold Coast.

Eurafricans were part of the social structure of the Gold Coast societies since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, as consequence of the Portuguese permanent settlement in São Jorge da Mina, Axim and Shama. However, these Eurafricans were few in number, and they did not play an important role as middlemen between the hinterland trade and the coastal areas, nor did they achieve any political leverage with the Portuguese authorities or the African rulers.<sup>49</sup>

In the Cape Verde and the São Tomé societies, however, the mixed-descent population increased both in number and influence from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Some of them became important members of the local elites, while others were small- and

---

<sup>48</sup> Such practice was also common among the Eurafrican women of Portuguese descent in the Senegambia and the Guinea-Bissau regions. George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*, pp. 57-58, 124-129 & 206-221; Philip J. Havik, 'Comerciantes e Concubinas: sócios estratégicos no comércio Atlântico na costa da Guiné' in *A dimensão atlântica da África*, pp. 161-179; *idem*, 'Women and trade in the Guinea-Bissau region: The role of African and Eurafrican women in trade networks from the early 16<sup>th</sup> to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century', *Studia*, 52 (1994), pp. 83-120; *idem*, 'Parentesco e poder feminino nos Rios de Guiné: a revolta de Bibiana Vaz de França (séc. XVII)', Grupo de trabalho 3. <http://www.desafio.ufba.br/gt3-004.html>; Isabel Castro Henriques, 'As Outras africanas: as reais e as inventadas', *Oceanos*, 21 (1995), pp. 53-73.

<sup>49</sup> 'Informação da Mina': 1572-09-29 in António Brásio (ed.), *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, III, p. 90.

mid-scale landlords and merchants. Their role in the government of the Archipelagoes and their importance in the local elite became more visible after the Portuguese Crown granted them their requested parity of rights with the European colonists i.e. access to offices in the municipal councils and in the royal civilian and military administration.<sup>50</sup>

In both the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola, the Eurafricans also achieved more social prestige over time. In these two settlements an influential group of mixed-descent people emerged from the marriages between *lançados* and *tangomaos* and the African women. Some of these Eurafricans became inhabitants of Cacheu, Luanda, Massangano and Benguela. By and large, they were traders like their parents, although some became craftsmen. In fact, many of the royal officers serving in these settlements were recruited from this group of Eurafricans. In Luanda, these *filhos da terra* formed a small oligarchy. Their members held many offices in the royal bureaucracy and the army, side-by-side with the Portuguese sent from the Kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

The influence of the Eurafricans over the African communities, mainly through marriages and other family ties, granted them the control over the supply markets for African products. Therefore, they became important middlemen between the hinterland and the coastal areas, where the Portuguese metropolitan merchants were settled. Due to their key role as brokers, they were often perceived as a threat to the economic interests of the Portuguese Crown and the Portuguese businessmen. This idea was reinforced by the connections of these middlemen with the European competitors of the Portuguese operating in Senegambia, Loango, Kongo, Angola and Benguela, such as the Dutch. All these circumstances fuelled a deep rivalry between the Portuguese from the Kingdom – *reinóis* – and the locally born mixed-descent traders – *filhos da terra* – since both desired to control the slave and ivory trades and access the supply markets. The conflicts involving the white businessmen, the royal authorities and the Eurafricans in Guinea and Angola also contributed to the decline in the supply of slaves to the ports of Cacheu and Luanda. In many cases, the Eurafricans would receive products from the Portuguese merchants, but instead of exchanging those products for slaves in the interior they would send the slaves to

---

<sup>50</sup> Until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, mixed-descent people were not entitled to occupy certain posts in the royal and municipal administration of the colonies. However, over time they achieved parity to the Europeans. See also: Ilídio Cabral Baleno, 'Pressões externas' in Maria Emília Madeira Santos (coord.), *História Geral de Cabo Verde II*, pp. 173-188.

<sup>51</sup> Eunice R. J. P. L. Jorge da Silva, *A administração de Angola I*, pp. 121-129.

other areas on the coast. Gradually, other points on the coast of the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola became important gateways for the slave trade supplying the Portuguese interlopers and Brazilian-Portuguese traders, as well as the Dutch and the English.<sup>52</sup>

The commerce in those areas was controlled mainly by the European competitors of the Portuguese, especially the Dutch, although the presence of French and English, etc. would become more regular throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well as that of the Brazilian-Portuguese traders.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, in these two settlements, the recruitment of *mestiços* became essential in order to guarantee the penetration of the interior, the military presence in the forts and the access to the commercial networks in the hinterland.

#### 4. Impact of social organization in the building of the Atlantic empires

To sum up, in the Dutch posts before 1624, the group of Europeans was formed exclusively by the military staff sent by the States General, although after that date it started to include commercial, judicial and military personnel of the WIC, while in the Portuguese forts and settlements the royal officials, the military officers and the religious staff shared their power with groups of settlers organized in local elites. In the Dutch case, the staff of the Company was responsible for the military and diplomatic interests of the States General and the commercial interests of the WIC.<sup>54</sup> In the Portuguese case, the royal officers had only to implement the legislation and policy of the Portuguese Crown concerning the forts and settlements. The local elites played a key role in the development of the settlements, by promoting agriculture and trade, as well as in the defence of the territories.

In addition, the local elites, partly of mixed-descent, helped the Portuguese to penetrate the interior and get access to the areas of supply in the hinterland, especially in the Guinea-Bissau region and Angola. However, the presence of these groups of Europeans in the Portuguese settlements provoked multiple social conflicts, generated by the opposite interests of the representatives of the Portuguese Crown and the members of the local elites.

---

<sup>52</sup> For further information on this topic, see Chapter 5.

<sup>53</sup> For a general overview on the role of Brazilian-Portuguese traders in the Portuguese Southern Atlantic economy see: Stuart B. Schwartz, 'The economy of the Portuguese Empire' in Francisco Bethencourt & Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion*, pp. 19-48; Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, 'The Economic Network of Portugal's Atlantic World' *ibidem*, pp. 109-137.

<sup>54</sup> For further information on the subject, see Chapter 1.

Often, these conflicts became disruptive for trade. Simultaneously, these local elites tended to have internal conflicts among the most powerful families in their struggle for political influence, economic power and social prestige. The opposing factions used personal armies of slaves and clients to impose their will within the elite group or on the royal officers. This kind of conflict was absent in the Dutch societies on the Gold Coast.

Free Africans, despite being kept as outsiders by the Dutch and the Portuguese colonial societies in West Africa, played a key role in the development of the local economy of the posts and settlements, and became essential for the success of the Dutch and the Portuguese Atlantic economies, since they were middlemen responsible for the supply of African goods to the coastal areas, from where the products would be distributed to the international consumption markets. In the case of Portuguese Africa, the Eurafricans also held an important position as brokers in the abovementioned trade.

Slaves, in the Dutch West African posts, did not play a key role in the local economies, whereas in the Portuguese case slaves and manumitted slaves were essential for the development of many economic activities as well as for the defence of the settlements. However, the presence of high numbers of slaves in the Portuguese settlements had social consequences, such as in São Tomé, where runaway slaves became a social problem, since they posed a clear threat to their masters and the Portuguese colonial society at large, by embarking upon an endemic Bush War – *Guerra do mato*.

The emergence of the Eurafricans, in the Portuguese case, immediately followed the settling process, while in the Dutch settlements inter-racial relationships only became more numerous in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, the numbers of mixed-descent people in these colonial societies were quite different, and the social position achieved by their members quite distinct. Moreover, the role played by the Eurafrican population in the Portuguese and the Dutch settlements on an economic level differed. In the Dutch societies, Eurafricans only started to be hired as Company employees in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did they become important as middlemen with the hinterland.

The different characteristics of the Dutch and Portuguese societies in West Africa would play a key role on the success or the failure of the Europeans in these areas and on the formation of their Atlantic economies, as we will show in the second part of the book.