

Bubi Government at the End of the 19th Century: Resistance to the Colonial Policy of Evangelization on the Island of Bioko, Equatorial Guinea

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ABSTRACT

This text recounts the transition that Bioko political structure underwent upon entering into contact, first, with different African populations and, later, with the Spanish colonial government, at the end of the 19th century. The political process I analyze unfolded in a very short but very intense time: in just a few years, after numerous failed attempts, the transition from a decentralized government to a consolidated centralized chiefdom was made, culminating in the formation of a kingdom. This period ran parallel to the incipient advance of the colonization process and ended during this same reign with the death of the monarch.

Keywords: Equatorial Guinea, Bubis, colonization, evangelization, chiefdoms.

1. INTRODUCTION

This text deals with some of the most recurring issues in mid-20th century political anthropology, such as leadership and the impact of colonialism on autochthonous forms of government. From a methodological point of view, it combines the analysis of ethnographic materials obtained from fieldwork in contemporary Bubi society with the analysis of documentary sources from the past. This is the main contribution of the text because, for the context of Equatorial Guinea, there is hardly any documentation on local political structures, much less an analysis of this colonial documentation. The small amount of information on native organization that exists is from travelers, missionaries, and colonial administrators, and it is dispersed among all of the colonial literature from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century on Equatorial Guinea. In this contribution, I have tried to recover this information, contrast it, and filter out the colonialist, biased, ethnocentric orientation that characterizes it, in order to make a small part of the history of the Bubi people visible.

From this ethno-historical approach, I will analyze the Bubi political strategies and resistance that managed to delay the encounter with the Spanish colonial government. This spatial-temporal framework makes it possible to

argue how and why this process ended up centralized in a specific monarchy, in a specific time and place. Finally, I will contribute a theoretical discussion about these historical convergences that favored this political development of chiefdoms.

2. THE BUBI

The Bubi ethnic group is the autochthonous population of the Island of Bioko. This island is 2,017 square km. in size and forms part of the insular region of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. According to the 1983 census, the Bubi population is the second most numerous ethnic group in Equatorial Guinea, although it represents only 9% of the total of the population, as opposed to the 82% that the Fang ethnic majority represents. Even on the Island of Bioko, the Bubis are not the most numerous population, as they make up 42% of the total of 57,740 inhabitants of Bioko.¹

Bubi social organization is articulated in two descent² groups: the *carichobo*³ (matriclan) and the *loká* (patriclan), with descendants simultaneously belonging to and inheriting both clans. Bubi clans are exogamous and segmented in lineages without names. Each matriclan and patriclan has a main spirit, the founder of the sanctuary where it is venerated. The most important spiritual element of the patriclan is the *bojulá*: a force or energy with a sacred origin that is transmitted through the men, while blood ties are transmitted through the women⁴. In the past, inheritance was also matrilineal, with men leaving their inheritance to their uterine nephews, thus maintaining the property within the matriclan. The succession to chiefdom is patrilineal and by birth order among the men. Both patriclans and matriclans have a chief called the *mochucu*⁵ who is the oldest living member of the clan. Likewise, the oldest woman of the matriclan, the *mochucuari* or *botucuari*, shares the chiefdom of the matriclan with the man. These descent groups were involved in a series of splits and

¹ According to the population projections of the last census carried out in 1994, the estimated population of Equatorial Guinea for the year 2004 was 527,814 inhabitants. The estimate for 2011 was 668,225 inhabitants, according to CIA data and Internet world statistics (Aixelá 2011).

² Descent, following the definitions given by: Leach, E. (1975: 201), Fortes (1970) and Scheffler (1964). Descent groups, according to Goody (1975: 210). Clan and lineage, according to Evans Pritchard (1977: 212).

³ *carichobo*: *cari*:woman, *nchobo*: house- in the northern dialect, *rijoe* or *mnoé* in the south. *Loká* in the north or *eóa* in the south

⁴ A wider explanation of Bubi kinship, specially, matriclans and marriage, in Fernández, N. (2005) and (2011).

⁵ *mochucu* (in the southern dialect) or *botucu* (in the northern dialect.) This appellative is used not only to designate the clan chiefs but also to refer to any man whose hierarchical status makes him relevant.

fusions that created a key power structure for the centralization of the chiefdoms that took place at the end of the 19th century.

The origin of the Bubi ethnic group is uncertain and their arrival to the island cannot be pinpointed; we only know that the island was populated by different migrations that came from the continent, displaced by other Bantu peoples who advanced towards the coast. They were all peoples with an agriculture based on yam and oil palm cultivation.⁶ The first Bantu inhabitants of the island cannot be considered to be predecessors of the present-day Bubis, who are estimated to have arrived in Bioko approximately two thousand years ago. During the first period, the population established itself on the coast, with the inhabitants living by fishing and cultivating yams. Intensive agriculture began later when they settled in the interior of the island. This gave rise to two types of economy: agricultural and fishing economies, carried out by interior settlers and by coastal settlers, respectively. The fishermen traded fish for the agricultural products of the interior settlers and were vassals to their chiefs.

3. CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS

During the 19th century, the Bubi economy underwent transcendental changes as a result of the first commercial transactions that they entered into with African and European foreigners who provided them with the first pieces of metal in exchange for yams and palm oil. It was at this moment that the first written references to the Bubi population appeared.⁷ The first Europeans to settle on the

⁶ According to Martín del Molino's (1989) archaeological research, the oldest settlements have been found in the north of the island and reveal a first Paleolithic occupation around 4,000 BCE.

⁷ The fact that the first references to the Bubis go back only to the 19th century is due to the long period during which the island was abandoned between its discovery and when colonization began. In 1472, the Portuguese subject Fernando do Póo discovered the Island of Bioko, but, due to its supposed unhealthiness for Europeans and the hostility of its inhabitants, the Portuguese paralyzed all attempts to colonize the island. Three centuries afterwards, in 1777, the island was ceded by Portugal in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, becoming dependent on Spain. Although descriptions of the island previous to the 19th century do exist (Silveira [1772] 1959, Varela Ulloa 1780), including comments on the inhabitants, the first data of interest on the Bubi ethnic group do not appear until the 19th century. The accounts of expeditions and missionaries who arrived soon after the city of Clarence (today, Malabo) was founded in 1827 provide this information. Likewise, the writings of Spanish missionaries such as Usera y Alarcón (1848), Father Juanola (1888), and civil servants of the Colonial Government, Sorela (1888) and Navarro (1888), should be highlighted. These last three authors, and, to a lesser extent, the Polish expeditionary Janikowski (1887) are the ones who provide the most precise information on the political chiefdoms and on Bubi military organization at that moment.

We find the first description of the northern Bubis in the diaries of the English Baptist John Clarke (1841.) Expedition members Allen and Thomson (1848) , Thomson (1850) and Hutchinson (1858) also provide information on the Bubis from their sojourns on the island,

island were the English who, in 1827, founded the city of Clarence (today Malabo) on the northern end of the island.⁸ The Spanish government did not start to send expeditions to the island until the 1840s. It was a decade later when Spain started colonization with a view to permanence, based on the first Claretian missionaries, the leaders in the evangelization of the island and also of its colonization during the 19th century.

It is evident that Bioko's abrupt topography, with its orographic barriers, not only made contact with foreign populations difficult, but also favored certain isolation among the settlements of the different Bubi migratory groups that arrived to the island; this isolation even produced different Bubi dialects that persist today.⁹ The situation of political and social dispersion of these villages and the few mutual relations that they maintained seemed to be evident when Allen and Thomson (1848: 195) visited the island in 1841. They noted the lack of understanding between the northern and the southern villages when they observed, for example, that clay pots were traded using sign language. So when communication was established, it was exclusively for commercial purposes.

4. CONFRONTATIONS

With the founding of Clarence in 1827, the English navy used the city as a base to control and suppress the slave trade. Once the slave boats were captured, the merchandise was confiscated and many of the slaves were liberated on the island. In this way, they populated the northern part of the island with a Creole population of *Krumans*, workers from the *Kru Coast* (Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast), and with freedmen brought from the Gold Coast (Ghana), Pepper Coast (Liberia), Oil Rivers (Nigeria) and *Río dos Camaroes* (Cameroon), whose

where they arrived during the Niger River expeditions. Valero y Belenguer (1891, 1892) relates some Bubi customs in detail, and the missionary Coll (1899) gives special attention, in his memoirs, to Bubi traditions related to religious beliefs. Their positive attitude toward the natives stands out in the works of these two authors, together with the work of Garibaldi (1891), Valdés Infante (1898) and Abate (1901), in contrast to the dominant criteria of contemporary publications. Among this group of 19th-century publications, two very relevant works appear, which can be considered to be the first ethnographies of Bubi culture: Baumann (1887) and Aymemí ([1894] 1942; 1922.) It was in the 20th century that the most extensive work on Bubi culture, done by the German ethnographer Tessmann (1923), appeared.

⁸ The Spanish crown's lack of a colonization policy for the island led to the loss of real control to England.

⁹ Although the geographically closest dialects are very similar, the dialects of the south and the north are the ones that show the main differences, to the point that mutual comprehension becomes difficult. According to linguistic studies, Bubi is a language that split off from the main Bantu branch at a very early period. Vansina (1990) believes that the Bubi language could be a group of languages rather than a single language; this would, in part, be the result of the effect of borrowing from continental languages on the southern dialects.

descendants in Bioko Island were the so-called *Fernandinos*. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, this Creole population was the main actor in the colonization of the island's coast. Their main activity was commerce with the Bubis and with the European ships that reached the island.

In the beginning, the Bubis resigned themselves, skeptically, to accepting these settlements, since they had not, until then, needed to trade with foreigners, due to the limited technology with which they managed. According to an informant of Martín de Molino (1956: 12): “the inhabitants of Moka (southern part of the island) did not go to Ripotó (the city of the white people, referring to the city of Clarence), during the last century, because they were afraid of the foreigners and because of their enmity with the northern tribes”. Relations with these Creole populations were, then, quite distant and rather hostile; the Bubis never accepted their presence, but they did not expel them, either. Shortly afterwards, there began to be conflicts about land, with the new colonists demanding more and more. In addition, the Creole populations disputed among themselves the function of intermediaries between the natives and the Europeans, provoking numerous confrontations known as the Lubá Wars. The first conflict took place in 1841, with the coastal Bubis confronted by the *Krumans*, who expanded throughout the southwest of the island and supplanted the Bubis in the fishing business. The *Krumans* committed continuous outrages against the Bubis, demolishing their villages. Commerce was marked by the *Krumans*' violence and abuse; in addition, the Bubi women who had been repudiated as adulteresses sought refuge among them (Clarke 1841: 429 in Sundiata 1994). The Second Lubá War lasted from 1845 to 1848. During the first stage, the *Fernandinos* became allies of the Bubis in order to supplant the *Krumans*, who finally lost control of commerce. Later, the *Fernandinos* fought against the Bubis, managing to extend their market all along the western coast.¹⁰

5. A DECENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND DISPERSED CLANS

Among the Bubis, as in many other African societies, the tales of how villages were founded are, basically, tales of wars and escapes. In the narrations that we gathered from the informants on the origin of their *loka* (patriclan), mythical explanations are mixed with historical events such as the continuous wars and fighting among the different Bubi villages, attested to in explorers' and

¹⁰ Mary Kingsley wrote the following about the *Fernandinos*: commerce on the island depends on them, they are the intermediaries between the native producers and the European buyers, their trading posts are disseminated along the bays of the entire coast (Kingsley 1897: 71). The *Fernandinos* little by little reached a high economic position (Lynn 1984) and constituted an élite that stood out above the rest of the native population, above the Nigerians, the Fang, and the rest of the immigrants on the island. In time, they came to have a certain influence over the island's social, political, and cultural life, up to its independence in 1969.

missionaries' descriptions¹¹. The majority of the wars took place between neighboring regions; on occasion, several regions accepted the authority of a single, very prestigious chief. Confrontations between Bubis who lived in distant territories were less frequent (Valero y Berenguer 1892; Allen & Thomson 1848). Aymemí (1894) tells how the victors of the battles imposed the tribute of a certain number of maidens each year.

The Baptist missionary J. Clarke, while traveling around the island between 1841 and 1846 to prepare a map of the villages, witnessed the wars in the north and the east of the island and the continuous population movements resulting from them.¹² In the midst of this situation of generalized warfare, Clarke had news of a concentration of 28 chiefs from three regions meeting to achieve peace for their peoples. Clarke himself gives us a good example illustrating one of these war episodes, in which one of the island's southern villages was displaced, in the following account:

... Bokope, chief of both Bolokos, that occupy the region between the two bays [Riaba (to the east) and Luba (to the west)], was friendly and, after listening to us, told us the story of the most recent wars that he and his people had suffered. They were expelled from one place to another, until they finally found a fertile place where no one seemed to want to abuse them or bother them. The origin of the conflict was the following: he and his group formed a small *buala*¹³ on one of the mountains of Upper Biappa [Valley of Moka]. He did not receive the privilege of *loetta* [chief] because the previous *buala*, to whom he had paid enough to have acquired the right to be chief, did not want to let him. There was nothing for it but to declare war and they were defeated. They fled to the small district of Biepepe [on the eastern part of the island] and lived there for some years. Afterwards the *Krumans* came and everyone had to flee from this area, their village was destroyed, their goats stolen, and their yams uprooted. Finally, the people in Upper Biappa acknowledged their rights and granted him the title of *loetta*, allowing them to occupy the territory near Boloko by the ocean (in Martín del Molino 1993: 196).

¹¹ These reconstructions in which myth and history coincide in time remit to the idea of archetype in Mircea Eliade (2001), the adaptations and connections between events and what people think about how these events happened.

¹² The inhabitants of the Baney district expelled the Basaleboko, and afterwards, the Basaleboko confronted the Bakake who, in turn, did the same with the Billelipa. The Billelipa moved their confrontations to the south against the Barriobata, who had been expelled from the Bantabaré district. In the western part of the island there was also fighting between the Batoicopo and the Batete (in Martín del Molino 1993: 196).

¹³ *Buala* were political-war societies whose members were recruited according to age or generation, and the person who was to govern was elected from among these members.

Judging from writings from before the reunification of the towns, there were some settlements that grouped together various patriclans, since references to large groups situated in the same place appear. Similarly, there were settlements made up solely of one patriclan, as the texts also speak of numerous very small and disperse communities. When various patriclans emigrated, they all settled relatively close, around one patriclan, this being the one that dominated the others, either by simply taking on the responsibility or by force:

... At the end of 1918, the chiefs of the two sections of Basakato, Borikó and Patoma, and the chief of Basupú, named Bobonaní, met and decided to concentrate the three villages into one, choosing the site of present-day Basakato which was already more important than the others. (Pujadas 1968: 295)

In the mythical explanations about how conflicts broke out and how migrations developed, the legends narrate that each migration was directed by a legendary hero, today considered the founder of the new settlement, who was guided by a spirit to a suitable place. This spirit entrusted different functions to each of the groups involved in the migration, thus originating the specialization of the patriclans.¹⁵

A woman narrated the history of her village, East Basakato, led by her grandfather (referring to a distant ancestor), as follows:

...they say that my grandfather lived in a settlement behind the river, a small area, but he had a very big group. After the Bubi war was over, they couldn't stand to see each other. One day, while he was fishing, he called to my mother's people [referring to the matriclans that their women belonged to] to leave and look for a place where they could live. It was a single village, and an animal separated them, and that's how my village was started. They went to the spirit of his tribe named *Poaicotó*, and it told them that it would send them an animal that lives under the ground, the *chucuchucu* 'porcupine'

They were to follow it and wherever it stopped to go down underground, that's where they should stay. These were the Balosobe, my grandfather's people, [the

¹⁵ All the Bubi patriclans are, in turn, divided into subpatriclans with different social ranking, which demonstrates the existence in the past of a very structured internal social hierarchy. On the other hand, the meanings of the names in the patriclans show their functional character in the past and their importance in the social structure. In general, these names refer to jobs (fishermen, hunters) or are associated with ritual functions (inaugurating or concluding ceremonies, blessing the inauguration of a house, curing evil, crowning chiefs). In other cases, they explicitly allude to the social and hierarchical organization (landowners, servants of the chiefs, or members of the monarchy. (Fernández 1999) This link between functions and clans, which we find in greater or lesser force at present, is especially revealing for understanding the socio-political and religious organization of the past. The specialization and hierarchy of the patriclans also appears in the mythical tales that narrate the fusions and splits of the patriclans.

patriclan]. That's how all these lands and forests came to be ours, belonging to the Balosobe, shared out among the brothers.

The legend of another village, Batoicopo (on the east coast), originates in Batete (on the south coast).¹⁶ An informant told me the following story:

Tee, the founding spirit of this place called Batete, went with a few tribes and when it arrived at Batoicopo, it made a cave, brought some families, some related and others not related, [referring to lineages and patriclans]. It invited all the spirits of the island to tell them that its village had multiplied. The women cooked and when it was time to share things out, they decided that this spirit's lineage would be the host and be in charge of watching over the ceremonies. But the host was a Boterribo (an important type of spirit) and said: the Ribo Boo [a subpatriclan], will be inferiors of the Bola bari paalo [a patriclan], they will serve the food at the feasts, and the Bakeé [a subpatriclan] of the Bola Bari Paalo are the chiefs. That is how he formed the other *loka*, which are also in Basupú and in Baloeri. And they all come from the Teé spirit.

These struggles for dominance among the Bubi villages lasted until the end of the 19th century. According to Sundiata (1994: 510), this time period coincides with the emergence of a kingdom in the Valley of *Moka* (the southern part of the island). At this time, the Spaniards were timidly initiating their expansion to control the colony, and this is when the authority that King *Moka* had over all the southern region of the island came to be known. From this moment on, transcendental changes occurred in Bubi political and social structures. The evolution of what has been called the Bubi monarchy deserves special attention because of the important role it had in native political resistance to the colonial government.

6. A SINGLE CHIEFDOM: THE BEGINNING OF A MONARCHY

According to the oral tradition collected by Martín del Molino (1962; 1993: 165), dealing with this period for which there are no historical references, the monarchy arrived with the last migration to the Island of Bioko under a chief called Muametó, in the mountainous interior region in the southern part of the island (in the Valley of Moka), previously called Riabba, the region where the Abba, (or high priest) resided. In this way, the two great centers of power, religious and political, became concentrated in the same place. It was precisely in this region where the centralization of the chiefdoms that were dispersed throughout the island began. The stories about the first two dynasties that governed, the Babuma and the Bapolo dynasties, tell that their descendants lost their status, due to the numerous alliances they had forged with people who did

¹⁶ Going back to Clarke, he included the war between Batete and Batoicopo in his list.

not belong to the monarchy; they were forced to transfer their spiritual authority to the present-day dynasty, the Bagitari (Martín del Molino 1962) also resided in a village Ribiri (today the village center) in Moka's Valley). Along with the Bagitari there was a second lower-ranking dynasty, the Barío-baké dynasty that was likewise situated in the Valley of Moka¹⁷. In the 19th century, the Bagitari spread throughout the Riabba region, scattering throughout all the southern villages and even establishing themselves in some of the most northern villages on the western coast of the island, such as Batoicopo.

The rest of the villages of the southern area were each governed by a *mochucu* (chief) designated by the king himself and who also had to belong to the monarchy. These *mochucus* had more authority than the *mochucus* of the rest of the patrilineal clans of the village where they were assigned. In this way, the king had other places under his control and, at the same time, he kept the possible candidates to the throne, which could represent a threat to the throne at conflictive moments, at a distance. The *mochucus* could govern not only in the town, which was made up of a group of villages, but also over the region that grouped together a series of nearby towns. As for the towns in the northern part of the island, there were also *botucus*,¹⁸ but it is interesting to point out that they did not belong to the monarchy nor were they appointed by the king. In each village, the chief of the patrilineal clan that was highest in the hierarchy governed.

We cannot specify the period of the first reigns or the links existing among them. The first reference to a king appears in J. Clarke's diary (1841): with the news of the existence of a king who in 1845 governed the southern region. The different authors do not agree about this period, for which there are hardly any historical references about Bubi socio-political structure.¹⁹ What does seem to be true is that Moka was already reigning around 1870, because the Methodist missionaries already mention his existence and their unfruitful attempts to meet him (Martín del Molino 1993).²⁰

¹⁷ Both dynasties are colloquially known as Mókata and Bioko dynasties, respectively. These names correspond to the two most significant monarchs of each dynasty.

¹⁸ *Mochucu* or chief in the northern dialect.

¹⁹ Martín del Molino (1993: 220) has reconstructed the following chronology: in 1845, Lupoá reigned, and he was succeeded by Moadyabitá, Sebaocó, and Mókata. In a previous reference (1962), this same author omitted Sebaocó and established exact dates for the reigns of Moadyabitá (1860–75) and Mókata (1875–99.) Janikowski (1887) states that Lorite was Mókata's predecessor. Pujadas (1968: 263) even says that Mókata was Lorite's, not Sebaocó's, nephew, thus situating Mókata's reign from 1848 to 1898. Vansina (1990: 144) places this reign even earlier, from 1835 to 1845, based on the legend that Mokató died when he was a hundred years old.

²⁰ The succession to the monarchy presents, in practice, great complexity. In addition, the contradictions in the existing documents and in the information collected make it tremendously difficult to analyze the time between the reigns. The links between the monarchs are practically unknown, nor do the oral genealogies clear up the doubts about the line of succession. The main difficulty for explaining the succession derives from the ritual descent between the monarchs, that is, finding out who was the legal pater of each king (his

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The following table shows the chronology, over approximately a century, of the reigning monarchs and of the princes who were never crowned. In the main Mókata dynasty, I was given one chronology that went back to eight reigns (See table 1: from Lupoá to Oriche) and a period of rule by a final successor who was never crowned (Francisco Malabo). In the second Bioko dynasty, there were three reigns (from Roomo to Batajolo) and three periods of rule (from Mijero to F. Oki) with no crowning because, just like in the first dynasty, the final successors were never crowned. The chieftains or *mochucu* who belonged to the monarchy and were governing in southern villages are also included in the table (from Moyamueto to Msocop). The table shows, as well, the movement of two chiefs (Malabo y Nicolás Bioko) from their villages to the kings' residence in Moka's Valley when they were crowned as kings. But Nicolás Bioko, who was supposed to be the King of the second dynasty, was never actually crowned.²¹

<u>VALLEY OF MOKA</u>		<u>OTHER VILLAGES</u>
<u>MALABO (village)</u> (kings Dynasty I)	<u>BIOKO (village)</u> (kings Dynasty II)	<u>Chiefs</u>
Lupoá –1845		
Moadyabita 1860–1875		
Sebaoco / Lorite		Moyamueto (Village:UREKA)
Mókata 1875–1899	Roomo	Mahoe -1888- (RUCHE), Lobete -1890- (BATOICOPO) y Malabo (BOME)
Sas Ebuera 1899–1904		
Malabo 1904–1937	Silvestre Bioko (or “Wosara” –1944)	Epula (BATETE), Eopi (BATOICOPO), Yube (BOCORICHO), Taburi (MBORI), Sibelo (BOCOCO), Sommo (MOERI) Nicolas Bioko (BOME)
Alorabi 1937–1943		
Oriche 1943–1952	Batajolo	
Francisco Malabo 1982–2001	Mijero –1980	Msocop (BOME)
	Nicolás Bioko 1980–1984	
	Felipe Oki 1986-	

patriclan), as a starting point for contrasting the norm of succession in the actual practice of the reigns.

²¹ When, after the death of a king, it was necessary to choose the successor to the throne, all the possible candidates who fulfilled the requirements for sitting on the throne left the villages where they lived, dispersed, to meet in the Valley of *Moka*. The final choice took place once the ancestors had been consulted in the oracle by means of the monarchy's priests. The crowned king then had to move to the Valley of *Moka* to live.

7. MOKA'S REIGN: RESISTING TO THE ENCOUNTER

In the second half of the 19th century, the difficulties that Spain faced for colonizing its possessions derived, to a great extent, from ignorance about the territories. The colonization process was characterized by a precarious political and administrative organization, because of which Spain's sovereignty, on the continent as well as on the island, was only acknowledged by the coastal villages, while "...among the chiefs of the interior, the idea that existed was that they were completely independent..." (Barrera 1907). According to Sorela (1888), "there must have been a social evolution in the interior that had, as its consequence, the different states that had become confederated, acknowledging Moka's authority as the incontrovertible chief". Abate (1901) also states that two governments existed on the island: the Spanish one, with jurisdiction in Santa Isabel, which had sovereignty over the foreign colonists in the areas of the coast that were under their control, and the indigenous government, with jurisdiction in Riabba, Valley of Moka), with its subjects being the rest of the native population. The mochucu Moka had more power and influence over the Bubi population than the Spanish governor (Baumann 1887). In Baumann's opinion, the centralizing politics that Moka practiced was positive for the Bubis, because he also realized the danger that contact with the whites could entail. Moka also considered himself to be chief of all the foreigners who arrived to the island, and their permission to stay was a concession that he made to them, but he did not acknowledge Spanish authority, since he considered them "to be fish that cannot own land and should go back to their ships" (Baumann 1888: 104). He even went so far as to forbid the Bubis to offer hospitality or provisions to any foreigner who approached his domains, which extended to the towns of Bao and Bantabaré (Baumann 1887).

The king should never leave his throne, just like the Abba, given his status. They were both required to remain in their residences and stay distant and inaccessible. The Valley of Moka itself, where they both lived in seclusion, was hard to access. According to Garibali (1891) and Valero (1892), Moka had never seen the ocean nor could he eat salt. It was even hard for the natives to see him and the legend spread that he would die if he saw a European (Baumann 1888: 103). This isolation and mystery that was created around Moka, so frequent in the figure of the big men to reinforce their image as great chiefs, did not prevent him from either finding out about everything that occurred in his domains or from collecting the tributes he demanded. The second dynasty's function, as the king's emissaries, consisted of collecting these tributes that they later handed over to the king who, in exchange, guaranteed protection and order. Likewise, they inform to the king about everything that happened. . According to Aymemí (1943), the subjects regularly paid the *roka*, a contribution that could be made in species, in money, or in work. As Baumann (1888: 106) reports, even in the conflicts and witchcraft accusations in which guilt was not

determined, Moka collected part of the compensation that the entire village had to pay.

In the processes of centralization, as in the Bubi case, when authority relations extend beyond the local group, Cohen (1973) states that the result is always the same: there is a movement from disperse chiefdoms to a centralized chiefdom in which one clan (or a lineage of the clan) becomes a royal clan (or a royal lineage), while the other lineages form a bureaucracy that helps to resolve political matters. In the Bubi case, for example, this was carried out, as I have described, by the second dynasty of the *Bioko*.

One of the keys that helped reinforce Moka's control over the chiefs of other villages was his military superiority. Moka set up the *lujúa* to control all of the southern towns and put an end to the continuous fighting among them. Authors that were contemporaries of Moka, such as Navarro (1888), defined this institution as an armed body that traveled from town to town to apply the law, imposing justice and collecting tributes at certain times of the year. This judicial militia was made up of the *baribidi*, the most veteran group of the Bubi armed forces. Below these, the second military rank consisted of the *basalicopo*, and finally, there was the *baricaná*, the troop of young men (Abate 1901. Sorela 1888). Each of these forces formed a *boala* or age group. The king possessed the legitimate authority and granted optional power to the institution of the *boala* (Janikowski 1887). These political-war societies of the *buala*, in addition to judging and executing sentences in the towns, were in charge of the government and defense of each region (Martín del Molino 1989: 485). According to Martín García (1968), each tribe (referring to the clans) was organized in four public societies that corresponded to four generations, which competed among themselves with games, songs, and dances, to demonstrate their power and prestige, but only one of which governed.²²

²² The chief of this governing society was the *boabí* and the main ritual object of the *buala* was the *lobedde*, a 20-cm clay boat. The villages were known by the name of the governing *buala*; for example, the present-day towns of Batoicopo, Bokoricho, Bahó, and Belebú are names of *bualas*. Each man belonged, from birth, to a *buala* according to his generation. When the members of the governing *buala* reached old age, they handed their power over to the *buala* of the following generation, this generation being made up completely of individuals whose fathers had belonged to the previous *buala*. During the days that the transition lasted, disorder reigned: robberies and assassinations were committed, women were raped, the huts where cult was rendered to the outgoing *buala* were burned, and their *lobedde* was thrown off a cliff. According to Martín del Molino (1989), each *buala* considered itself to be the offspring of its predecessor *buala* and they lasted approximately 40 years. Based on this, the author has reconstructed a sequential chronology of the *buala* of the town of Moka, according to the order of appearance of each society: Babiáomá (previous to 1600), Bao (1600–1640), Balobedde (1640–1680), Beolé (1680–1720), Bamotedde (1720–1760), Balobicho (1760–1800), Badya (1800–1840), Barilaroote (1840–1924) and Bidya (1924 to the sixties.) The last king, named Oriche, should have inaugurated the following Bidyá *boala*, but he did not do so. Some of these *bualas* are, at present, venerated as spirit societies, especially the Babiáomá, because among them, the Batórichi, according to tradition, were the

The Bagitari dynasty belonged to the Barilaroote boala, which was the one governing at that moment. These societies were supra-clan groups, as their members belonged to any of the patrilineal clans (what Martín del Molino called the *rijata* or lineage).

Moka also reinforced the institutions related to justice which, together with the *lujúa* and their *buala*, played a key role in the expansion and control of power and, therefore, in centralization.²³ Thus, in order to handle justice procedures more precisely, Moka fully developed a form of government that had only been incipient up to then, based on a military force of noble warriors and an assembly also made up of nobles.

As the years went by, the obscurantism that had surrounded King Moka was dispelled. He was aware of the missionaries' arrival to the Bay of Concepción (today Riaba, on the eastern side of the island) and kept watch on them until he finally gave in and agreed to let the Spaniards visit him. The first contact that he had with Europeans was in 1887 when the missionary Juanola, accompanied by the official Sorela and twenty-two *Krumans*, managed to get Moka to receive them. As Sorela (1888: 24), himself writes: "Governor Navarro proposed that I be in command of the expedition, with plans to try to uncover the mystery that surrounded Moka, as many missionaries had previously attempted to do without success." Juanola (1888: 64–68; 82–85 in Valero 1892 and in Bedate 1954) described Moka as follows:

His hat made of feathers was covered with a monkey skin; six hen skins with their feathers hung at his belt and two little antelope horns topped his hat. He was tall of stature, with gigantic, athletic muscles, a serene and vigorous expression, and with a thick but white beard. His neck, calves, and arms seemed to be wound all around with all the products of nature. His loincloth was a large skin from a wild animal similar to a monkey, the rest of his body that was visible was smeared with red-violet.

According to the report that Pujadas (1968: 258) gives, it was a friendly encounter:

The king in person came out to receive them, surrounded by children who ran away. Moka, addressing one of the interpreters, asked him: Why did you take so long to bring these friends to me I am Moka, friend of Spain. He made them go into his royal hut and there the Spanish retinue gave him the gifts they had brought: goats, rifles, gunpowder, cloth, and tobacco.

first ones to arrive at Baabba, today the Valley of Moka. The author states that the Molavochá and Bapolo clans, two matrilineal clans that we have recorded in Moka, derived from them.

²³ Baumann (1887) speaks of a court of chiefs who ended up accepting Moka as the highest authority for resolving conflicts. As Aymemí (1992) describes it, the chiefs had a consultational body without a vote in the final decision that was presided by the chief himself together with the high priest. The rest of the members of the body were: second, the *takabaal* or chief of the army, third, the *mochucu oboho*, representative of the nobility, fourth, the *korachó*, the head of the supreme court, fifth, the *buac*, in charge of taxes, the sixth, the *tchoko* in charge of security and, seventh, the *looba*, in charge of justice.

From that moment on, there was a series of meetings between King Moka and the missionaries, as well as Spanish explorers such as Valero y Belenguer (1892: 165). Although Moka continued to be invisible for the great majority of the population, some Spanish explorers, such as Valero (1892: 165) also managed to reach him. This author described him as follows:

One should note that the most outstanding characteristic of the great *mochucu* Moka is his goodness. He intends to speak Spanish, and the contrary qualities that a certain foreign explorer, who did not see him but felt his ire, has bestowed on him [he is probably referring to Baumann] are due to a confusion with Mado, the *mochucu* of the village of East Boloko or with Sas Ebuera, Moka's right-hand man, who received us very rudely, but Moka apologized and accepted our gifts willingly.

Moka's authority was extolled again and again by numerous authors: "...he had absolute domination over the lives of his subjects throughout the island and over the twenty-five big *mochucus* of the different regions. He created the *lujúa*, a troop made up of hundreds of men with Herculean strength" (Pujadas 1968). Tessmann (1923: 184) highlighted the great respect of the Bubi for their chiefs, but in particular for King Moka to whom, as they had informed him, they all owed fidelity and submission; the opposite was true for his successor Malabo, in whose reign everyone declared themselves to be small autonomous chiefs. Even after Moka's death, there were authors who continued to nourish his legend:

Each town is governed by a *cocoroko*²⁴ or *mochucu* who depends, in turn, on the great *cocoroko* named Moka who resides in the mountains, not allowing the Europeans or even the other *mochucus* to see him (Lucas de Barrés 1918: 6).

It is surprising that at that time, it was not known that Moka had been in contact with the Europeans for three decades and that he had died twenty years earlier. Even in the famous book by J. Frazer (1890: 210), *The Golden Bough*, we find the following quote that contributes to the legend of King Moka:

In the extinct crater of a volcano, closed in on all sides by luxuriant hillsides, are the scattered huts and yam fields of Riabba, the capital of the native king of Fernando Poo. This mysterious being lives in the heart of the crater, along with a harem of forty women, and they say his body is covered with old silver coins. Despite being a naked savage, he still has more influence on the island than the Spanish governor in Santa Isabel. He incarnates, more or less, the spirit of the Bubis or aboriginal inhabitants of the island. He has never seen the face of a white man and, according to the firm conviction of all the Bubis, the sight of a paleface would produce his instantaneous death. He cannot go to see the ocean; in truth, it is said that he has never seen it, not even from a distance, and that is

²⁴ This name, given to the native chiefs by the Spaniards, could be translated as great drinker, according to the notes of Janikowski (1887) and Lucas de Barres (1918: 7.) *Coroco* is a liquid made from an almost pure alcohol base.

why he has worn shackles on his legs all his life, in the twilight shadows of his hut. He has certainly never set foot on the beach and, with the exception of his musket and his knife, he uses nothing that comes from the white man; European cloth does not touch his person and he disdains tobacco, rum, and even salt.²⁵

Both the mission and the colonial government were very interested in controlling this parallel native political order. However, we must remember that political and religious interests did not always go together. During the first period of the colonization, there were some confrontations between the general governors, civil positions, and the Catholic mission for control and for the effective power, regarding two models of colonization: the civil model, more pragmatic, and the missionary model, which put its religious objectives first (see Negrín 1993).

At the end of Moka's reign, when only one decade had gone by since his first encounter with Europeans, missionaries introduced potato cultivation into the valley. This quickly facilitated the evangelizing mission. However, Moka remained steadfast in not allowing any missions to be established in the valley and in not sending the children to school. The following quote is illustrative enough:

In 1896, with the idea of lighting the torch of the gospel in this prohibited valley, Father Puente asked Moka for authorization to install a house for the missionaries. The apparent purpose: to plant potatoes. Moka gave them permission and lands. When harvest time came, the missionaries gave the king potatoes, and he found them very tasty; he asked them to make a large plantation for him, which the Claretians naturally were delighted to do. The harvest was a success and the king himself made them go down to Santa Isabel to sell them. Some said that Moka was already in his dotage because he preferred potatoes to yams and to taro. Those potato fields were the roads by which the faith arrived at Moka. (Pujadas 1968: 261)

Evangelizing the Valley of Moka was a colonial and missionary objective, and it would have happened one way or another, but the fact is that it began in 1896 thanks to the implantation of this tubercle which facilitated the conquest of the Valley. Moka widened his concessions to the Spaniards from the moment that the mission was established in the valley. From then on, the colonial government broke through and achieved political control of the Bubis during the following reign. King Moka's first encounter with the Spaniards, narrated by the missionary Juanola in previous paragraphs, contrasts with the following report by Pujadas (1968) on the last visit that Moka received in 1897, the visit of the

²⁵ This information gathered about Moka, in spite of being coetaneous with the personage, offers a mythicised and distorted image of this personage. There is no reference by anyone who saw him to the garments described in the quote, nor did he wear shackles; these were the carved and braided shell bracelets that Bubis with high hierarchical status wore on their waist and ankles.

General Governor. In this last report, some details of significant symbols can be noted that indicate the transfer of powers that had begun during that decade:

The king, with sufficient advance notice, prepared a reception for the visitors, the kind of reception only he could prepare. From the outskirts of the town to the palace of the *mochucu*, the street was lined with two long lines of Bubi warriors, daubed with red, with rifles and lances and holding buffalo-skin shields. They cheered for Spain. At the end was the aged King Moka, standing next to his throne made of tree trunks. He still looked arrogant and for the reception he had, naturally, put on his best finery: the two-point full-dress hat of a marine official and an old frock coat, but without the trousers. The monkey skin apron hung from his waist, and in his right hand he flaunted his staff of command. To his right was Abba Moote, high priest of the Bubi, with his paddle in his hand, emblem of his dignity; to his left, his first lieutenant, Sas Ebuera. The elderly counselors and the king's sixty wives crowded after him. The Spanish flag Moka had received as a gift waved over the palace door. After two days of conferences and after having exchanged the customary gifts and tightened the bonds between Spain and Moka, the visitors returned to Santa Isabel, not without the governor having granted the king permission to use gunpowder... That year, the English Methodist pastors presented themselves before the monarch requesting land for a mission, to which Moka responded that he had enough with the Spanish missionaries. (Pujadas 1968)

Two years later, on February 23, 1899, Moka died. A year after his death, Sas Ebuera, who had been Moka's first lieutenant, usurped the throne from the legitimate heir, Malabo, proclaiming himself the king. This leader's manifest mistrust of the Spaniards and of the missionaries, reported by the chroniclers of the period (Juanola 1888 and Valero 1892), drove him to rebel against the legitimate heir, Malabo, because of Malabo's excessively submissive attitude towards the colonial government (Buale 1988). During his brief four-year reign, Sas Ebuera even refused to collect the tributes, to regulate property according to the dictates of the colonial government, and to deliver the quota of labor requested to provide workers; for this, he was arrested and moved to Santa Isabel, the capital of the colony (today Malabo). He refused to eat for fear of being poisoned and weakened progressively, dying in 1904.

In 1904, the same year that Sas Ebuera died, Malabo was crowned legitimate heir. His reign was characterized by an opening up to the Spaniards and a good relationship with the missionaries, as well as a lack of leadership, a very limited sphere of power, and submission to colonial authority.

8. DISCUSSION OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN BIOKO AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Throughout the history the fusion and splitting of groups is a recurring phenomenon. Africa, in particular, is a good example of this, with many well-documented cases (Gluckman 1978, Sauthall 1953, Watson 1958). Generally, the explanations given to this have excessively focused on one single factor. A review of these arguments will help us to ascertain their validity for explaining the political processes of splitting and centralization that occurred on the Island of Bioko.

8.1 ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE SPLITTING OF THE CLANS AND THE DECENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT

According to Robert Carneiro's (1970) Circumscription Theory, splits happen when an unsustainable imbalance between resources and population density is produced. In this case, it is difficult to state that the dispersion strategies of Bubi clans, described for Bioko's Island in the 19th century, responded to problems derived from the proportions between population and resources. In the first place, the ground is very fertile; as for the demographic aspect, we cannot state, either, that the Bubi population increased enough to make the subsistence resources insufficient. It seems, rather, that the opposite occurred: the Bubi population suffered a progressive decrease since the end of the 19th century and continuing also during the colonization.²⁶

In my opinion, the Bioko political scenario at the time, with its independent chiefdoms, could be attributed to other causes:

- 1) The isolation among Bubi's settlements favored to remain chiefdoms dispersed for a longer time. However, these environmental conditions were not the decisive factor but just an additional one among others²⁷.

²⁶ The following estimates seem to indicate this, although the data must be considered orientative. Around 1841, Allen (1848), based on the proportion of inhabitants in the northern part of the island, estimates a total population of 15,000 to 20,000 inhabitants. In 1908, Governor Ramos Izquierdo (1912: 345) ordered a census of sixty villages and registered 5,200 inhabitants. However, Terán (1962) estimates for 1910 a population of 10,000 Bubis. Tessmann (1923) speaks of 6,800 Bubis compared to a total of 12,545 inhabitants on the island in 1913. The Bubi population decreased considerably due to the epidemics that immigrant workers and Europeans brought: yellow fever (in 1868), smallpox (in 1889), dysentery (in 1896), and trypanosomiasis brought by the Fang workers in the 20th century (Sundiata 1994.) The permanent labor deficit in the island's colonial agriculture intensified even more with the hiring of Liberian laborers between 1914 and 1927 and of Fang laborers in 1924.

²⁷ I differ from Vansina's (1990: 137) and Sundiata's (1994) idea that the Bubi isolation contributed to the exact opposite phenomenon: the appearance of the centralized Moka reign.

- 2) The political sphere of power relations was more important, however. We should remember that 19th century in Bioko was marked by the violence of the conflicts among the Bubi themselves and against the other African populations settled on the island. As a result of the internal struggles for leadership within the Bubi chiefdom; these underwent numerous splits, provoking what Barnes (1954) calls a “snowball social structure”: each split-off group and its new leader ended up acting as if it was an independent group with its own political organization, as happened during the Bubi migrations on the island. This panorama of decentralization was the previous situation to the political centralization that took place later, with the appearance of the monarchy.

8.2 ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE CENTRALIZATION OF THE CHIEFDOMS AND THE FORMATION OF A KINGDOM

The centralization of chiefdoms and the appearance of a kingdom, according to the most of the explanations given, happen either when there is an increase in wealth and power or when it is necessary an inner cohesion to defend against foreign intrusions. I do not think that the first argument applies in this case because according to the reports (Aymemí 1894) , even though King Moka possessed considerable wealth, other chiefs (such as Batete’s chief) did also and had even more spouses than the king.

On the contrary, the second argument: defense against foreigners, seems to be a workable explanation as one of the causes that promoted the unification and centralization processes. This statement helps us to understand why the process developed in that historical period. However, as war and insecurity had already been common in earlier time, that argument is not sufficient to explain other questions that I stated at the beginning: Why did the kingdom appear only in that region? And why was the figure of Moka able to materialize?

Analyzing these three variables (time, space and person) together, we can better understand which circumstances were decisive in the rise of the Bubi kingdom:

- 1) As I have pointed out, the insecurity and threat to which the Bubis were exposed at this time, in addition to their situation as a minority population on the island, made it even more necessary for them to unite and submit to a single leader. The way that events developed during the period of centralization leads us to believe that Moka’s attitude was not a strategy of attack, but rather a strategy of internal reorganization and resistance to the double invasion of Africans merchants and colonists. There is nothing to indicate that he had any intention of standing up to them and expelling them from the island in order to take control of commerce himself. In fact, the Bubi population never showed any

interest in establishing contact or in commerce with foreigners. The few Bubi settlements located in the most accessible areas on the coast were fishing ones and the exchanges that they carried out were minimal considering the multiple commercial possibilities that these settlements offered then. The result was that the foreign control of commerce on the coast weakened Bubi socio-political structure and radically remodeled Bubi society.

- 2) The valley of Moka, where centralization started, was an emblematic place not only because it was the political center where the monarchy lived, but also because it was the religious center where the Abba, the maximum religious authority, lived as well. He was the guardian of the sacred fire that represented the entire society's welfare. Moka's leadership was not based on wealth but on spiritual legitimacy and the Abba, as Sundiata (1994) states, reinforced this sacred dimension of the Bubi monarchy.
- 3) Finally, what differentiated Moka from other possible leaders who similarly attempted to centralize power, was that he also managed to implant new and effective military and judicial institutions, precursors of a centralized bureaucracy. Moka knew how to take advantage of and to reinforce the elaborate social stratification system that the Bubis already had. On the other hand, as Sundiata (1994) claims, in order for such a process to be carried out, the population must be ready to accept as desirable the idea of a supreme chiefdom. On Bioko it took place when a chiefdom had enough power to force the population to accept it.

Nevertheless, I believe that centralization would not have endured for long, even if Bubi monarchy would have not run into the colonial government, because the threat of fragmentation was already evident during the following reign. As Cohen (1973) says about these societies whose centralized chiefdoms are at constant risk, they are para-state formations more than (incipient) states. In fact, during Moka's reign, centralization was never complete (Sundiata [1994] and Vansina [1990]). The island never came to be totally governed by a single chief; as Clark (1841: 463–67 in Martín del Molino 1993) observed, "each village had its own chief and several villages formed a district headed by a chief... up to eighteen districts were counted on the island... There were also chiefdoms over several districts that were grouped together in areas or regions". The fact that Moka managed to impose peace on all of them does not mean that he enjoyed absolute power over the entire island. Thus, Aymemí (1894: 66), for example, speaks of chiefs in the plural," who arbitrarily and despotically dominated their subjects, especially the *babala*, a social class treated almost like slaves and from which absolute obedience was required". The *botucu* of the town of Rebola, the most powerful chief of the northern region, is an example of this, because although he acknowledged Moka's superiority and had great respect for him, he maintained authority over his villages (Navarro 1888).

The fact is that in Bioko culminated the formation of a kingdom that had emerged in parallel to the colonizing process and ended, politically, with the definitive expansion of colonialism. Since that time, the Bubi monarchy continued more as a symbolic institution than a political one.

9. CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the 19th century, the transition from a local structure of dispersed chiefdoms into a centralized chiefdom that culminated in the formation of a kingdom slowed down colonial expansion on the Island of Bioko. The initial situation, before this process, was one of continuous internal conflicts that favoured this disperse structure and, therefore, weakened the capacity to react to the expansion of other African populations settled on the island. The factors that came together to make this process possible can be summarized as:

- Colonial expansion from north to south on the island became a new threat added to the wear and tear from the aforementioned conflicts.
- In order to deal with this situation, it was necessary and urgent a change in the Bubi people's government that could end the internal conflicts and make then, common cause against foreigners.
- This moment coincides with a strong chiefdom, the rule of King Moka, who carries out the change in government: he established the *lujúa* (a military institution of control, repression, and taxing) and submitted the Bubi people to his authority in exchange for protection. He centralized the power.
- This monarch lives in the Valley of Riabba (later known as the Valley of Moka) together with the Abba or spiritual leader, a figure who legitimizes the sacred dimension of the royal power, thus strengthening the king's leadership. This place turns into a nucleus of power and resistance from which they managed to carry out incursions and slow down the contact with the Spaniards.

All too frequently, colonial history hardly includes local history, as if the colonized people had never had or shown any capacity to respond. The Bubi people, like any other African people, had their own development and initiative in the history of their own particular colonial encounter. Thus, we should not attribute excessive importance to the transforming power of western colonial domination because, as Gledhill (2000: 113) points out, this could constitute another way of denying the role of the "others" in history.

In this text, I have tried to present, on one hand, the influence that colonial contact doubtless had, but also, the influence that previous contact with the African populations settled on the island had also had. On the other hand, I want to emphasize the influence that the Bubi's own internal situation had along the

process and, finally, I have pointed out the difficulties and resistances that the Bubis created for evangelization and Spanish colonization.

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