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The Clothes of Extraversion

Circulation, Consumption and Power in Equatorial Guinea

Alba Valenciano-Mañé



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PhD Thesis



Programa 'Societat i cultura: història, antropologia, art i patrimoni'

Departament d'Antropologia social I història d'Àfrica i Amèrica

Facultat de Geografia i Història, Universitat de Barcelona

Director: Dr. Josep Martí i Pérez (CSIC-IMF)

Tutor: Dra. Cristina Larrea Killinger (UB)

Barcelona, September 2017



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Image of the cover: Plaza Ewaiso (Malabo) during the celebration of the International Women's Day in 2010. Author: Francesca Bayre.

A l'Àngels i a la Berta.

*Ya Tía Lola,
que estará siempre en mi Bata.*

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Abstract

This thesis is about grassroots strategies of material and political extraversion. It is an ethnography of the provisioning of clothing goods in Equatorial Guinea and it bridges the everyday lives of ordinary people with issues related to political economy and power configurations. Based on more than twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, mainly localised at Malabo's principal marketplace but also complementarily carried out in Spain, it describes the strategies Guineans engage with in order to generate livelihoods but also to be able to make material statements about their self-worth in a context of uncertainty and precariousness.

The exploitation of off-shore oil wells in the mid-nineties has provided an injection of resources to a regime that has been able to consolidate its power and an outside-oriented economy. While the extraversion strategies of the political elite are known and described in the political economic analyses of the country's contemporary situation, studies about how ordinary Guineans deal and engage with this extravert system, an intended contribution of this thesis, are practically non-existent. The protagonists of my ethnography are market women, who have made from clothing provisioning both their source of livelihood and also their mechanism for social inclusion and political participation.

The argument begins with a historical account, showing how rentist capitalism and extraversion strategies are not a recent phenomenon related to oil exploitation but have a longer trajectory in Equatorial Guinea. This process has signified the production of specific idioms for wealth and power that are deeply gendered and that make comment upon differential access to foreign rents and goods. These understandings of wealth and power are also associated with particular ideas about space that draw upon specific substantial and imagined geographies. These geographies are reproduced in the provisioning and valuation of foreign goods, but also by keeping trading routes and networks, which I describe for the two main categories of clothing goods consumed in Equatorial Guinea. By accessing valuable geographies and managing rents, market women manage to contest gender roles,

reach certain levels of public participation and generate political debates. This participation, however, is co-opted by the elite and more specifically by the first lady who, through a non-profit organisation, offers her protection to female petty traders in exchange for political support. The ethnography of the everyday of these women reveals how, by engaging with rent managing strategies and by connecting with the powerful elite market, they are able to source their households. However, their capacity to generate income, to make political claims, and to gain access to certain levels of power is limited by a hierarchy that is ultimately maintained by such extraversion strategies.

The dissertation contributes to debates within economic and political anthropology surrounding rentist capitalism and extraversion, but also about markets and consumption. While it questions *extraversion* as totalizing theory, and as a particularity of African states and elites, it recovers it as a concept useful to explain processes of active material and political dependency.

Keywords: provisioning, clothing, circulation, consumption, power, Equatorial Guinea, extraversion

Resumen

Esta tesis presenta una etnografía del aprovisionamiento de productos textiles en Guinea Ecuatorial, vincula la vida cotidiana de la gente común con cuestiones relacionadas con la economía política y las configuraciones de poder. Basada en más de doce meses de trabajo de campo etnográfico localizado en el mercado principal de Malabo, pero también complementario en España (Madrid y Elche), describe estrategias ingenidas por las guineanas para generar medios de vida, pero también para hacer declaraciones materiales sobre su valía personal en un contexto de incertidumbre y precariedad.

La explotación de pozos petrolíferos off-shore a mediados de los noventa ha proporcionado una inyección de recursos a un régimen que ha podido consolidar su poder y una economía orientada hacia el exterior. Mientras que las estrategias de extraversión de la élite política son conocidas y descritas en los análisis político-económicos de la situación contemporánea del país, prácticamente no existen estudios sobre cómo las guineanas corrientes se relacionan con este sistema extravertido. Las protagonistas de mi etnografía son las mujeres del mercado, que han hecho de la provisión de ropa su fuente de sustento, pero también su mecanismo para la inclusión social y la participación política.

El argumento comienza con un relato histórico que muestra cómo el capitalismo y las estrategias de extraversión rentistas no son un fenómeno reciente relacionado con la explotación petrolera sino que tienen una trayectoria más larga en Guinea Ecuatorial. Este recorrido histórico ha generado ideas particulares sobre el poder y la riqueza que tienen un componente de género importante y que dibujan unas geografías tanto imaginadas como sustanciales. Estas geografías se reproducen en el aprovisionamiento y valoración de mercancías extranjeras, pero también mediante el mantenimiento de rutas y redes comerciales, que describo para las dos principales categorías de artículos de prendas de vestir consumidos en Guinea Ecuatorial. Al acceder a geografías valiosas y gestionar rentas, las mujeres del mercado logran impugnar los roles de género, alcanzar ciertos niveles de participación pública y

generar debates políticos. Esta participación, sin embargo, es cooptada por la élite y más específicamente por la primera dama que, a través de una organización sin fines de lucro, ofrece su protección a las pequeñas comerciantes a cambio de apoyo político. La etnografía de la vida cotidiana de estas mujeres revela cómo, al comprometerse con las estrategias de gestión de rentas y al conectarse con la poderosa élite, son capaces de abastecer a sus hogares. Sin embargo, su capacidad para generar ingresos, hacer reivindicaciones políticas y acceder a ciertas cotas de poder está limitada por una jerarquía que las estrategias de extraversion sólo ayudan a mantener.

La tesis contribuye a los debates de antropología económica y política sobre el capitalismo y la extraversion rentistas, pero también sobre los mercados y el consumo. Si bien cuestiona la extraversion como teoría totalizadora y como particularidad de los estados y élites africanas, la recupera como un concepto útil para explicar los procesos de dependencia política y material.

Palabras clave: aprovisionamiento, ropa, circulación, consumo, poder, Guinea Ecuatorial, extraversion.

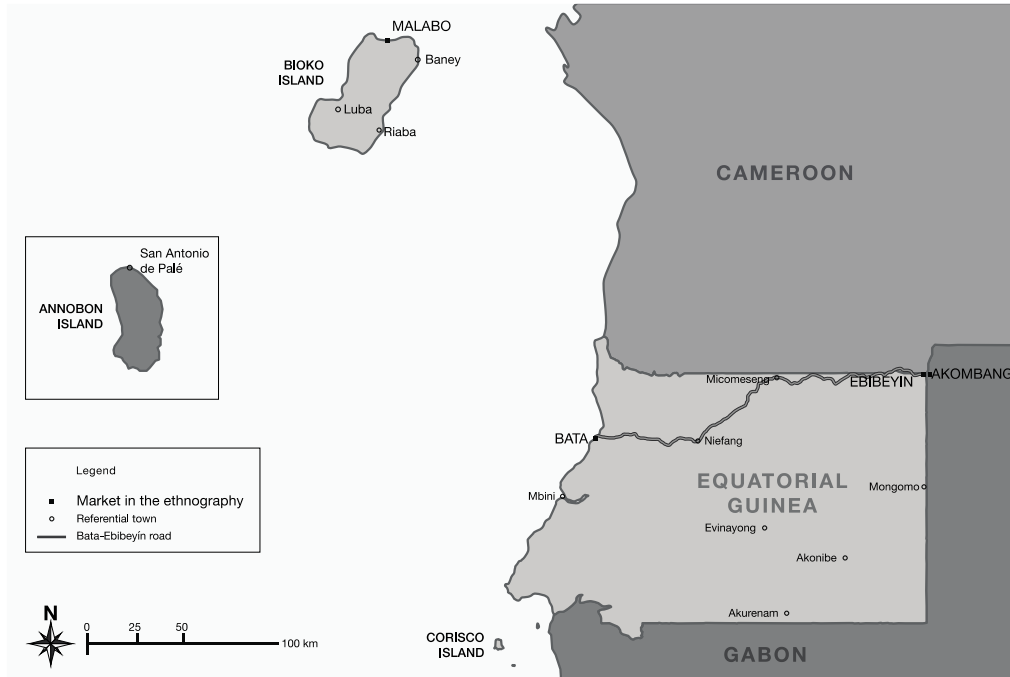


Figure 1 Equatorial Guinea with fieldwork sites

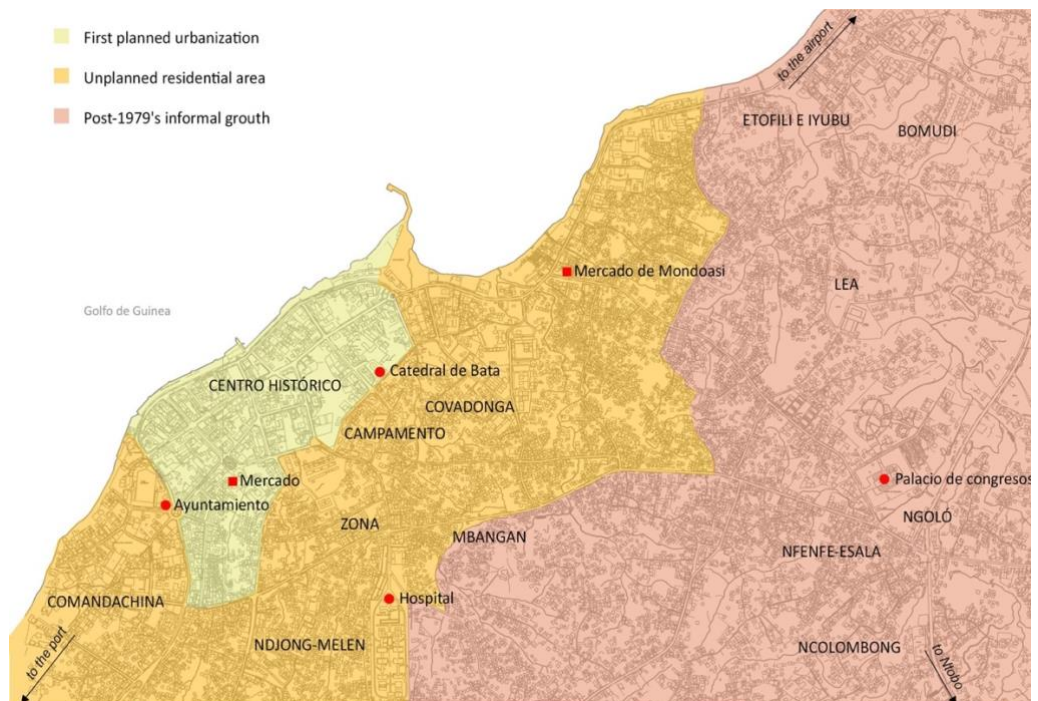


Figure 2 Bata, neighborhoods and marketplaces

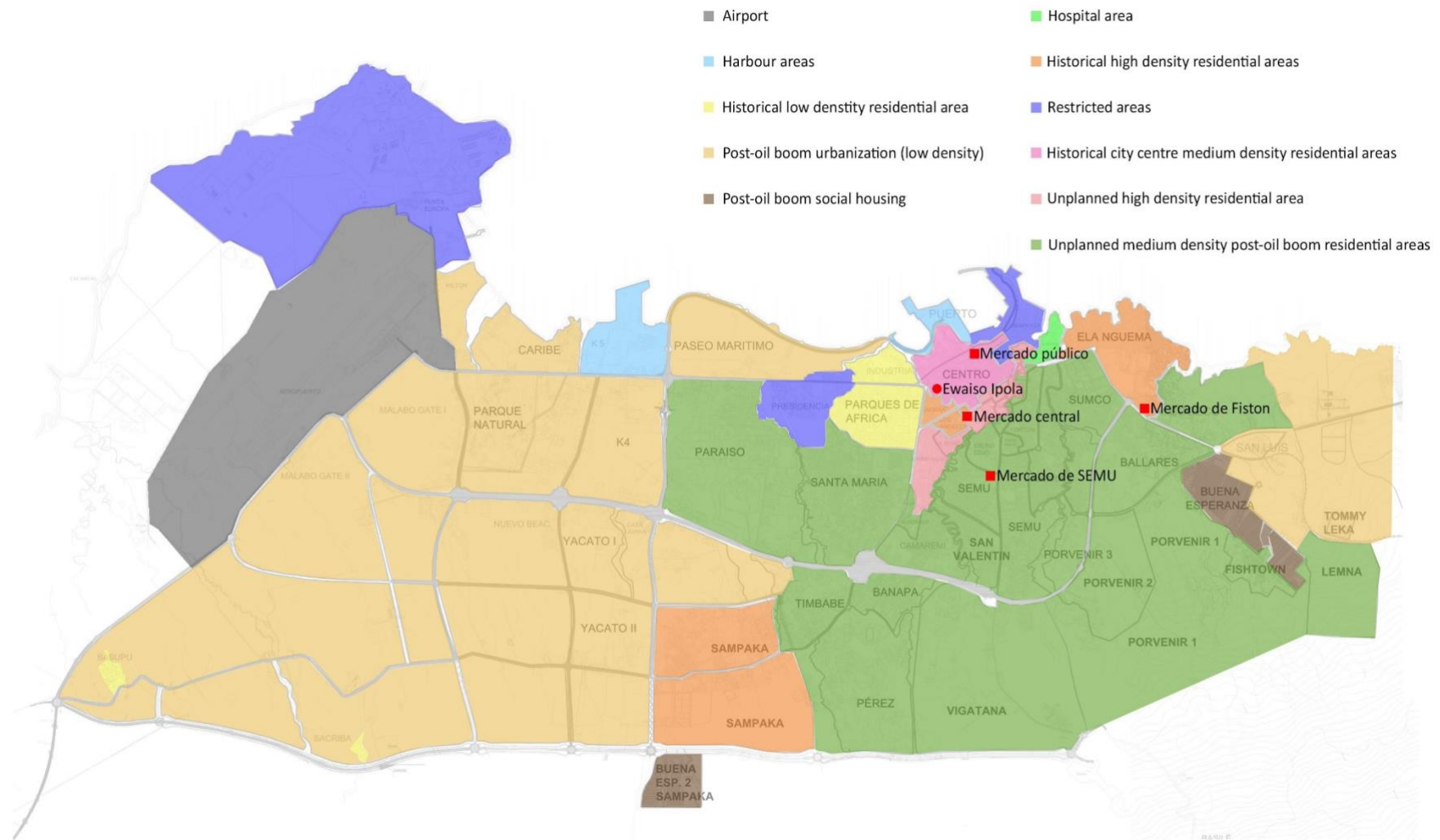


Figure 3 Malabo, neighborhoods and marketplaces

Acknowledgments

Mbamba menwíñ mene akúm

Good friends are wealth

This has been a long and hazardous journey! I started this project formally in the fall 2009 but it was somehow forged by the start of my relationship with Equatorial Guinea. It was 2006 when I first tried to visit the country, but I failed. I had just finished my undergraduate degree in History at the University of Barcelona and I was given the opportunity to attend a course organised by CEIBA, an academic NGO with an oral literature and history project. My trip had been funded with a grant from the *Institut Catalunya-Àfrica*, which had decided to support me with the intention of having a future involvement with one of the projects which CEIBA had in Bata. I traveled from Barcelona to Madrid and it was in front of the jet bridge leading to my plane to Malabo that I was told to return home. My visa, which was supposed to be waiting for me at Malabo's international airport, had not been issued and I could not travel to Equatorial Guinea. It was only little more than two years since the attempted coup d'état funded by Margaret Thatcher's son, only two years after the re-opening of the US Embassy in Malabo, and in a moment of especially tense diplomatic relationships with Spain. My first trip to Equatorial Guinea had to wait for another year. The diplomatic tensions between the post-colony and the former metropolis translated into many obstacles in those early visits. This first frustrated visa was the first indication that the journey that I now close with this monograph would not be an easy one. Many processes, flaws of many systems and despotisms from different scales and geographies have made my work and life more challenging. Malaria also visited me a few times and the resulting physical weakness led to an emotional state that made everything harder. Thankfully, there have been people who have helped me in this drift. I want to express my gratitude to them here.

When I had to take a plane back to Barcelona after my first trip had failed I met Josep Martí Pérez, with whom I shared the frustration of this first failed trip and who three years later became my PhD supervisor. I would like to thank Josep for his enormous patience and for giving me total freedom to explore different perspectives, even when this generated massive detours and terrible delays.

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In New York, I benefited from the contacts at Hofstra University, especially with Benita Sampedro and Sabine Loucif. I thank them for hosting me at an early stage of my research and for offering me the possibility to share it. I also thank Cécile Sterembergher for her useful comments at that same early stage of my research and to John Cinnamon and Sasha Newell for their participation at a workshop in Hofstra during my stay.

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My biggest thank you goes to people from Equatorial Guinea. First of all to my Siale-Djangani family. Dolores: thank you *mamá*, I hope you are happy observing us from where you are now. I am also grateful to Laida Memba for her support in every aspect of what life has turned in the years that this process has lasted (including the elaboration of the cities' maps of this thesis), and to members of Laida's family, in particular Pedro Boleko. To my many Guinean friends, including Mariano, Christian, Boturu, Nanay, Bielo, Agustín, Héctor, Andrés, Silvia, Sofa, Nena, Esongué, Diamantina, Maite, and Eugenia I say thank you for making me feel at home. And, obviously, I am extremely thankful to *mamá Nati*, and all the market women that have had the patience to have me hanging out in their stalls and answering my questions. To all *akiva, akeva, potö!*

I would also like to thank the many friends that have been patient during the long years it took me to complete this project. To my friends in Poblenu, my neighborhood, and specially to Jordi who never saw the finishing of this manuscript but who has been present throughout crucial moments in the process. Warm thanks also go to my friends from university, especially the '*histèriques d'Història*', and to

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Note on language, anonymity and money

Guinean Spanish words included those borrowed from Fang, Ndowé, Igbo or Pidgin English (eg. *elegancia*, *asamsé*, *bayamselam*, *negocio*, *moda africana*, *djangué*, *los grandes*) are italicised and translated when first mentioned and given in parentheses (see also glossary at the end of the text). The direct quotations from interviews are translated into English and the original text is provided in the footnotes. The original quote to my field notes retains the particular usage of Spanish of the informants. Although there is not an official recognition of the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea as a separate dialect of similar status to those spoken in the different peninsular regions or those spoken in America, I have decided to not to ‘correct’ what in Spain would be considered ‘a mistake’. There is enough evidence of the linguistic differences between the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea and the Spanish spoken in other contexts, although more research need to be done about its peculiarities (Lipski 2004).

The transcription of words in Fang has followed the advice of Mariano Ekomo and Dr. Veronica Ñengono: I have simplified the transcription avoiding the usage of phonetic characters. Therefore, I have only used two accents (open ` and closed ´) to emphasise the tone and as diacritic accents (eg. *akúm*, *ayeñ*, *eseñ*). In spite of my decision to ‘simplify’ the transcription of the Fang words I must reference here the work of the so far first and only Guinean linguist specializing on Fang language Julian Bibang, who suggests the use of a phonetic alphabet for the transcription and who has carried out the only existing works on the Fang spoken in Equatorial Guinea (Bibang 2007). I had the privilege to be able to have a conversation with him which helped me to clarify the etymology of a few crucial concepts of this thesis. This is acknowledged at the relevant moment in the text.

Even though the demonym ‘Guinean’ is used to refer to Guinea (-Conakry) citizens and it can create some confusion, I have decided to use the term ‘Guinean’ to refer to the people from Equatorial Guinea in order to be closer to the local usage, where the term ‘*guineanos/as*’ is used to refer to Equatorial Guinea’s nationals. On

several occasions, I have been told that the term Equatoguineans '*ecuatoguineanos*' can be received as offending because of the closeness to the French term '*équato-guinéen*' which was shortened into '*ecuató*'. *Ecuató* is regarded as a derogatory term that was used to refer to Guinean refugees in Gabon during Macías dictatorship. The memory of the dearth and mistreatment that Guinean migrants received in Gabon during the two decades after independence is still vivid amongst middle-aged Guineans¹.

For ethical reasons and in some cases under request, I have anonymised my interlocutors. The only names that have not been changed are those of public characters, who due to their particular role in Guinean society are already exposed. I want to take the opportunity to state that any political interpretation of the conversations I reproduce in this thesis are my own and that my interlocutors have never engaged in discussions of formal politics during the interviews.

The exchange rate of the Franc CFA during the period of my fieldwork (2010-2013) was of 1 Euro = 655 FCFA (see chapter 3)

A reference list of prices for the same period (see chapter 3):

A small baguette of industrial bread: 50 FCFA

A bundle of 3 fermented cassava sticks: 500 FCFA

A tomato: 100 FCFA

A beer (660ml): 500 FCFA

A taxi ride in Malabo: 500 FCFA (300 in Bata)

A gas bottle: 5000 FCFA

A litre of gasoil: 350 FCFA

A common salary amongst ordinary Guineans (equivalent to what a teacher or a nurse in the public system earns): 100,000 to 150,000 FCFA

The starting salary of an educated Guinean worker of international companies (most of them migrant returnees): 1,000,000 FCFA

¹ See Jeremy Rich on the Equatorial Guinea diaspora in Gabon (Rich, 2009).

Preface

I landed at Malabo airport for the first time in July 2007, exactly ten years prior to writing this preface². I was going to live in Bata, the second biggest city in the country, for at least twelve months as I had been awarded a grant from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work for at least a year in a cooperation and research project and I did not know yet that I would end up writing the present dissertation. I had filled my luggage with all sorts of items I thought I would need for that period: tampons and period pads, pens and notebooks, a laptop, raincoat, homeopathic prophylaxis for malaria, a few ethnographic reads and my first books on anthropological theory, as well as vacuum sealed packages of Spanish ham and cheese. All the recommendations I had received both from Guineans living in Barcelona and from Spaniards dwelling in Guinea had pointed towards the same

² This happened after a first failed attempt to visit the country right after I finished my studies in History at the University of Barcelona (2006), when I had been awarded a grant to attend a summer course in Bata. That time my visa was denied arbitrarily. From the seven students and professors from Barcelona that were meant to attend the summer course, only four got the visa stamp. The criterion for selection was the alphabetic order of the first surname. At that first time my second name, Mañé, which later helped me to start so many conversations with military and customs officers during my travels around the country, did not help. Mañé, apart from being a common name in particular areas of Spain, is also a Fang name and a very relevant one: Acacio Mañé Elá was one of the heroes and martyrs of the independence of Equatorial Guinea from Spain. This fortunate coincidence, the fact that I was interested and knew about Guinean history and about the heroic deeds of my namesake helped me to bridge some distance with some of my interlocutors, who welcomed me into their spaces and allowed me to be part of their lives. With the time I came to appreciate my name and the new stories that got attached to it became part of my identity.

direction: ‘fill your luggage as much as you can because everything in Guinea is very expensive, scarce or non-existent’. In spite of my effort to fill my luggage with ‘as much as I could’ one of the first activities I carried out upon my arrival was to do some household shopping: groceries, kitchenware, toilet paper, etcetera. It took little time to realise that, indeed, *buying* would become one of the first activities I needed to learn about in order to live in Equatorial Guinea. I mentioned to one of my first acquaintances that I needed a set of linen and that I did not know where to start to search: were there homeware shops? Did I need to go to the marketplace or was there a specific space for textile goods? Silvia, who would later become one of my closest friends in Bata, decided to come along and help me with the purchase. We went to Monte Bata (or *Mercado Central*) which, together with the Monduasi marketplace at the Northern coast of the city, was one of the biggest markets in town. It occupied a triangular area between the central square of the historical quarter (*Plaza del Reloj*), the General Hospital and the Radio Bata station in Comandachina neighbourhood. It was in the part of town where the main commercial activity took place. In the area, I could find shops of different types: branches of the main commercial trading companies; small shops in the ground floors of blocks of flats; a structure of small winding alleys (some of them covered with plastic sheds or zinc sheets) with small stalls assorted with all sorts of products from foodstuffs to textiles, cosmetics and ironmongery; sellers wandering the streets with wheelbarrows filled with medicines, and many kinds of hardware; small tailors; and African print sellers.

Silvia drew my attention to a huge building under construction next to the fruit and vegetable stalls at the southern edge of the *Plaza del Reloj*. She explained that the construction site, which would become a modern shopping mall, was right on the space where the Central Market of Bata (built during the colonial period) used to be. The old colonial marketplace had been functioning until a few months before this first visit. The sellers had been dis-placed to the side streets, to temporary stalls in front of the ironware and homeware shops run by Igbo and Chinese traders. The stalls had been constructed on the basis of wooden frames, into which nails had been hammered from which all types of clothes were hanging. All the clothes were second-hand (*asamsé*) and imported from the Global North. Upon my explicit request, we entered one of the Chinese shops on the side of the road. There we looked at a set of linen for 15.000 FCFA. Initially, I thought it was on the expensive side, considering the prices of other goods in the marketplace. However, the set of linen, which stood

out because of its colourful patterns, came with various pieces: an under-sheet, a pillow-case and a top cover. It also had a plastic envelope that protected it from the dust that floated and covered everything in the marketplace. Silvia was not impressed with the Chinese linen. She told me that it was not 'good enough: the Chinese bring some good stuff but not good linen. Chinese linen go off soon³'. Silvia took me to the market stall of one of her acquaintances who brought 'good things from *Akombang*'. Akombang is a Cameroonian town near the Guinean border and the town of Ebibeyín, where there is a marketplace that supplies an important niche of the Guinean market. Unfortunately, we were not lucky that time and Silvia considered the woman's stock to be too limited and of lower quality than we required. Perhaps the woman had arrived back from Cameroon long before our visit and we only could find the left-over merchandise that had not been sold. We assessed a good number of the second-hand clothing stalls that were lined up along-side the road. From all the pieces of linen that we had seen Silvia insisted I purchase an immense cotton cloth patterned with small blue squares that was hanging from one of the nails of a wooden beam that served as a clothing display. The linen, which was soon to be mine, was hanging together with other pieces of cloth at the mercy of the sun, the rain and the dust clouds that cars, wheelbarrows and pedestrians generated. It cost 5.000 FCFA (approximately 8 Euros). At that time I thought the piece was expensive considering that I was buying a de-coloured, spotty and dusty second-hand piece of cloth, of which I was not sure if it could even be cleaned properly. According to Silvia, to whom I subtly communicated my concerns, I had made a good purchase. She acknowledged that she could have negotiated a better price if the linen had been for her own use, but she considered that I had paid a *fair price* for what I got: a good quality sheet that would last well and be good for my skin during the hot nights of the dry season.

I went home not fully convinced of Silvia's recommendation, having nonetheless told her, out of politeness, that I was happy with my acquisition. When I washed my cloth all the spots and dust disappeared. Even though the cloth was now radiantly hanging from the drying rack, I made up my mind and went back to the Chinese shop and purchased the linen set that in my judgement I should have purchased in the first instance. However, after a couple of nights of equatorial heat and high humidity, I had to swap the linen and use the cloth Silvia had recommended. With the sweat of

³ 'suficientemente bueno: los chinos traen buenas cosas, pero sus sábanas no son buenas, se gastan' (Silvia in Bata, October 2007)

the night, the linen I had chosen produced an uncomfortable stinging all over my body. The blue cloth that I acquired with Sílvia worked perfectly for my skin. From then it was clear that, in order to live and make sensible purchases in Equatorial Guinea, I was going to have to take on new categories for assessing the value of goods while forgetting old ones. *New, second-hand, European, Chinese, African, good, bad, asamsé, from Akombang*, and so on, were categories that defined and ranked the goods consumed in Equatorial Guinea and their meaning was complex and not as straightforward as I had imagined during the very first weeks of my stay in Equatorial Guinea. The relationship between the different categories of goods, their prices and the assessment of their quality was not evident to me either. The need to learn how the market system worked prompted my constant reflection and fed my curiosity, which was still being shaped in my introduction to the anthropological discipline and the definitive shift that my training in social sciences would end up taking.

The marketplace of Monte Bata turned to be one of the places I most often frequented to do my daily shopping. *¡Socia, socia! ¿Qué quieres?* [lit. Business partner! What do you want?], women in the fruit and vegetable stalls used to ask while extending their hands over the merchandise with their palms facing up. The goods were sold in *bundles* with fixed prices. There were *bundles of a hundred, of five hundred and of a thousand* FCFA. In a bundle of tomatoes, for instance, one could find a couple of overripe ones, or one with a dent. In order to make a good deal one had to compare different bundles and consider which of the sellers was offering better quality bunches. The quality and the quantity of tomatoes that one was interested in buying also varied in relation to what had to be cooked. If a sauce had to be made, for example, for the same price of two tomatoes for salad, one could get a big bag of mashed tomatoes in a plastic bag. Price, quality and quantity were assessed in particular ways that varied contingently but, at the same time, a system of *fixed prices* served as a reference for the assessment of goods.

For the purchase of cans, drinks, cleaning products, and imported cosmetics, I had to go to one of the commercial warehouses run by foreign import firms. Initially the very name of these shops struck me: *factorias*. It was the colonial name that I had read in history books and that had already disappeared from the Spanish language spoken on the Iberian Peninsula. The smaller commercial posts were called *abacerias*, a term no longer used in Spain either, describing a small retail shop, similar to a convenience store, selling imported products in small quantities. The

most popular of those foreign firms, dedicated to the importation of foodstuffs, alcohol and construction products is Martinez-Hermanos. This company, funded by a Spaniard in 1940, is one of the few that survived the semi-autarchy of Macías Nguema's regime (1968-1979). A few months before I settled in Bata it had opened the first supermarket in town, which I ended up attending weekly⁴. It was in that commercial establishment where I saw for the first time a group of women dressed in a colourful uniform and purchasing enormous quantities of foodstuffs and alcoholic beverages including bottles of fancy and extremely expensive champagne. They all wore dresses made from the same cloth which I quickly identified as *African fabric*: namely a cotton cloth with colourful patterns similar to that of the renowned wax prints, available in a range of fabrics, different in quality, but with a certain aesthetic coherence. When I got closer I noticed that the pattern contained the national flag together with the emblem of the ruling party (*la antorcha – the torch*) and a medallion with a photograph of Teodoro Obiang Nguema – the president of the country since 1979. The 3rd of August was close, the national holiday for the commemoration of Teodoro Obiang Nguema's coup d'état against his uncle Macías Nguema in 1979. My first impression was that I was seeing a sort of a folkloric national dress and that the group of women were preparing some kind of celebration. *Local, traditional, own...* were the adjectives that came to my mind while thinking about a clothing practice that seemed counter-posed to the *global, cosmopolitan, urban* of the 'other' clothes I could see ordinary Guineans wear all the time. Notwithstanding, by the time I got to learn about Guineans' consumption practices and uses of clothing, as well as the literature produced around the topic in other contexts, I kept questioning these categories and realised their ineffectiveness.

I decided to explore these first impressions and to carry out my very first ethnography of the uses and meanings of African fabrics and, as expected, these first conjectures were made more complicated at the very moment I started to explore the *cultural biography* (Kopytoff 1988) of the *African Fashion* consumed in Equatorial Guinea. My initial efforts led to a DEA Thesis, and two articles (Valenciano-Mañé

⁴ The Martinez-Hermanos supermarket in Malabo opened a few months after the one in Bata. This was, continuously commented and interpreted allegedly as an evidence for the Presidential family preference for the continental city against the insular capital. There are minor long standing companies that have not interrupted their activities since the colonial period such as Kelema, Comercial Santuy, Hermanos García or Comercial Angelín.

2008, 2011, 2012).⁵ The ethnography of consumption and clothing choices seemed a safe way into understanding Guinean politics and gender/power relationships, which would have been difficult to get at otherwise, due to the impenetrability of the regime and the fear and reticence of the majority of Guineans to openly talk about the system. Talking about clothing sourcing and practices turned out to be a window onto wider social processes and particularly fruitful to grasp political alignments, resistances and contestations.

I soon became aware that so called *African Fashion* was the result of a fascinating dialogue between African consumers and European producers that had a historical trajectory of almost two centuries. This discourse had started alongside Atlantic commerce, which itself had a much longer history of exchange, negotiation and circulation of all sorts of goods including textiles as a primary traded item (Pretholdt 2008). The material features of these textile goods were extremely varied geographically as were their uses and meanings which were adapted to the needs of their users. In previous decades, a number of studies have been published that consolidate this perspective (eg. Tranberg-Hansen and Madison 2013; Sylvanus 2017). Prior research on the genealogies of African Fashion led me to the realisation that textile goods, not only as commodities but also as currencies, have played an important role in internal trade in Western Africa since at least the 10th century (Kriger 2006). During the 15th and 16th century European traders actively participated in trading and circulating textiles produced on the continent and they even used it as currency in their transactions (Martin 1986, 2002). Later on, European industrialists specialised in the production of textiles specifically for the African market that substituted those locally produced as well as those that had been imported from Asia. Since the late 19th century until the dawn of the African independences, European

⁵ A third article, concomitant to this first research, appeared at the journal of the Catalan Institute of Anthropology in 2013, and analysed consumption practices of female youth in Malabo. In this case Malabo young women refused to invest on African Fashion clothing. Their choices were specifically made to be able to perform 'connectedness', to the elite and to 'the world'. Western style expensive clothes and the cultivation of certain manners and attitudes showed they were well-connected at the same time that allowed them to build up wider and more prestigious links (Valenciano-Mañé, 2013). Finally, in 2014 I wrote an analysis and compilation of the first pseudo-ethnographic texts describing clothing practices of Guineans in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th and I suggested the need to contrast it with other sources, namely the ones produced by traders such as the Liverpoolian John Holt and the museum collections that resulted from the coastal trade (Valenciano-Mañé, 2014).

industries produced the cotton textiles that formed the raw material for *African Fashion*, which became iconic especially in the sixties and the seventies, when they came to epitomise ideas about Pan-Africanism and post-colonial modernity. These fabrics were the result of a dialogue and early forms of market research which came together to create an *image* of the continent that was extremely different from the one that was produced in other media (Steiner 1985).

It is precisely the meanings, interpretations and the power of representation of this *image*, that has occupied other studies centered on the discourses produced around clothing during the colonial period (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Rich 2005; Martin, 2002) and in the post-colonial period (Allmann 2007; Hendrikson 2009). All this literature supposed a counterpoint to previous studies, which had focused their attention on the *artisanal* textiles, considered *traditional*, and that had been carried out by the museum and for the museum (Perani and Wolff 1999). The so-called African Fashion that has attracted the attention of Western scholarship, and that has been used by globally renowned artists like Yinka Shonibare precisely because of its history of aesthetic connections, is not the only category of clothing consumed in the continent, which, as its domestic textile industry has shrunk in the last decades, imports from afar most of the clothing goods consumed by its population. The conspicuous consumption of imported textiles from Europe and America has also drawn the attention of both anthropology (see eg. Gandoulou 1989; Masquelier 1995; Weiss 2009; Newell 2012) and political philosophy (Fanon 2009; Mbembe 2001; hooks 1992) which have provided diverse interpretations of these consumption options, considering the incorporation or mimesis of Western consumption practices as evidence of cultural alienation or as a form of resistance to imperialism. Additionally, the rapid growth during the last three decades of the trade and consumption of second-hand clothing across the African continent, has generated some reflection on the impact of this trade for local textile productions, as well as on changes of the value and meaning that these goods evidence when they stop being 'useful' in Europa or America and are given away to charity organisations and NGOs after which they are re-mercantilised and re-commoditised (Tranberg-Hansen 2000; Fodouop 2005; Abimbola 2011; Brooks 2015).

The present Thesis emerged from my very first ethnography, from the experience of building up my everyday life in Equatorial Guinea during that first long stay in the country and from the literature produced around the history of clothing

trade and consumption in Africa, all of which I compulsively consumed in trying to understand the genealogies of the trade and the global connections in that corner of the world frequently depicted as isolated and marginal (see Hannerz 1996 and Sampedro 2008). It also draws from key works on the anthropology of the body and the semiotics of dress that I explored with my supervisor, Dr. Josep Martí Pérez and the other members of the research group of the Spanish Research Council entitled 'Body and modernisation processes in Africa. The case of Equatorial Guinea' (I+D+I 2012-2016, CSO2011-23718). And, last but not least, it has been the result of an anthropological and personal drift that made me consider my ethnographic material from different angles and which, in a journey not exempt of pain and anxiety, has driven me to an economic and political anthropology approach. For this last and definitive analytical and theoretical tack, my stay for research at the Department of Anthropology in the University of Manchester, as well as the conversations and advice of various members of the Reciprocity Research Group (GER) of University of Barcelona, have been of crucial relevance.

My research, thus, has moved from being primarily concerned with the meanings of clothing goods and practices to the exploration of how their provisioning is organised and how the latter is shaped by particular material circumstances and power relationships. The primary objective of the research has, hence, inevitably widened from the description of consumption strategies towards an ethnography that aims to add critical material to the understanding of Equatorial Guinean political economy. I have focused my ethnographic research on a sector of the population that makes a living while organizing the provisioning of clothing: market women. Between January 2010 and July 2013 I carried out fieldwork among traders in the main markets of the country, primarily in SEMU, Malabo. I have also followed its traders to Ebibeyin, Madrid and Elche and I conducted an interview with a second-hand clothing business owner in London, in September 2015.

Introduction

Baggage belts and clothing bales: on the everyday of extraversion

In the five years that I travelled to and from Equatorial Guinea I never got used to the powerless feeling of not knowing if I would see my suitcase on the baggage belt when leaving the plane in Malabo or whether I would have to come back to the airport at a later date to pick it up from the following flight or even the one after next. I would see all sorts of packages and objects circulating on the baggage belt and a few people giving instructions to airport workers as to where the massive televisions, the Ikea garden furniture, or the fancy suits' suitcases had to go. The passengers' luggage would come with the next flight whenever a 'big one'⁶ from the government had filled the hold of the plane with the items acquired during his or her latest shopping expedition. This happened so often that most passengers did not get particularly anxious and either they themselves or a younger family member would keep an eye on the luggage belt for the next few flights. In Equatorial Guinea it is almost mandatory to travel with large suitcases in which to bring all sorts of items acquired outside of the country. The hold of the planes is always full and the order of arrival of the extra baggage depends on the influence one can wield over the airline.

Ministers, state secretaries, senior military, and diplomats, - in fact all the members of the Guinean elite – constantly use the airplanes to source their household and to fulfil their conspicuous consumption needs. Actually, every Guinean resorts to goods from outside of the country to source their households due to the absence of production in the country, which results in an almost complete dependency on imports. Clothing is no exception, and it is one of the types of goods that needs a

⁶ 'the big ones', *los grandes*, is the expression often used by Guineans to refer to the elite members.

major mobilisation of various types of resources. While ‘the big ones’ purchase their suits in the shops of prestigious international firms, ordinary Guineans who cannot travel every time they need a shirt, resort mainly to *asamsé*. *Asamsé* is the term used for second-hand clothing imported from Europe and America, and also the name of the space where this type of goods is sold. *Asamsé* wholesale is organised by Nigerian Igbo traders who import big bales of second-hand clothing mainly from the UK. When the bales arrive to Equatorial Guinea, they are closed and the clothes they contain are pressed in such a way that once opened, they cannot be re-packed without the help of industrial presses. This means that they cannot be opened before the sale has been concluded. The petty trader who purchases the bale cannot see what is inside until she cuts the straps that hold it together, after which the clothing items expand and recover their original shape.

Similar to my feeling of powerlessness when looking at the baggage belt, hoping to see my suitcase, traders powerlessly wait and hope to find good pieces of clothing in their bales, the contents of which have been sorted and packed far away from their sight and control. They source goods from afar, they mediate between Igbo wholesale traders and the final retail consumers, but they cannot control if they will find a piece that suits them and improves the quality of their wardrobe, nor if they will ‘see their money’ (lit. *ver su dinero*) in them, that is, if they can sell the contents for prices high enough to recover the cash invested in the purchase of their sac. Uncertainty also describes the expression of ordinary Guinean shoppers when they walk through the small alleys of the marketplace in search of a *good piece* of second-hand clothing at a *fair price*, which can only be found when luck is combined with experience and the knowledge to be able to ‘see the good clothes’ and make the *right decisions*.

Baggage belts and second-hand clothing bales epitomise what throughout my fieldwork in Equatorial Guinea became a constant ambivalence: a sense of constant *connectedness* but the lack of control of these same connections. There was a sense of great international connectedness and regional integration in the material everyday life of most Guineans: flights departed from Malabo airport full of passengers and connected to Asia, Europe and America. Ships, commodities and people constantly arrived into the country. The latest West African music hits bleared out of the speakers of bars and shops. The latest fast fashion trends from Europe arrived in the suitcases of the people who travelled and were made available for purchase in the marketplace; Chinese shops were filled with all manner of homeware,

Father Christmas hats and Halloween plastic pumpkins, while market stalls were crammed with the equipment of the most popular international football teams, unofficial president Obama merchandise or DVDs of popular South American soap operas. The engagement with the international material world was to the same extent actively performed (and chosen) as it was unavoidable due to the lack of local production. There was a limited availability of resources that were not brought in from abroad and even the most basic foodstuffs were imported from neighbouring Cameroon.

Although Equatorial Guinea's macroeconomic indicators showed rapid growth, this was growth derived from the management of rents. As David Harvey puts it, the country was immersed in a process of 'accumulation by dispossession' rather than in the production of capital through the generation of surplus value (see Harvey, 2004). Most of the economic resources of the country came from off-shore oil extraction (led by North American companies) and were invested abroad in the acquisition of consumption goods crucial for the sourcing of basic livelihoods but also for the making and continual recreation of self-worth and status. These connections were highly mediated as few people were able to travel abroad. Commodities could be held in customs at the ports for weeks or even months, visa applications from Guineans wanting to travel abroad were denied and immigration controls were sometimes extremely severe with foreign nationals. At times, land borders were arbitrarily closed, generating periods of scarcity as essential goods, including imported basic foodstuffs, could not reach the marketplace. How is it to live in a rentist system where most of the resources upon which the population depend for their livelihood come from afar? How is the access to these external resources mediated and what are the everyday strategies ordinary Guineans engage with in order to source their lives materially but also meaningfully? These are the main questions that are addressed in this thesis and they will be answered through an ethnographic analysis of strategies for the provisioning of textile goods as they are formed and actualised by market women for whom the textile trade forms their main source of livelihood. The thesis will uncover how these women gain access to foreign goods, how they establish clients and relationships of indebtedness and dependency amongst themselves, and how they create links with powerful personalities and institutions as a way of getting closer to established sources of wealth and power.

In this introduction I will discuss my use of the concept of *extraversion*. I will, then, explore how this has been present in the literature about Equatorial Guinea. Following this, I will justify my choice of market women as the ethnographic subject of the thesis and, subsequently, the thesis' methodological and epistemological aspects. Finally, I will describe the techniques of research that have been used and the challenges encountered in the field in order to provide an overview of the architecture of the text.

On Extraversion strategies in the existing literature and the thesis

In this thesis, I analyse provisioning strategies of ordinary Guineans from the perspective of what I call 'the everyday of extraversion'. My approach benefits from Bayart's theory of extraversion, itself the result of a broad reflection on dependency and connectedness. Rather than using extraversion as a general explanation of the strategies of elites and states on the African continent, I use the notion to explore everyday relationships of dependency in a context where the access to sources of both basic goods and wealth are extremely mediated and generate strong hierarchies. My choice for the notion of 'extraversion' developed throughout the experience of ethnographic fieldwork. In the following paragraphs I provide a genealogy of the concept and the particular aspects of it that I found useful for my research.

Marxian social anthropologists' reaction to the world system and dependency theory of the 1970s was to create Braudelian narratives exploring the 'connectedness' of peoples, regions and nations that had hitherto been considered discretely (Wolf 1982), and to emphasise how what happened in the so-called 'periphery' had a vital importance for the course of the history of the so-called 'West' (Mintz 1982). The main contribution from the Africanist literature was to elaborate *longue durée* accounts about the active participation of Africans in the processes that generated the continent's dependent position in the global system (Thornton 1992), and to challenge such binaries as modern/traditional, global/local and centre/periphery, with ethnographies that elucidated how so-called 'traditions' are the result of processes of participation in globalisation (Piot 1999). It is against this background that the political scientist Jean François Bayart formulated his theory of *extraversion* (Bayart 2000). The theory has received as much criticism as it has had influence. Bayart developed his political economic analysis while closely studying the history and inner-workings of the Cameroonian post-colonial state, the logics of its politics,

and its crucial role for capitalist expansion. Unsatisfied with accounts that considered the existence of the State in Sub-Saharan Africa as an exogenous structure, he described how ‘the State in Africa rests upon autochthonous foundations and a process of appropriation of institutions of colonial origin which give it its own historicity’ (Bayart 1993, 260). A study of this historicity could, therefore, help to illuminate certain patterns in power configurations and accumulation by the elites in charge of Sub-Saharan states, who took:

‘deliberate recourse to strategies of extraversion, mobilizing resources from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment. The external environment is thus turned into a major resource in the process of political centralisation and economic accumulation, and also in the conduct of social struggles of subaltern actors from the moment that they attempted to take control, even in symbolic ways, of the relations with the exterior on which those who dominate the society base their power. In short Africans have been active agents in the *mise en dépendance* of their societies’ (Bayart 2000, 219)

Bayart’s ground-breaking theorisation of the post-colonial state was, however, criticised for his emphasis on the belief in ‘the invisible’, or mystified practices such as witchcraft, to explain African post-colonial political behaviour. In spite of his explicit rejection of culturalism (a theme he would explore later in *l’Illusion Identitaire* (2006)), some anthropologists have considered his ‘politics of the belly’ a primordialist attempt to explain ‘an African way of doing things’ (Meagher 2006). If, as Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan stated, ‘the culturalism which Bayart chased away from the front door with vehemence sometimes seems to be re-entering his house surreptitiously through the window’ in his emphasis on witchcraft and the association between the idiom of ‘eating’ and power (Olivier de Sardan 2010), the fact remains that for Bayart the particular voracious style of governing often utilised by African elites is not due to the prevalence of an ancestral ‘African culture’ but to a ‘historical mode of action’ the specificity of which lies precisely in its historicity (Bayart 1993).⁷

⁷ The original quote from Olivier de Sardan is the following: ‘Mais il est vrai que le culturalisme chassé par Jean-François Bayard avec véhémence par la grande porte semble parfois se réintroduire chez lui subrepticement par la fenêtre, dans la mesure où cette « politique du ventre », par laquelle il caractérise parfois l’État en Afrique, se réfère non seulement à la corruption et à la prévarication régnant chez les élites politiques, mais « aussi et surtout » à la sorcellerie : « La “politique du ventre” se rattache non seulement à la problématique pastorale et rédemptrice du pouvoir [...] mais aussi et surtout au répertoire de

This specificity is linked to particular politico-economic relationships that have been shaped by a logic of power and accumulation based on the management of rents (from natural resource extraction, but also from development funds and foreign aid) rather than on wealth generation through productive endeavours. Bayart's notion of extraversion can therefore be of use in explaining how, for certain African elites, dependency relationships created by developmental projects, or situations of war that call for foreign intervention, can be extremely productive. This perspective has been echoed in other generalist accounts and syntheses' such as Frederick Cooper's description of African States as 'gate-keeper states', which

'sit astride the interface between a territory and the rest of the world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself: customs revenue and foreign aid; permits to do business in the territory; entry and exit visas; and permission to move currency in and out' (Cooper 2002, 157).

Through a battery of examples Bayart identifies certain patterns or 'formalities of action', a particular 'grammar of extraversion and dependence': coercion; trickery; flight; mediation; appropriation; and rejection (Bayart 2000, 255). Bayart finds these patterns of action not only amongst the elites in charge of the state, but also in everyday strategies across the social strata. Bayart poses another concept that has had a great influence in African studies: 'the rhizome state', which emphasises the interpenetration of state and society rather than its separation, and so he finds extraversion strategies across different scales (Bayart 1993, 218). In the context of extraversion, violence and coercion are said to be omnipresent while being the particular means of regulation of a state that is imported, hence lacks solid roots, and needs to defend its resources. Trickery as 'the quality which allows a person to manipulate hostile forces which are too powerful to be confronted directly' (ibid. 259), also cuts across strata. Andrew Apter makes a similar argument about Nigeria when he describes how the '419' scam is adopted by a state which presents itself as 'a state' only to be able to access resources, but which does not comply with its obligations – namely the protection of private property, security, and basic rights for citizens (Apter 2005). The third strategy observed by Bayart is that of escaping from the central authorities: flight. Informality, smuggling, and illegal migration are,

la sorcellerie, une pratique dont les entrailles sont justement le centre » (Bayart 1996 : 122)' (Olivier de Sardan, 2010:10)

according to him, particular forms of extraversion strategies and therefore the result of historical dependency. Finally, mediation, appropriation and rejection, are historical modes of action forged by the way in which Africans have engaged with globalisation. Within such a process middlemen gained political power thanks to the mediation between European traders and African consumers which adopted and rejected European material culture, currencies and consumption practices according to their needs and anxieties.

With this extremely brief summary of the ‘patterns of action in extraversion theory I would like to return to Kate Meagher’s criticism of Bayart. I agree with Meagher that defining ‘patterns of action’ in the relationship between Africans and the world can be misleading. Extraversion can be read as ‘path-dependent’ if it is taken as a totalising theory (Meagher 2006, 595). In response to this critique I argue that the ‘patterns of action’ of Bayart should be understood as ‘symptoms’ of extravert relationships and that the ethnographic analysis of the *contents* of the *strategies of extraversion* – strategies of rent management, accumulation and power configurations – is fruitful and necessary in order increase our understanding of rent-seeking political economies in general, and the Equatorial Guinean one in particular.

Whether explicitly using the term extraversion or not, the concern with how Africans are active participants in the relationships of dependency they are enmeshed in is ubiquitous in ethnographic accounts of urban Africa in recent decades. This is especially visible in the works concerned with consumption, development, spiritual worlds and memory. Consumption practices, particularly among the urban youth, have given special attention to the appropriation and resignification of imported goods as a way to perform and emulate connections that open to them the possibility of acquiring power and status. An early ethnographic account that inspired consumption studies and ethnographies of urban youth in particular is Justin-Daniel Gandoulou’s monograph on the Congolese *La Sape* (Gandoulou 1989). Unemployed youth in Brazaville in the 1970s competed for status through the acquisition of French designer clothing which they conspicuously exhibited in night clubs. Jonathan Friedman’s ‘political economy of *elegance*’ interprets la Sape’s process of acquiring clothing from the former metropole as a mechanism of empowerment. According to Friedman, *sapeurs* acquire ‘life force’ by travelling abroad and acquiring material objects in a journey they call ‘*l’aventure*’ and which transforms them into reputed

Parisiens (Friedman 1992). The la Sape movement did not only use imported material culture to make symbolic statements of status and self-worth, but also influenced the development of the transnational trading networks that Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Beenguissa-Ganga described in an inspiring monograph (MacGaffey and Bezenguissa-Ganga 2000). The acquisition of particular foreign goods, its incorporation in value repertoires and the semiotics of power and status, is both generated by and generative of substantial relationships beyond the symbolic meanings ascribed to the clothing. They make use of and create trading networks, they follow and maintain migration trajectories, and they make possible the creation of new livelihoods (such as bar owners, transport organisers and accommodation brokers).

The appropriation of the material aspect of otherness or 'the outside' and particularly that of former metropolitan centres - still centres of power - is not unique to the aesthetically extravagant *sapeurs*. Brad Weiss has discussed how young men owning and frequenting barbershops in Arusha, Tanzania, navigate the uncertainties and inequalities of the neoliberal economy through the performance of 'invincibility', whereby specific Western consumer goods become symbols of power (Weiss 2009). Similar mechanisms are used by the *bluffeurs*, young unemployed men in Côte d'Ivoire, who perform their version of 'modernity' and wealth through the consumption of imported commodities. To *bluff* is to appear to be successful through a combination of dress, attitude and conspicuous expenditure. Sasha Newell contends that, for Ivoriene *bluffeurs* and Kongolese *Sapeurs*, 'consumption practices were linked to a cosmology of modernity in which Europe was seen as a locus of power that could be drawn upon through consumption and migration' (Newell 2012,17).

The perception of the Global North as a source of wealth and power is also pervasive in many African states that are materially and ideologically sustained through development relationships (Ferguson 1990). As Maia Green describes for post-socialist Tanzania, volunteering in NGOs and being part of development projects has become part of the habitus of an emergent middle class that seeks to perform modernity and connectedness (Green 2014). Modernity and connectedness, which are linked to power but also to many dangers, has been a central theme in several studies of witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997) which look at the ways in which such dangers are controlled through ritual practice. Markets

have been seen as potential sources of danger, as spaces related to accumulation and externally sourced materiality, but also as spaces of reciprocity, knowledge and rumour (Masquelier 1993; Bastian 1998; Clark 1993).

Finally, social memory is another field where *longue durée* relationships of dependency and accumulation through extraction and brokerage have been addressed. The long history of extravert relationships forged in the Atlantic Trade configures power hierarchies and dynamics that are invoked by young people of the Grassfields of Cameroon and in Sierra Leonian witchfinding rituals, to name but two instances. For Cameroon, Nicolas Argenti researched how masked performances among the youth are used to discuss power relationships related to forced labour in precolonial and colonial periods, topics which otherwise would not find the space to be brought to debate. The precolonial and colonial history of extravert relationships is present in relations of 'structural violence that continue to divide and polarise communities' (Argenti 2007, 5). Rosalind Shaw, in turn, has explored how the memorialisation of the Atlantic world is crucial in the imagination of contemporary Sierra Leone, built from extraction of human life and value (Shaw 1997). The embeddedness of extraction, dependency and exploitation is ubiquitous in the ethnographic accounts mentioned, which set out a range of strategies which people use to participate, neutralise, resist or contest these situations of power and economic extraversion.

...

With this far from exhaustive review of the presence of extraversion strategies in Africanist ethnographic literature, I hope to have stressed the relevance of the discussion within Africanists' debates. I do not consider extraversion to be a total explanatory matrix for the functioning of an entire continent's political economy, nor do I regard it as particular to a hypothetical 'African political culture'. I take Bayart's 'strategies of extraversion' as a useful concept for approaching processes of active dependency, not only of a predatory elite but also of ordinary people in their everyday lives. Extraversion strategies are not exclusive to African political economies. They are part of the strategies of *rentist capitalism* (see Henni 2006), and of processes of *accumulation by dispossession* (Harvey 2003). I understand extraversion strategies

as the active participation in processes of rent-seeking and accumulation by mediation and brokerage. I also contend that extraversion strategies can be found across different scales: from the household, to the state, crossing through the market and civic associations. Finally, I also take from Bayart's approach the need to historicise these relationships for a better understanding of current rent capitalism and its functioning in Equatorial Guinea in particular. I propose that the concept and approach to extraversion strategies, together with the grounding that the semiotic and ethnographic analysis of consumption offers, can help to bridge a theoretical gap which often exists between the spheres of cultural meaning and that of political economy, which is the main objective of this thesis.

This approach is influenced by substantivist economic theory and specifically by the Polanyian concept of *embeddedness*. If 'social relations are embedded in the economic system' we cannot try and approach the ethnographic reality without taking into account the political economy and vice versa (Polanyi 1944: 60, Godelier 1974, Moreno 2011). I chose the market as one of the main locations of my fieldwork, as a meeting place where different types of relationships (reciprocity, redistribution and exchange) are produced and reproduced, and where different kinds of institutions intersect (kinship, the state and taxation, gender), and not as a space relegated to a hypothetical economic sphere separated from other spheres of life.

The perspective of strategies of extraversion also allows us to account for the ways in which what happens in the realm of clothing provisioning is embedded in diverse social institutions on different scales (the marketplace, the family, the state, the international provisioning paths) and at different moments in time. Past connections generate precedent, valuation systems are built upon historical processes, and the possibilities for change and for imagining different futures depend on power relations and hierarchies that are also historically informed.

Before deepening the theoretical and methodological perspective of the thesis I will offer a review of the literature on the political economy of Equatorial Guinea. The goal of the following section is twofold: on the one hand, it offers an overview of the context of my ethnography. On the other hand, it points towards the strengths and problems of current analyses and it opens up the space within which the thesis aims to make a contribution.

Extraversion strategies and the literature about Equatorial Guinea's political economy

The literature on Equatorial Guinea's political economy has focussed on the oil industry as the trigger for social transformation, it having initiated a definitive shift in the country's post-colonial history of isolation and economic stagnation (Frynas 2004). After its independence from Spain in 1968, Guineans suffered a bloodthirsty dictatorship (Macias Nguema 1968-1979) which left a devastated country with a decimated population – one third killed or fled into exile - and an economy in ruins. After the military coup that ended Macias' dictatorship, the new regime led by Obiang Nguema (Macias Nguema's nephew), eager to find the much-needed funding to ease the economic devastation, flirted with the Bretton Woods institutions and allowed the implementation of foreign aid programs (Liniger- Goumaz 1988; Sundiata 1990). The influx of oil wealth in the mid-1990s resulted in the end of the need for international aid and thereby secured the regime, which could no longer be held accountable by international financial institutions to meet institutional conditions in exchange for the influx of cash.

The Guinean oil industry has developed *offshore* from the first oil well, discovered in 1991 of the coast of Bioko. Following that discovery, the industry grew exponentially and by 1994 the production was already more than 7,000 barrels per day, all of them extracted from oil rigs by North American companies and shipped directly without even brushing against the National shores (Roitman and Roso 2001, 132). The industry boomed throughout the decade that followed, reaching production of more than 300,000 barrels per day at its peak in 2012, which put the country in the third place within the ranking of the main oil exporters in Africa (World Energy 2015). During the first years of exploitation, the oil boom had important socio-political impact but produced little material evidence on-shore. The industry's needs were completely externally sourced, from foreign labour and electricity generators, to groceries and toilet paper for its oil rigs and walled compounds. Investment in the construction of general infrastructures such as electricity plants, drinking water distribution, and a national education system, has been extremely slow, leaving the ordinary population in precarious living conditions. More than two decades after the discovery of oil, various modes of inequality have increased dramatically. Luxury cars commute between glamorous hotels and the tall glass office buildings that mushroom alongside insalubrious slums and shanty towns.

The memory and fear of the Macias' dictatorship, together with the inherited repressive methods of the current regime, have left the ordinary population with multiple fears and uncertainties.

Often the framework of the *resource curse* or *the paradox of plenty* has been invoked to explain social inequalities, lack of political freedom and lack of social justice (see last decade's literature eg. Shaxson 2008; Yates 2012; Silverstein 2015). Indeed, Equatorial Guinea seems to contain all the ingredients of the *rentier* and *petro-state* recipe: a significant inflow of external oil rent has guaranteed the financial autonomy of the state; the latter, being less reliable on foreign aid and taxes, is therefore relieved from political accountability and prone to anti-democratic political praxis; at the same time, import dependency has exacerbated the vulnerability to global oil price shocks (see eg. Yates' description of the 'chain of causality in a rentier state' (Yates 2012, 86-89). The narrative of the resource curse, easily bought into by policy makers, and also by expatriate personnel and the social responsibility departments of the extractive industry (Appel 2012, 694), does not convince all political economists, however, especially not those coming from an anthropological perspective. These scholars have critiqued the *resource curse* literature for its reductionism and commodity fetishism as it considers oil as containing 'natural' properties that generate a universal pattern of causalities (Watts 2004; Mitchell 2009).

It has been argued that economic models and concepts – such as the *resource curse* or the *petro state* – themselves become projects towards which people and institutions act and react⁸. In her ethnographic analysis of the oil industry in Equatorial Guinea, Hannah Appel shows how the *offshore* character of the oil industry and its effects for the Equatorial Guinean population and power structures is far from being an upshot of the substantial nature of oil itself. Rather, she shows

⁸ Susana Narotzky has called for the need to historicise the concepts and models we use and to reflect upon the political projects inherent in them (Narotzky, 2007). In the same line, the resource curse narrative can become an 'economic device' that shapes politico-economic projects and therefore, generates particular outcomes for its own sake. Giza Wezkalnys analyses this in the neighbouring state of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, where the resource curse narrative arrived with the prospection for oil but before the exploitation of the oil itself. In Sao Tomé and Príncipe the resource curse 'comes in various guises: as an economic thesis, a narrative device, an instrument, an abstraction, a future imaginary and so on' and it not only spurs people into action but people themselves become 'the material sites of its production and contestation' (Wezkalnys 2011, 349).

how the particular features of oil extraction in Equatorial Guinea are the result of a political project towards which the industry has to invest a vast amount of work. Much of this work, however, is aimed at disentangling the oil from the ‘cursed’ socio-political context of its extraction. It is not the substance of oil, its materiality, or the sudden influx of money that generates a particular form of capitalism in a specific part of the world but, Appel argues, ‘the work on framing heterogeneity and contingency into profit and power’. According to Appel the North American-based industry in Equatorial Guinea ‘is a modular capitalist project: a bundled and repeating set of technological, social, political and economic practices aimed at profit-making that industry works to build wherever companies find commercially viable hydrocarbon deposits’ (Appel 2012, 697).

The project of the American-based oil industry encounters power dynamics and logics of accumulation that it tries to differentiate itself from, but without which it would not be able to function. The influx of the oil rent has empowered the existing elite and it has strengthened previous illicit businesses and economic rationalities that were already taking place in the 1980s and that have their precursors in the colonial period (Wood 2004; Soares de Oliveira 2007, 138). Alicia Campos-Serrano, has directed our attention towards the continuities in Equatorial Guinea’s political economy, arguing that the development of an extravert economy is not a recent outcome of the discovery of hydrocarbon wells, but has a longer history that needs to be traced back to colonial times (Campos-Serrano 2013). According to her, oil wealth has retro-fed a dynamic of power extraversion that was already in place before the oil-boom and which contributed to the shape of local rationalities that have been interacting with global capitalism for centuries. In fact, Ulf Hannerz had already pointed towards the need to look at the multiple connections that people and institutions practised and experienced in late-1980s’ Malabo, when it was often perceived as located on ‘the outskirts of modernity’ and the idea of the oil boom was on a far-away dreamed horizon (Hannerz 1996, 46)⁹. In this thesis, through reference to my ethnographic material I seek to contribute to our understanding of the continuities both in time and scale of economic rationalities that underlay the Guinean political economy. These dynamics and rationalities, as my foregoing

⁹ Hannerz published his book in the mid-nineties but he based his account on Robert Klirtgaard’s *Tropical gangsters* (1990).

discussion makes clear, have less to do with the characteristics of a particular resource than with historically informed processes.

In addition to illusions of isolation, disconnection and cursed resources, there is another relevant aspect in the socio-political descriptions of the country that I will critically engage with: the emphasis given to kinship and ethnic relationships in power and rent redistribution. Described as *nguemista*, political economists and analysts have given central importance to the *clan* in the structuring of the regime and, in extension, to the Fang dominance at the summit of the state (eg. Liniger-Goumaz 1996; Silverstein 2014). Ethnic identities are evidently relevant in political discourses, especially so amongst the intellectual *cadres* of Guineans in exile and even more relevant for the political parties in the exterior (particularly in Spain) (see eg. *Assodegue*; Rondo-Igambo 2006). Without denying the strong role of ethnicity in public identity discourses, I will show how the ethnography of the everyday strategies of extraversion allows me to think beyond this issue and to elucidate the existence of other social categories, including some that are not explicitly or publicly articulated and that have more in common with a bourdiesque notion of *class* than other ethnic or racial-driven post-colonial categories. The ethnographic material I discuss in what follows suggests the existence of other groupings that are not often taken into account in the existing literature about Equatorial Guinea.

Towards the approach and the method: from clothing consumption to clothing provisioning and from the elite to the ordinary.

Equatorial Guinea has recently gained presence in the international press, primarily due to the judicial prosecution of Teodoro Nguema Obiang, alias Teodorín. The son of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, himself now Vice-President of the country, has been investigated in several Western countries - including the US, France, South Africa and the Netherlands – due to his illicit tenancy of luxury goods¹⁰. Apart from a mansion in Malibu, several luxury cars, and an immense yacht, Teodorín's conspicuous consumption attracted the attention of the US judicial

¹⁰ See the details of the different legal proceedings involving Teodoro Nguema Obiang in the EG Justice website. EG Justice is a non-profit organisation for the promotion of human rights in Equatorial Guinea, led by the Guinean Lawyer Tutu Alicante and based in the US: <http://www.egjustice.org/post/eg-must-combat-corruption-top-government> (accessed 20 September 2017)

authorities and of journalists over the world because of the acquisition of several clothing items that belonged to the pop singer Michael Jackson, including the famous glass glove that the artist wore on one of his tours and the jacket which he wore in the even more famous ‘Thriller’ video clip. Michael Jackson’s clothes were just part of a collection of expensive objects that the US authorities decided to confiscate¹¹. In 2014, in spite of the existence of an international arrest warrant against Teodorín, the goods were released because he did not have a criminal record in the US. He did, however, have to pay a huge fine that benefited aid organisations working in Equatorial Guinea. *Le patron*, as he is usually referred to, decided to auction off his mansion in Malibu but he saved his Michael Jackson memorabilia which were subsequently exhibited in Malabo in the buildings of the National Library and the Guinean Cultural Centre, with all the honours of National treasures.

Le patron has now another trial coming up against him in the US and, recently (in July 2017) he was accused of corruption and ‘*biens mal acquis*’ by the French justice system. His sentence would be prison, a fine of millions of Euros, and the confiscation of his properties in Paris¹². This latter aspect of the sentence was received by the governmental family with particular annoyance, Paris being the favorite hangout of Teodorín, who did not attend the trial. The Guinean authorities responded with the convocation of a ‘peaceful demonstration’ against the French embassy in Malabo. The discourse of the authorities was based on the premise that, by threatening Teodorín and his properties, the French were acting against all Guineans, their ‘national pride’ and their national sovereignty¹³. At the same time Teodorín has never hidden his conspicuous consumption practices and he constantly exhibits his luxurious lifestyle in the social media and also in the streets of the small republic. He

¹¹ See the article in El País:

https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/01/31/actualidad/1391187973_485479.html (accessed 20 September 2017).

¹² See press articles in Le Monde:

http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/06/18/proces-de-teodorin-obiang-a-paris-la-croisiere-ne-s-amuse-plus_5146620_3212.html (accessed 20 September 2017) and http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/07/05/trois-ans-de-prison-amende-et-confiscation-requis-contre-teodorin-obiang_5156138_3212.html (accessed 20 September 2017).

¹³ See the account for the demonstration and the texts of the official speeches in the official website of the government: <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=9919> (accessed 20 September 2017) and <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=9923> (accessed 20 September 2017).

throws extravagant parties or drives around town in one of his Ferraris, stopping in popular bars where he *sprays*¹⁴ cash and *buys drinks* for everybody he encounters; he wears the most expensive suits and he even authorised the production of a video that features him doing his shopping in Paris, which has reached thousands of visits on YouTube.¹⁵

This attitude of *le patron* that so scandalises the international press is not at all unique and it has occupied (and preoccupied) a good volume of the literature about the post-colonial state and the political economy of the oil producing states in Africa (ie. Soares de Oliveira 2007; Yates 2012; Mbembe 2001; Hibou 1999). The shameless exhibition of kleptocratic practices by the elite through disproportional consumption has been presented by Bayart as central evidence for his '*politique du ventre*' (Bayart 1993). In Central African societies the idiom of 'eating money' acts as a metaphor for material consumption, so consumption of material goods engrosses the *ventre* of Bayart. Material extravaganza projects a strong image of power. The Cameroonian political philosopher Achille Mbembe in his description of 'the banality of power' in the postcolony emphasises how,

'those elements of the obscene and the grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin claims to have located in "non-official" cultures [...] in fact, are intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed' (Mbembe 2001, 102).

However, he considers the postcolony to be 'characterised by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed and put into circulation' (ibid.).

In fact, most accounts of the postcolonial state emphasise the importance of the 'image' and the 'make-believe' projects, which are considered to be more important than the actual state structure which is often depicted as weak and insufficient. Complex bureaucracies, the construction of 'white elephants' alongside the magnificence of state celebrations, are often described as more important than the actual state apparatus (see Apter 2005; Appel 2012). At the same time, this

¹⁴ To spray cash or *faroter* is a common practice in Central Africa. It consists in literally throwing banknotes through a crowd or a person. It is a sign of bigmanship.

¹⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Gip9DQVas8> (accessed 15 April 2017).

performative character of the state can only be effective if it is part of a more general hegemonic understanding of the nature of power. That is to say that the ‘aesthetics of vulgarity’ that Mbembe describes are only possible as part of an ‘economy of signs’ that is shared beyond the elite¹⁶. It seems clear that a one-sided focus on the elite’s ‘aesthetics of vulgarity’ cannot explain how such a shared ‘economy of signs’ is produced. I attempt to resolve this puzzle by looking at clothing provisioning from the grassroots, while taking the historical dimension of the production of this hegemonic understanding of power into account. In the following paragraphs I will situate these ideas in the broader literature.

Clothing practices have a relevant role in this ‘economy of signs’ that is often invoked when describing the postcolonial state and elites. The main approach to the analysis of clothing consumption is influenced by the semiotics studies that later influenced so-called consumption studies (Simmel 1957, Baudrillard 2012 and Barthes 2003). In fact, the practice of clothing itself has been the object of several ethnographies and historical accounts that consider it as a ‘window to the social world’ (eg. Hendrickson 1996, Allmann 2007, Ravine 2002, Robine 2008), and so a useful tool to approach certain processes in the history of African societies. These studies often combine the theoretical framework of the anthropology of the body, which considers the corporeal surface as the main field of social and political action, with performance studies (Entwistle 2000). Scholars like Hildi Hendrickson, in a crucial edited volume on clothing in colonial and post-colonial Africa, asserts that dress and other treatments of the body surface are fundamental symbols ‘in the performances through which modernity – and therefore history – have been conceived, constructed, and challenged in Africa’ (Hendrickson 1996, 13). Clothing has had a relevant role as a tool for social control and as a visible element of colonial imposition. However, clothing has also suggested forms of resistance through the incorporation of commodities initially exclusive to the coloniser (Rich 2009). Jean and John Comaroff, for instance have analysed the role of clothing in the missionary imposition among the Tswana. They describe how European textiles were already prestige items before the arrival of the missionaries. Therefore, the latter could not control the desires of a new culture of consumption (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Jean Allmann (2004), in similar vein but different context and chronology, analyzes

¹⁶ Bayart also addresses this in the formulation of the ‘reciprocal assimilation’ concept, for which the elite is totally embedded and tangential to the social strata.

the discourses of the anti-nudity campaigns promoted by Nkrumah in Ghana between 1958 and 1964. She elucidates the pillars of the national construction in the public debates between nudity and dress and its associated ideas, which were influenced by colonial discourses but framed in the politics of new nationhood.

Clothing has an obvious material dimension that is relevant here beyond the ideas it can represent, the discourses that can be constructed around it, and the information that it can provide both about the individual and about social groups. While acknowledging the importance of consumption studies and the focus on ‘meanings’ and agency, I focus my research on the material aspects of clothes and clothing sourcing. Rather than looking at clothing only in its symbolic dimension I explore it in its facet as commodity embedded in different dimensions of social life. As I have previously stated, with the ethnography of clothing provisioning I attempt to address grassroots livelihood strategies in a particular historical context characterised by extraction, dependency and accumulation by dispossession. As Sylvia Yanagisako has stated in her seminal ethnography of small family businesses in Italy, it is not enough to focus on meanings and discourses in the description of such ‘strategies’:

‘Cataloguing and explicating discourses and meanings does not, by itself enable us to understand their articulation in the formation of social action. Such an understanding requires knowledge of the ways in which people in specific circumstances connect these discourses and negotiate their complex meanings’ (Yanagisako 2002, 6)

I contend that by looking at the means by which people organise clothing provisioning, one can gain better access to these ‘specific circumstances’, in particular those related to power configurations and the politics of distribution. While the focus on systems of provisioning is widespread in studies on general household sourcing in Africa (eg. Meillasoux 1981, Clark 1993, Guyer 1987), as well as in many other studies outside the continent (see eg. Sabater 2012, on housing, Brooks 2015 for clothing, Stolke 1982 for food, Brandon 2000 for care), it has not been central for the ethnographic study of clothing and clothing practices in Africa. The common approach to clothing in the continent starts from the perspective of its consumption (eg. Tranberg-Hansen 2004, et al. 2013, Rabine 2002). This research has been driven by the need to understand the *cultural* process of the appropriation of foreign commodities (in the case of Tranberg-Hansen 2004), the cultural biography of

clothes that travel between continents (Rabine 2002), or the symbolic meanings and communication capacity of *traditional* fabrics (Perani and Wolf 1999). In my aim to connect everyday practices with the larger scale issues of political economy, I take as my starting-point the Marxian critique of existing accounts from consumption studies (eg. Fine and Leopold 1993, Carrier 1997), while drawing on the political economy approaches within Anthropology (Roseberry 2005, Wolf 1982, Narotzky 2013).

The aforementioned Marxian studies consider the relationships that people construct in order to pursue their livelihood to be a dimension of a continuum that can not be removed from other aspects of sociality that have traditionally been considered discretely, for example: kinship, morality, religion, or gender (Moreno 2011: 127). As I will show during the course of the thesis, for the protagonists of this study, clothing trade and consumption are to the same extent strategies for the (re)creation of meaning and strategies for the pursuit of livelihood. One of the theoretical strands that emerged from the ethnography is precisely the embeddedness of consumption strategies in every aspect of sociality. The ethnography shows how consumption practices can not be understood when viewed separately from other institutions like the state, taxation and pricing, but also from gender and kinship, the political structure and relationships of patronage.

For the methodology of this thesis, the perspective on *provisioning* has proved to be the most efficient way to connect grassroots and everyday economic and organisational practices with structural and systemic organisation. My work, thus, seeks to contribute to the literature on clothing consumption in urban Africa by considering the paths of its provisioning, as defined by Susana Narotzky:

‘provisioning is a complex process where production, distribution, appropriation and consumption relations all have to be taken into account and where history defines particular available paths for obtaining goods and services. Provisioning is also a useful way to understand social differentiation, the construction of particular meanings and identities and the reproduction of the social and economic system as a whole’ (Narotzky 2005, 78).

Attention to clothing *provisioning* has shaped the exercise of my ethnography. It has required a constant management of temporal and spatial scales. The tracing of the trajectories of trade and clothing sourcing required going back in time in order to

identify trends, continuities and change, but also required me to connect both in abstraction and materially with diverse spatial scales such as the marketplace, the nation, the region and international flows and dynamics. The first section of the thesis (chapters 1 and 2) deals specifically with (perceptions of) history and space. However, the multi-scalar and multi-temporal perspective is maintained in all subsequent chapters as well.

...

In contrast to the elite and the ‘spectacular’ tales of Teodorin’s conspicuous consumption I began this section with, I dedicate my ethnographic research to the ordinary. By ordinary I mean that I focus on the non-exceptional everyday strategies of common people. Of course, the ordinary is in itself diverse. It is composed of many layers and particularities while also encapsulating many situations that one could consider ‘the ordinary’. In Equatorial Guinea, as elsewhere, there are multiple co-existing daily realities: that of men in salaried employment, that of women with salaried work, that of the foreign African entrepreneurs, that of Western expats working for the oil companies, the one of the sons and daughters of emigrants with academic degrees that work in the oil industry or in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, just to mention a few examples. During my fieldwork I collected ethnographic data from all the mentioned ‘ordinaries’. Finally though, I decided to direct my systematic attention to a group of market women. The women I worked with belong to the majority of the Guinean population that does not have direct access to oil revenues and has to resort to strategies of survival that require a great deal of creativity. The particularity of these market women is that, for them, clothing trade is the main source of livelihood and the only possibility to fulfil their personal projects. As I will explore in the third part of the dissertation, market women have a sense of entitlement in regards to their trading activity. They regard their trading practice as an expression of their ‘right to subsist’ that resonates with the observations that J.C. Scott made for the South-Asian peasants he studied (Scott 1976). This sense of moral entitlement to take part in trading leads me to the third and final conceptual pillar of the thesis, that of the concept and approach of *the moral economy*.

My analysis has benefited from the recent revival of the concept of *moral economy* in economic anthropology and, particularly, from the strand of scholars

who argue that the moral economy, far from being an opposition to political economy (as E.P. Thompson had argued in his *Customs in Common* (1991)), is a useful anthropological tool to approach the functioning of power and the configuration of capital accumulation and thus also a valuable tool to approach hegemony as it plays a role within these mechanisms (Palomera & Vetta, 2016). Of the many threads the concept of moral economy has prompted in the scholarly debates, I understand it as the dynamic combination of norms, meanings and practices that underpin the structural inequalities generated by particular forms of capital accumulation (eg. Narotzky, 2015; Hann, 2010; Wiegratz, 2016). Aside from taking into account the recent revival of the concept, I will also return to the classic formulation of the concept by E.P. Thompson in the 'Moral economy of the English Crowd' (1971), specifically in regard of the importance of price setting and negotiations. I will dedicate Chapter 5 to the discussion of price as a political device, rather than a calculation of the labour and production costs of commodities. I will show how, in contrast to what Scott had shown in his *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, the perception of a fair price is not about subsistence, nor about the value of labour, but about participation and inclusion into a common project.

Market women: extraversion strategies from below

My first ethnographic incursion into the systems of clothing provisioning was through Monica, a 28 year-old domestic worker living in Malabo. Her boss was on holiday in Spain so she was able to take a couple of days off to go shopping in Ebibeyín. Monica had just moved from the single room she had been renting in a compound on the border between SEMU marketplace and Los Angeles, to a bigger double-room and she wanted to acquire new bed linen, towels and tablecloths for her new home. Moreover, one of her sisters had given birth and she needed to purchase new baby clothes for the outdooring ceremony of the new-born. She had been saving for months with the help of her rotating credit association and she had managed to collect 250,000 FCFA. This was enough to travel from Malabo to the Cameroonian border and to purchase 25 sets of bed-linen, a tablecloth, a set of towels and 10 new-born clothing sets. I decided to accompany her on her trip: first by ferry to Bata, then by bus to Ebibeyín, there a taxi to the border, crossing the border on foot and then taking a motorbike to the Akombang marketplace. We left Bata at 4 am from the

Ngoló bus station which in the middle of the night, to my surprise, was the busiest I had seen it. The bus arrived in Ebibeyín at 8 am just in time for breakfast and to start the shopping expedition to the other side of the border. The negotiations over price with the Cameroonian market women were hard. According to Monica, Cameroonians were now aware of the needs of the Guineans and the high prices that were charged on the other side of the border.

On the way back we encountered specialised taxis that could remove the car upholstery in order to hide the merchandise and cross the border avoiding customs. It took Monica two days to go to Cameroon and come back, and she considered it a good, successful expedition as she was able to get good home textiles for a significantly better price than the ones she could get in Malabo. She managed to acquire brand new baby clothes that would make the outdooing ceremony of her sister's baby a perfect one. But not only did she manage to get her own consumption needs sorted, she also brought back to Malabo a few sets of linen and new-born clothes that she would sell for more than twice the price she had purchased them.

She was giving me her thoughts about the expedition lying heavy on a chair. The trip had been physically exhausting. The eight hours that the ferry crossing with the national ship (*Buque Nacional Dgibolhó*) lasted were particularly challenging due to the precarious conditions on board. It was crowded, there were no seats or spaces for passengers, there was not enough shade, and thus the sun hit the passengers hard. The passengers had no access to drinking water, unless they had brought it on board themselves, nor were there toilets to refresh themselves or do their necessities. 'You think I'm strong because of this? I only do this once in every couple of months, sometimes I take a year. Market women do it every other day! They are tough' (Monica, January 2010).

On the way we encountered many women that would do the same journey as we did, but every week or every other week. They took the boat in the evening, arriving in Bata early in the morning to take the bus to Ebibeyín and cross the border and return the same day. Engaging in what may be termed an 'extraversion strategy from below', they are in fact crucial to the system of provisioning in the Malabo market. Some of them provide fruits and vegetables while others bring in clothing items and homeware.

The experience with Monica made me realise that the ‘non-productive country of consumers’ I was expecting to study was actually a country of *prosumers*, as every person I interviewed was involved in some kind of trade: ministers had their own shops in Malabo city centre; salaried workers invested in trips to Cameroon in order to get homewares they would then re-sell among their office mates; and housewives would invest part of the salary of their husband to buy a box of frozen chicken wings to re-sell among their neighbours. Consuming in Equatorial Guinea can often entail a great effort and the mobilisation of all sorts of logistics and networks and, at the same time, these are kept and recreated by means of trade and exchange. Douglas & Isherwood (1979) have already pointed towards the productive character of consumption practices. The acquisition of consumer goods ought to be regarded as productive as they generate and strengthen social status and ties. Here, I argue, that Guinean consumers are not only producing meaning and social ties through consumption, but they are producing the conditions to be able to consume. Similarly to what happens on platforms such as E-Bay (eg. Ritzer 2013), Guineans create their own market contents, an action which simultaneously facilitates access to their desired goods. Market women are at the bottom of this system of consumers/traders in that their trading activity becomes their (sometimes only) mechanism to access consumption. “Buying and selling” constitutes their particular means to manage the exiguous rents they receive from their social network. Like many women in strong patriarchal societies, market women face the ‘paradox of having to manage expenses without controlling income’ (see Guérin 2014).

Between January 2010 and December 2012 I devoted most of my fieldwork to SEMU, a bustling newly-built market where groceries, clothes, cosmetics and ironwares are orderly displayed in corrugated iron sheds. Most of the sellers are women. Exceptions include some Igbo traders who sell music, homewares or male clothing; a small cluster of cosmetics sellers mainly from Ivory Coast; and a few tailors from Burkina Faso and Congo-Brazzaville. The rest of the stall-keepers in the marketplace are Guineans, mostly Fang women who arrived to Malabo from Rio Muni in different waves of migration after Independence. These Fang women specialise in the selling of foodstuffs (*bayamselam*), second-hand clothes (*asamsé*) and prêt-a-porter first-hand clothing (*elegancia*), each product having a dedicated section of the market and its own organisational institutions, namely sellers’ associations. Their customers are ordinary Malabo dwellers, maids who shop almost

on a daily basis, and other market sellers. It is rare to find an expatriate worker from an oil-related company doing his or her shopping in the marketplace just as it is also very rare to see a member of the Guinean elite sourcing her household in SEMU. Wealthy households employ domestic servants that are placed in charge of the sourcing of foodstuffs and, thus, of going to the marketplace. Meanwhile, expats and salaried middle classes tend to carry out their main shopping at the many supermarkets that have mushroomed since the country's first supermarket opened in 2005. These supermarkets offer a range of imported products at conspicuously high prices which, of course attracts the wealthy of Malabo while effectively excluding what I have referred to as ordinary Malabo dwellers.

Histories of SEMU and SEMU's market women

SEMU marketplace was built in 2004 and first occupied by sellers in 2006, following the first directives for the urbanisation of Malabo. These directives were established in the wake of the oil boom, and were intended to set up an agenda for the 'modernisation' of the country through the use of oil revenues (see Appel, 2017). In the process of 'modernisation' so called 'traditional' market activities were now considered 'backwards' or 'underdeveloped' and were relocated away from the city centre. Veteran sellers of SEMU marketplace had already been developing their trading activities in the market spaces of the city centre before they were re-located to the new site, however none of the group had been dedicated to trade before Independence in 1968. During the colonial period, most of the sellers in the marketplace were either Hausa or Igbo, mainly wives of the migrant plantation workers who sold their farms' revenues and turned bulk products acquired in the commercial factorias into affordable small portions. With the expulsion of Nigerian workers in 1975, President Macías-Nguema (1968-1979) established the forced recruitment of Fang workers from Rio Muni for the cocoa plantations in Bioko. The elderly sellers of SEMU market were the widows of these workers. They had arrived from Rio Muni with their husbands in the mid-seventies, occupying the fields that the Hausa and Igbo former traders had left after the eviction, they had been forced to volunteer at the cocoa plantations when required, and they lost their husbands in the course of two epidemic outbreaks they agree took place in 1976 and 1978. Most of them had been involved in the selling of different kinds of product. Some had already started selling drinks at their homes in Rio Muni during colonial times, others cooked

sweet fritters (Makala) and sold them at the school doors before joining their husbands to go to Malabo. Subsequently, if they had the relevant connections, they would combine the selling of the limited revenue from their farms with the re-selling of small portions of the products which they found in the State-owned warehouses. This was practised even though one could only purchase bulk products and under the further limitations of a consumption allowance.

The rationing during the first dictatorship was strict. Every family had access to very limited amounts of imported goods. The informal distribution of rationed goods nevertheless proved crucial to complement the scarce allowance most families were given. The dependency upon informal circulation in order to source a household generated strong hierarchies in the patron-client relationships which mediated the access to basic-need goods. Scarcity turned those in charge of the State's commercial stores into powerful agents in the post-independence regime. Power was, thus, structured around the access to livelihood resources which ultimately meant the control over rents and imported goods as dependency on the latter was unavoidable.

The inequality of access to essential sources of proteins, medicines and hygiene-related commodities added extra violence to the everyday lives of people living within the already merciless Macias dictatorship. The position of women was especially critical and powerless. In the Fang patriarchal society, accentuated by three decades of colonial national-Catholicism, they faced the task of feeding their families while men were barely able to access (scant and unreliable) salaried work. Market women had kinship and/or friendship relationships with state factors which allowed them access to the type of goods (rice, salt, stock fish, soap...) that could be re-sold outside the rationing system. While men could perform the role of gate keepers in the access to rents and foreign goods, women were generally in charge of the care of the family, the land and its fruits. The market, which in colonial times had been a space mainly occupied by foreigners, emerged as a means by which women could manage their access to resources. In the marketplace women could build their own network beyond their kin. This offered them both a sense of partial empowerment and the possibility of organizing a certain space for mutual help and solidarity on the one hand and control over certain people and resources on the other. In the marketplace, women could perform the role of managers of rent and wealth – in goods and in people – activities which, outside the marketplace, were exclusive to men.

A second wave of migration from Rio Muni to Malabo arrived in the mid-1980s, after the coup d'état that ended the first dictatorship and at a time when the opening of the borders, the diversification of trade, and the income from international aid started to generate visible effects in the poverty-stricken Guinean economy. This generation of women, born in the late 1950s and in the 1960s, were made up of those who had moved to the capital in search of new opportunities arising from the increase in circulation of people and rents resulting from the foreign aid programs, but also from those formerly exiled who had studied and/or accumulated cash they were ready to invest. While the first generation of Fang market sellers mainly stuck to the selling of foodstuffs, this second generation is largely focussed on the selling of second hand clothing (*asamsé*) imported in big bales (55 kg) from the Global North (predominantly UK) by Igbo wholesalers (see Chapter 3). The trade of discarded clothes from the Global North increased during the 1980s, becoming the main source of clothing consumed in the African continent at the end of the twentieth century. For Guineans *asamsé* represented the possibility of accessing western clothing, which had been unavailable during the former decade. Concurrently, the liberalisation of trade led to the open access to the trading activities for anyone able to invest in a second-hand clothing bale. This democratisation of the access to trade and consumption, however, did not happen without the immediate deployment of mechanisms of control and bondage. In 1986 the Association of Market Sellers was created under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In order to be allowed to sell in the marketplace women had to be members of the association, which implicitly implied membership of the ruling party, which itself makes use of the association to mobilise crowds when needed.

The youngest generational group of market sellers arrived to SEMU with its relocation in 2006, right at the height of the oil-boom. They started their market activity with the selling of *asamsé* but their goal was to sell first hand clothing from Spain. Some of them have been able to collect enough rents to invest in several international shopping expeditions. Such expeditions do not only require monetary investment but also the mobilisation of a wide network of collaborators to help out with logistics, from the acquisition of a travel visa and the initial capital for the trip, to the organisation of the accommodation and provisioning. Most of these women have family members living in Spain and I interviewed sellers who had attempted to emigrate themselves but after finding it impossible to find a source of livelihood in

Europe (already hit by the so called financial crisis), they decided to generate their livelihood in between the two continents.

The field: words, silences, and learning how to complimentar

Equatorial Guinea has an extremely bad reputation amongst international researchers. The Spanish media block in the seventies did not contribute to the circulation of information about the country outside of its borders. In addition, the violent eviction of former colonial trading firms, international organisations, and foreign workers only generated a state of fear and desinformation during the seventies which lasted well into the eighties. After a period of openness to foreign aid and cooperation programmes in the eighties and the beginning of the nineties – a move which allowed some journalists and researchers to enter the country – foreign researchers' access to the country became again restricted. The journalistic accounts outside of Guinea's borders depicted a devastated land suffering from an endemic, general scarcity of goods and a hostile bureaucratic apparatus that repelled most of the scholars that had been interested in conducting research in the area.

It is because of these narratives of difficulties and fear that I need to address the specific circumstances of my research. I did not arrive to Equatorial Guinea as a PhD student or as a researcher. I first arrived to the country as a fellow in the Spanish Ministry of Foreign affairs. This gave me the status of co-operant, similar to Spanish nuns, teachers and Spanish Cultural Centre workers. I had, thus, the possibility of extending my visa during the length of my contract. The Spanish diplomatic authorities, or rather their secretaries and consulate workers, did not make the bureaucratic element of this extension easy. Due to my low status in the system, my documentation was kept for months in the Consulate in Bata and I remained illegal during my first two months. This experience happened before I started my PhD dissertation research but had an important impact on how I got to try and understand many aspects of the functioning of the state, the territory and urban life in Equatorial Guinea. This is why in chapter 2 of the thesis I return to those two months in my description of the perceptions of the space and the circulation of goods and people.

If I had applied for a research visa through a Guinean institution, such as the University or the Research Council, it would probably have not succeed. I tried several times to get my visa via other institutions but I never succeeded without the help of the Spanish Embassy, and resorting to Spanish official cooperation, for whom

I had then to work: either teaching, preparing exhibitions or facilitating the work of other researchers. Once in the country I did enjoy the umbrella of Guinean research institutions. I was given special permissions for research by the Guinean Ministry of Education and by the Research Council. Those research permissions that allowed me to travel around the country, take photographs and conduct interviews.

Upon my arrival to SEMU marketplace I visited the president of the Association of Market Sellers. Mamá Nati was my gateway to the field and I am grateful for her assistance and her generosity. The relationship with Nati, however, limited my capacity to relate to non-organised and non-affiliated market women. The power position that my relationship with Nati entailed made access to some information possible but also implied many silences. I could not register criticism of the management of the organisation. Market women would not feel comfortable speaking openly about big P politics, nor about micro politics and the factions inside the organisation itself.

Sources and techniques

As mentioned above, the ethnographic material was mostly collected through processes of observation, informal conversations and unstructured interviews. In the case of market women and traders with a long trajectory in the activity, I conducted structured interviews in order to re-construct life histories. In this case, the interviews were registered with a voice recorder. The transcriptions of these interviews are not included in this thesis. I deposited key interviews with senior traders in the archive of the Oral Resources Lab (LRO) of the Spanish Cultural Centre in Bata and they are available for consultation.

Among the ethnographic material collected for this project are close to 1500 photographs. The images were taken during several fieldwork stays and I have included a small selection of them in the present volume. Part of the selection process was the need to preserve the anonymity of the protagonists of the ethnography. The photographs are the result of a long-term relationship with my collaborators, and I have used them mainly as research notes. However, at a crucial moment during my fieldwork in SEMU they contributed to my active participation in the pace of the marketplace. I recorded video images of the ceremony of the blessing of the marketplace that took place on the 13th of March 2011 and that was organised by the clothing sellers' association of the marketplace. The material offers an overview of the

different stages of the event: the service and the offertory, the march through the alley of empty market stalls and their bathing with holy water, as well as the celebration *a posteriori* with dances and drinks. The video images are raw and have not been edited, as they are lacking technical quality. They do, however serve as field notes. Some of the photographs taken during the event served to illustrate an article I wrote for *Ewaiso*, a women's magazine edited in Malabo which, for the first time covered an internal event organised by market women. The president of the market sellers' association asked me to print copies of the images that I subsequently sold in her market stall. It was the only time I actively participated in the market activity by selling the product of my work. As other market women in SEMU, I did not generate a profit from the selling of the photographs but I strengthened my networks with other market women which enriched my field research enormously.

To compliment my ethnographic field research, I consulted specialised libraries and archives. During my research stay in New York City I accessed the collections of the New York Public Library and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The historical collections of the Biblioteca Nacional and the Filmoteca Nacional, in Madrid, have been crucial for references related to the history of Equatorial Guinea. In the reconstruction of the latter, consultation of the Liverpool Record Office, the United African Company collection at the Unilever corporate archive in Port Sunlight, and the visit to the stores of National Museums Liverpool have been of critical interest. The archives in Liverpool contain relevant information about the commercial activities in Equatorial Guinea of the companies John Holt, Ltd. and Hatton and Cookson. These archives have not yet generated secondary literature related to Equatorial Guinea and they offer interesting counterpoints to the colonial narratives as they are focused on trading and exchange. The collection of historical material in relation to trade and Equatorial Guinea's integration into Atlantic capitalism has exceeded the scope of this thesis which has focused primarily on ethnographic material. The systematisation and critical analysis of all this material in the light of the approach that I have developed during my doctoral process will need to be carried on in the future. Chapter 1, and an article published in Spanish in 2014 (Valenciano-Mañé 2014), are just the very first steps towards an analysis which makes more of the historical material.

Thesis layout

The structure of the thesis consists of three sections, each section containing two chapters. The first section entitled *Extraversion genealogies and geographies* begins with a historical account, showing how rentist capitalism and extraversion strategies are not a recent phenomenon related to the oil exploitation but have a longer trajectory in Equatorial Guinea. This trajectory has facilitated the production of specific idioms for wealth and power that are deeply gendered and that are associated with access to foreign rents and goods. The first chapter of the section describes a *historical genealogy of connections*. The second chapter deals with how understandings of wealth and power are also associated with particular ideas about space that draw upon specific substantial and imagined geographies. These geographies are reproduced in the provisioning and valuation of foreign goods, but also through the maintenance of trade routes and networks, which I describe for the two main categories of clothing goods consumed in Equatorial Guinea.

The second section of the thesis is concerned with *provisioning paths and strategies*. Chapter 3 and 4 deal with two different categories of goods, *asamsé* and *elegancia* that correspond to two different provisioning paths. Each chapter starts with an ethnographic description of where the goods from the category are found in the marketplace and the ways in which they are marketed. I then explore the entanglement of these categories with the dynamics of global commodity flows. Subsequently I address the power relations that inform the creation of these categories by looking at their paths of production, distribution and consumption. This section describes the trajectories of the commodities I encountered in the marketplace, as they arrive in Equatorial Guinea. It does not only reflect on their social biographies but tries to explore the paths they could have followed, but did not. I argue, then, that power relationships make some links and paths possible while curtailing others. This will lead me to reflect on how this process occurs. By looking at the trajectory of particular goods I can simultaneously elucidate issues related to the production of meaning and global distributive power, as well as micro articulations of structural power.

By accessing valuable geographies and managing rents, market women contest gender roles, reach certain levels of public participation and generate political debates. Their participation is, however, co-opted by the elite and more specifically

by the first lady who, through a non-profit organisation, offers her protection to female petty traders in exchange for political support. These are the concerns of the third section of the thesis entitled *The marketplace: debts, prices and political co-optation*. Chapter 5 explores the moral underpinnings of price setting and the types of relationship established amongst 'business partners' within the market setting. Chapter 6 continues the exploration of the relationships amongst market women, but tackles their relationships with the political elite. The last section demonstrates that the ethnography of the everyday of market women reveals how they are able to source their households by engaging with rent managing strategies and by connecting with the powerful elite. However, their capacity to generate income, to make political claims, and to access to certain levels of power is limited by a hierarchy that extraversion strategies only help to maintain.



Figure 4 View from SEMU's central alley, April 2011



Figure 5 SEMU, asamsé alley, April 2011



Figure 6 Blessing of the market stalls in SEMU. 13th of March 2011 (image used to illustrate the article published in *Ewaiso*)



Figure 7 Rainy day in *Adut Elang*, in SEMU, March 2011



Figure 8 *Elegancia* stall in SEMU, March 2011

Part A

Extraversion genealogies and geographies

In order to understand the centrality of the marketplace in the economic and political strategies of market women we first need to examine the historicity of these relationships. Market women constantly refer to the past, whether it is because they connect to already established networks in order to source their stalls, because they invoke certain standards of quality in their merchandise, or because they appeal to moral rules and obligations when their endeavour is challenged. This *past* needs to be addressed in order to understand the historical generation of the paths of provisioning that I explore in Chapters 3 and 4.

History has also shaped spatial configurations. In the second chapter of this section I explore the spatial configuration through which goods and people circulate in Equatorial Guinea. Values and meanings associated with space also come to impinge on people and things. In Chapter 2 I focus on the political economy of these spatial configurations and the values and meanings attached to them, which allow for a better understanding of the generation of routes and paths of provisioning.



Figure 9 Malabo's historical center, 2011. Photo by 'Patrimonio Guinea'.

Chapter 1

The genealogies of extraversion

1.1 Introduction: the history of people 'who don't want to work'

When, in January 2015, I started to put together the ideas that would shape the following chapter I came across a video uploaded onto the YouTube channel of Asonga Television, one of the broadcast channels promoted and funded by the Nguema family. The short video, from the section *'noticias a la carta'* (news on demand), shows Obiang Nguema and first wife, Constanca Mangué de Obiang, on their farm in their home-village in Mongomo. Obiang Nguema delivers a clear message to the television cameras: 'If in Guinea there are symptoms of hunger it is because people do not want to work'. This is the Head of State's response to the complaints of some citizens that they suffer from scarcity every time that – for a political or military reason – the borders of the country are closed and imported commodities that meet the basic needs of the population cannot reach Guinean households. In Obiang's words:

'the people that go to buy the products of neighbouring countries, in Cameroon and Gabon, are bad! [...] The same women who complain that they have to go to Cameroon to buy their household foodstuffs are the ones that are painting their nails because they don't want to put their nails on the land. Planting doesn't take away women's beauty.'¹⁷

¹⁷ Speech extract from the clip of 'Guinea news on demand' (Sp.: *Noticias a la carta*) on Asonga Television's YouTube channel on January 13, 2015. The direct transcription of the speech in Spanish is: 'Si en Guinea hay síntoma de hambre es porque la gente no quiere trabajar. Hay negligencia, dejadez y falta de iniciativa. La gente de los mercados que se dedican a comprar en países vecinos, en Camerún, en Gabón. Iesto está mal! Productos que se producen aquí ¿Cómo vamos a buscar estos productos y traerlos a nuestro país, cuando en realidad lo que es más importante es que tengamos nuestra propia producción? Porque hay mucha crítica de que las mujeres se van a Camerún para comprar alimentos. Esas son las que pintan las uñas porque no quieren poner sus uñas en la tierra. Plantar no quita la belleza de la mujer [...]' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_orcMxKD5UM accessed 10/2/2015.

The production of foodstuffs for an internal market has never been a relevant economic activity in Equatorial Guinea¹⁸. Even though the lack of production and productivity as the originator of the poor life conditions and stagnation of Guineans is a complaint often voiced by elite members, development officers and foreign company workers alike, production and productivity are not at the core of the mechanisms and understanding of capital accumulation in Equatorial Guinea. Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan observed for corruption what can be easily applied to the lack of production and rent seeking: the *lack of production and productivity* 'is therefore as frequently denounced in words as it is practised in fact. But *its* verbal stigmatisation rarely leads to legal proceedings or sanctions' (de Sardan, 1999:29).

Obiang's comments about the lack of commitment of Guineans to work the land could resonate with the discourse and practices of the colonial rulers, who solved the problem of the lack of a willing workforce through forced labour and the importation of workers from abroad (Sundiata 1996, Sanz-Casas 1983, Martino 2012). Whereas the labour question of colonial rule was solved with the import of male workers from abroad, the unwilling workforce that Obiang refers to in his speech is explicitly female. In this case women are those who 'don't want to work' and who 'buy the stuff in Cameroon'. Throughout Guinean history, women have contributed to the supply of household foodstuffs through systems of self-sufficient small farming. Since at least the first decades of the twentieth century, the meagre surplus of these small farms used to be sold in specific sections of the marketplace in the relatively lightly populated urban areas. Other imported and essential products (such as salted fish, oil, salt, etc.) completed the vegetable supply of these farms located in the surroundings of the urban areas.

The scarcity of foodstuffs that Obiang referred to in his speech, however, corresponds to a problematic embedded in the particular process of urbanisation that some scholars have linked with the oil extraction economy of the last two decades (Campos-Serrano 2013; Roitman & Roso 2001, 125; Frynas 2004, 543). Even though the oil boom has attracted populations from both inside the country and from abroad,

¹⁸ The only exception has been the small amount of farming activity in the area of Moka, in Bioko, that has been occurring since colonial times, as well as several attempts of NGOs with micro-credit initiatives funded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, that never resulted in a lasting and sustained food supply for commercial purposes.

investments have not been made in the sector of agriculture and basic foodstuffs. Both Malabo and Bata have extended horizontally through kilometres of informal dwellings and poorly urbanised areas, hindering urban women's access to the land necessary to cultivate small farms as they had done in the past¹⁹. Most of the fresh foodstuffs available in the marketplace are imported from Cameroon and are sold at extremely high prices, as the decades of the oil boom generated considerable inflation (see Roitman & Roso 2001, 127 and Campos-Serrano 2013, 318)²⁰.

Foodstuffs are not the only goods that are imported, and the perceived lack of domestic production constitutes a feature of the history of the Guinean political economy. Even during periods in which the production of cash crops generated important revenues, with locals involved in their cultivation, such productive activities were mostly managed and controlled by foreigners while most of the commodities consumed domestically were imported. There was a total dependency on foreign firms for the marketing of the crops. Frequently the same companies were in charge of the provision of all sorts of other commodities, so cash crops were never actually converted into cash in Equatorial Guinea, but rather into a bundle of consumer goods. These consumer goods, at the same time, functioned as multiple currencies capable of being stored or exchanged as a means of generating value.

Throughout the history of Equatorial Guinea, relationships with foreign entities have been 'the major source in the process of political centralisation and economic accumulation' (Bayart 1993, 23). By looking at genealogies of the connections with foreign entities and materialities, and through observing local understandings of wealth and power, I will argue that the lack of production has not been the consequence of the recent arrival of oil money, but has deeper roots that are due to the (dis-)functioning of the State and capitalism in Equatorial Guinea. I will provide an overview of the genealogies of extraversion and dependency here while showing how the appropriation of resources from the 'the outside', pivotal for the conceptualisation of wealth and power, has its potential risks that have been ritually

¹⁹ Most of the senior market sellers of the SEMU marketplace in Malabo recall how they used to have their farms (*fincas*) in the outskirts of Malabo. They refer specifically to the areas of Timbabé and Santa Maria. They complain that their lands have been progressively turned into roads and both formal and informal buildings. Consequently, keeping small farms is no longer practical, as they would have to use some means of transportation as the available land is too far away from their homes and the market (SEMU marketplace January-April 2011, December 2012).

²⁰ For a more nuanced discussion on the inflation during the oil-boom years, see chapter 5.

managed and neutralised. The ideas of wealth, power and their hazards articulated in the framework of extraversion will become crucial in the understanding of the role of clothing trade and consumption in Equatorial Guinea, and will serve as a framework for the ethnographic material presented in the following chapters.

The chapter is organised as follows: first I provide a historical overview of the trading connections that have embedded Equatorial Guinea in wider global and regional logics (section 1.2). Following this historical contextualisation I will explore the Fang idiom for wealth, *akúm*, and its crucial role in the vernacular historical narratives concerning engagement with foreign goods and people as well as social change (section 1.3). Section 1.4 will show how these relationships with foreign goods and peoples have generated opportunities for wealth accumulation and also risks which have needed to be managed. I will describe how these risks have been ritually managed and made sense of through various notions of magic and sorcery. In section 1.5 I will explore the crucial impact that the colonial state had on the ways in which wealth and goods were thought about, managed and valued. In the final section of this chapter (section 1.6) I consider how the reaction to colonialism generated discourses and practices around the signification, value and circulation of goods and people, which interact with colonial impositions by creating new power hierarchies, systems of obligations and global connections.

1.2 Gathering genealogies of global connections

Shoes from Spain, second-hand clothing from British charities, and tomatoes from Cameroon are only the most recent in a long history of long-distance trading goods that have been imported into Equatorial Guinea for many centuries and have drawn on historical networks and connections. Guineans have been wearing imported glass beads, brass bracelets and woven clothes since long before their incorporation into the colonial state²¹. It is no longer 'bewildering' to state that the territories that nowadays form Equatorial Guinea have been part of the global

²¹ Ruibal et al. (2015) offer archaeological evidence for the consumption of foreign goods in Corisco Island (Muni Stuary). According to this crossing of archaeological and historical data, the Benga people started to consume European goods in the late eighteenth century. Gustau Nerin, in his study of the history of the island and its relationship with the Atlantic slave trade, also collects historical evidence of the high level of foreign commodity consumption by the Benga population in the late eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century (Nerin 2014).

economy for centuries as part of a regional system which Jane Guyer has proficiently described as 'Atlantic Africa' (Guyer 2004). In her theorisation of monetary transactions, Guyer makes the case for historicizing institutions, practices and cultural constructions in order to understand the complexities of the African economic transactions that have been obscured by Western economic theory (p.172). I will return to Jane Guyer's interpretative suggestions throughout the text, but I find it important to draw attention here to the nature and different uses of imported goods in economic transactions in Central African history. Clothes, alongside other imported goods (ironmongery, guns and gunpowder, glass beads, silverware, stock-fish, etc.), have been used as currency and have been part of the 'multiplicity of moneys' that Guyer discusses in order to explain how wealth is produced in African economies. Textile goods, together with other items used for the social presentation of the body, adopted the multiple roles of being commodities, currencies and prestige goods capable of being gifted and inherited. In the following paragraphs I will provide a general overview of the connections and origins of these multiple-use goods.

Geographies and historical trajectories

It may be methodologically useful to think about Equatorial Guinea within wider regional dynamics. However, the distance and the sea that separates the insular territories from the continental ones is indicative of the existence of nuances and differing historical trajectories between the regions. These histories began to converge from the beginning of the twentieth century and with the definitive deployment of the colonial state, which only took place after a military operation in 1927 (which was successful due to the debilitation of the population after a severe famine caused by failed harvests, Nerin 2010). Although goods and people have been circulating through all areas of Equatorial Guinea since at least the fifteenth century, regional engagements with the market and foreign trade have been very different from one territory to another. The smaller islands of Equatorial Guinea – Annobón, Corisco and the Elobeyes – feature in very early European contact, and their populations have participated in the Atlantic trade since the fifteenth century. The Benga from Corisco and the Elobeyes, for example, have long standing traditions as traders and middlemen between European traders and the Fang population in the hinterland (Nerin 2015). Annobón, in contrast, became an entrepôt and agricultural centre that was populated with captured slaves from the coast and neighbouring Sao

Tomé and Príncipe. Its inhabitants exchanged commodities with the trading vessels but also remained for long periods without any contact with the coast (De Wulf 2014).

Although European slave trading operations were located on the coast (Bonny, Calabar, Bimbia, Cape Lopez, Loango, etc.) and coastal peoples were part of the inner workings of the global economy, Bioko island and its native inhabitants, the Bubi, remained on the margins of Atlantic trade routes until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a British naval base was established on the island (Sundiata 1990, 22). In Bubi historical accounts, the lack of engagement with the slave trade and the resistance to colonial control is a motive of cultural pride, and an important trope of their self-definition as a people that has resisted multiple occupations over time and until the present (see e.g. Bolekia 2003, 32-33). However, their participation in the global economy through the cultivation of cash crops from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is also celebrated as a source of national pride. For example, the arrival of the cocoa crop to Bubi society is memorialised as a crucial moment in oral history narratives and folkloric manifestations²². This integration through the adaptation of their political structures and language is what allowed them to maintain a certain independence and sovereignty that is more rhetorical than real²³. Historical accounts of the nineteenth century make evident the close relationships between Bubi political representatives and European traders and authorities; the Bubi representatives spoke in English, benefited from the trade and exchange of provisions for foreign goods and at times strongly resisted the occupation of their territories (Martin del Molino 1994: 18, 82, 218).

Although the Spanish Crown had acquired the islands of Bioko, Annobón, Corisco and the 'adjacent territories' from the Portuguese in 1777 with the intention of establishing a profitable slave trade, the enterprise did not succeed and the Spanish occupation of most of the territories did not happen until a century afterwards²⁴. The slave trade was only successful in the area of Corisco, and only as

²² Bubi peoples celebrate annually the cocoa festival, when they celebrate the arrival of the first cocoa crop in the island.

²³ See Núria Fernández (2013g) and Aranzadi (2014).

²⁴ For a detailed account of this failure, as well as the various negotiations between the Spanish and the British authorities between the founding of Clarence in 1827, and the Spanish expedition that finally set up a small Spanish presence in the island in 1846 – see M^a Dolores García Cantus (2005).

an illegal activity, following slavery's formal abolition in 1807 (Sundiata 1990, 21; García Cantús 2005, 25-40; Nerin 2015, 221).

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bioko became the destination and the crossing point for people from many different locations in the Atlantic. In the mid-1820s the British government considered Bioko as the logical base for naval squadrons to patrol West African waters and capture illegal slaving vessels (Brown 1973). In 1826 Captain William Owen founded Clarence City (later known as Santa Isabel during colonial times and as Malabo since independence), and began to host recaptured slaves (most of them Igbo from Nigeria) and Kru workers from Liberia and Sierra Leone who had joined British vessels. Very soon the island became part of the circuits of the so-called legitimate trade, and it came to specialise in palm oil. The Spanish claimed their sovereignty over the island in 1835, but until 1858 there was no Spanish administration, and, in fact, an English trader (John Beecroft) was recognised as the Spanish Governor. The Bubi engaged with the production of palm oil but not with its trade and distribution, which provided an opportunity for freed slaves and immigrants from Liberia and Sierra Leone to develop into an elite of 'creole' traders and plantation owners, known as the Fernandinos, who performed the role of middlemen between European businessman and the Bubi (Lynn 1984; Clarence-Smith 1994; Martin del Molino 1994). The small population of Bioko did not allow for a large scale expansion of commercial production, but nevertheless the main ports of the island became key nodes for commodity transshipment, which is a role that the ports of Malabo (Santa Isabel) and Lubá (San Carlos) have kept up until today.

By the last third of the nineteenth century the planters of Bioko – initially Fernandinos and British, though increasingly Spanish later on – turned their activities to cocoa cultivation, the monoculture that would define the economy of the island until independence. The shortage of labour, and the alleged unwillingness of the Bubi population to work as *braceros* in the plantation system, produced the need to import workers: first Kru workers from Liberia and Sierra Leona, then freed Cubans and, later on, Nigerian workers who would settle on the island for a limited period of time, having arrived with a closed contract, partially paid on the island and in kind (Sanz-Casas 1983, Martino 2015). All these movements of people went hand in hand with the movement of goods and with the circulation of multiple currencies. Workers were paid in bundles of goods which included clothes of different styles and

fabrics. These 'wages' were then used in social and ritual transactions (e.g. Martino 2016).

The deployment of the colonial state developed in parallel to the settlement of the Catholic missions that unseated the Methodist missionaries which had opened up stations during the period of British influence²⁵. Missionaries had specific views regarding how Africans had to engage with consumption and use foreign goods and currency. The clash of ideas concerning how the *indigenas*²⁶ should engage with the colonial economy generated tensions that I will sketch later²⁷. Travellers, missionaries and colonial officers frequently complained about the Bubi's lack of interest in foreign goods, and of the Fernandinas' excessive flashiness, just to mention but two examples (see for instance Mary Kingsley 1897, 58, 72 respectively).

The populations of the continent engaged with Atlantic trade differently from both the Bubi and Fernandinos. Coastal Ndowé peoples rapidly enmeshed with Presbyterian missions and trade – well established by the 1850s – and they founded profitable businesses, whereas the Fang peoples of the interior stayed on the margins of Atlantic commerce for longer. However, this does not mean that foreign commodities did not penetrate the Equatorial forest. German, English and Lebanese trading firms had been operating in the Continental territory for decades before the colonial administration was established. Corisco, the Elobeyes, Mbini and Bata all had well-established commercial firms at the end of the nineteenth century (see e.g. Unzueta y Yuste 1945: 42-45). The first sub-government in the area was situated on a tiny island in the Muni Estuary (Elobey Chico), due to the colonisers' fear of the populations and diseases of the mainland. As a result, the colonial administrators did not relocate to Bata until the 1920s²⁸.

Fang peoples were, however, far from 'isolated' or 'out of the touch of civilisation' (as the colonial literature usually depicted them) at the end of the 19th century and

²⁵ For an account of the first failed attempt of the Spanish colonial authorities to establish a Jesuit mission, see Vilaró- Güell (2014). For the history of the Catholic missions of the Claretianos order, see Creus i Boixaderas (2015).

²⁶ The Spanish colonisers referred to Africans as *Indigenas*.

²⁷ Tensions between missionaries and local populations about the use of foreign goods and currencies have been of interest to many post-colonial historians in recent decades. Seminal works include *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Comaroff & Comaroff 1995).

²⁸ See Manuel Iradier's memories of his travels towards the interior of the Muni Stuary (Iradier 1858, 1878).

the beginning of the 20th²⁹. They had been connected to long-distance trade before they engaged directly with the Europeans on the coast. Trading routes and peoples circulated through the Equatorial forest, exchanging locally-produced foodstuffs and products from the long-distance trade, including European goods obtained from the middlemen on the coast, such as cloth, cowries, beads, fire-arms, gunpowder, ironmongery, salt and copper (Vansina 1990). There is documentary evidence of coastal dwellers complaining to colonial authorities at the beginning of the 20th Century about the strong control that Fang people had over the circulation of commodities through the continent, and how difficult it was for the foreign commercial firms to trade directly with the hinterland (Nerin 2010, 27). As I will argue in the following chapter of this dissertation, the mobility between villages has been crucial for the Fang-Bulu-Beti populations of the Equatorial forest. With an exogamous clan-based kin structure, visiting relatives and receiving guests has been a feature of Fang sociality: the way to ensure the circulation of goods and redistribution of social payments (Guyer 1986).

Foreign population and the Factoria system

Following the installation of the colonial administration in Rio Muni, European trading stations were also established in the more populated centres of the hinterland (the capitals of the provinces), and marketplaces were set up where Fang people would exchange rubber, ivory and, later, coffee and cassava flour. The final deployment of the colonial state took place during the interwar period, which obviously conflicted with the Fang richman or *mikukuma*, who had been controlling the circulation of goods and people³⁰. As I will describe below, the *factoria* system, together with the implementation of the colonial health service and the missions, would play a key role in the final deployment of the colonial state.

By the 1950s and the 1960s the colonial economy had been consolidated and the Franquist metropolitan regime directed large amounts of resources to its 'last bastion

²⁹ This was a frequent trope in colonial literature, repeated ad nauseam throughout the nineteenth century (e.g. Burton 1863; Winwood Reade 1873, Du Chaillu 1861, etc.), but also in most twentieth century historical accounts (see e.g. the publications by the Instituto de Estudios Africanos (IDEA)).

³⁰ See e.g. the case of *operación rokobongo* in 1913 in Creus (2001). For a more recent period see Martino (2016), who explores the articulation and 'des-articulation' between Fang marriage practices and the cash-advance offer by the colonial labour recruiters.

of the empire that never saw the sunset'³¹. The many Spanish trading firms were well established all over the country and various varieties of imports circulated. The connection with other territories along the Gulf manifested in Nigerian workers on the cocoa plantations, connections between the Fernandinos and Krio communities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the Hausa traders that were well established in Bata, Malabo and Ebibeyín. European and Lebanese commercial firms hardly ever contracted locals in order to run their trading *factorias*³². Hausa from Nigeria and Cameroon; Yoruba and Igbo from Nigeria; and, to a lesser extent, other West Africans and Asians ran the commercial *factorias* situated in all the corners of the country³³.

Yet to be added to this diversity was a group refugees from German Cameroon who found shelter in Spanish Guinea after the Second World War. This last heterogeneous population group found different forms of subsistence. Mainly Hausa, but also Bantu-speaking ex-combatants, established a settlement in what would become Campo Yaunde, nowadays one of the most populated slums of Malabo. They became plantation workers but also petty traders, mechanics and hairdressers. Some of the German officers who first sought refuge in Santa Isabel left the island, but a relevant number stayed and developed their commercial enterprises, most of which imported merchandise from Las Palmas on the Canary Islands. They collaborated closely with the colonial authorities and became important, and indeed notorious, agents³⁴.

³¹ 'In my empire the sun never sets' (*en mi imperio nunca se pone el sol*) is a sentence attributed to the monarch Philip of Austria or Philip II (1527-1598), and his reign was considered one of the 'most glorious moments' of the expansion of the Spanish empire. Susan Martin Marquez (2008) has explored the process of the creation of a Spanish identity and how the imperialist discourse had a crucial role in the projection of an otherness to create a notion of a metropolitan unit. The idealised imperial Spain became the trope and the model for Franquist nationalism and, therefore, the maintenance of a profitable and successful civilizing mission in the African small colonies became a tool for reinforcing the metropolitan discourse.

³² In the second chapter of this dissertation I offer an overview of the system of *factoria* which has remained until today, despite the fact that since 2005 other forms of retailing, such as supermarkets, have also emerged.

³³ The history of the Chinese workers that arrived to Fernando Poo through Cuba is still to be written. But they were also part of the melting pot of the Bioko society.

³⁴ In many of the interviews I was able to carry out in the continental region, the names of and stories about German refugees were extremely present. There were recurrent anecdotes of them using the authority and impunity that the colonial authorities had granted them to mistreat the local population, and to make them serve their particular interests. The missionaries of the area were sometimes critical of and opposed to their presence, as their behaviour challenged the Catholic morals of the missions.

The colonial economic system, however, was extremely reliant on its metropolis that had put in place protectionist policies for the cocoa produced in the colony and financed its transport and production infrastructure (see e.g. Sant-Gisbert 2009 and Diaz-Matarranz 2005). During the 19th century most of the trade was dominated by non-Spanish trading companies (Woermann, John Holt, Hatton & Cookson, Dumas, and Perot, mainly) that exchanged European products for raw materials such as timber, palm oil, ivory and rubber. However, by the turn of the century the presence of La Compañía Transatlántica had increased, and by the 1920s more small and medium sized Spanish trading and extractive companies existed than non-Spanish ones. Those same trading companies were functioning as extractive companies by the turn of the 20th century, and they would operate as such until they abandoned the country in the aftermath of independence. The deployment of the colonial state implied the institutionalisation of land ownership and the establishment of concessions of exploitation. Companies such as the Compañía Nacional de Explotación Africana (ALENA) and Sociedad Colonial de Guinea (SOCOGUI) exploited a substantial forest area and became important institutions. They attracted workers both from neighbouring colonies and from Rio Muni, they transformed the landscape and constructed infrastructure for the extraction. During this period these companies also worked as states by proxy, providing sanitary assistance and training for manual work while exercising violence to maintain the colonial order (Guerra & Pascual 2015).

Trading companies owned land and exploited palm oil, timber, cocoa and coffee farms, which made commercial exchange very lucrative even if the consumer market of Equatorial Guinea was not sufficient to generate large revenues. Fernando Poo became both the recipient of commodities from the neighbouring colonies and a site for the smuggling of other goods. When the Spanish commercial firms overtook the English and German ones they found that there was already a consumerist tradition and that Guineans had developed a preference towards particular imported goods that could not be easily substituted with Spanish imports.

The *factorias* were not specialised in a particular commodity type. Apart from a cluster of ironmongers located in Bata, however, which has a long-standing history dating back to the very first establishment of trading posts in the area, most of the trading posts sold the same range of products, including clothes, hardware and foodstuffs (Perpiñá-Grau 1945, 159). Regardless of the origin of the owner or the

store-keeper, the product range of the *factorias* included, for example: Dutch and English gin, *cuadradillo de Manchester* (Manchester cloth), Spanish wine, and French *tergal* cloth³⁵. As I will develop in further detail later on, local people developed their own mechanisms for assessing the range of commodities available in the market. The categories used for assessing commodities associated ideas of quality and durability with particular centres of production or trading trajectories.

After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the Franquist regime tried to promote the strict consumption of Spanish goods. Nevertheless, English and German commodities were finding their way into the colony right up until independence. Ambas Bay and Hatton & Cookson ended their activities in 1970 and 1971 respectively, after having reduced their activities solely to shops in Fernando Poo and Rio Muni. The logistical problems encountered in the aftermath of independence encouraged them to abandon the trading *factorias* once existing stocks had sold out (Pedler 1974, 89, 92).

From the alleged prosperity of the colony to the dismanteling of the economy and back

It is matter of a general consensus that the situation of Equatorial Guinea during the last decades of the colonial period was one of considerable prosperity. This remembered prosperity is also seen to have arrived alongside political changes which resulted in a relative improvement of the status of the colonised. The rise of a nationalist movement that resembled the independentist movements that were spreading around the continent in the aftermath of the Second World War, was seen to have emerged alongside a general improvement of living standards. In 1959 the colony, which had been under military rule, was made a region of Spain (*Provincia*), and the division of status between *indígenas* (natives) and *emancipados* (*evolués*) was abolished. In 1960 there were three Guinean representatives in *las Cortes*. In 1964, the status of the territory changed again, due to international pressures, and it became an Autonomous Region within Spain (Sundiata 1983: 83). Following these rapid changes in status, the Franquist colony had to speed up the education of a generation of future rulers and of an indigenous middle class which could conduct

³⁵ In an interview with a former worker of Hatton and Cookson in Bata in December 2012 I was told that 'every *factoria* used to have the same range of products. Even the suppliers of the bulk commodities were usually the same'.

the clerical work required for the new country (Nerín 2016: 142). This goal was difficult to achieve, especially if we take into account the fact that, before 1959, the majority of the population could not access secondary or higher education. With independence, the new regime repressed this same western educated elite as part of a series of anti-colonialist measures. This first generation of Guineans who studied either in the ex-metropole or elsewhere in Europe are often referred to as 'the lost generation' (*la generación perdida*). They had a relevant role in the opposition movement against Macías Nguema and had great expectations after the coup. This same generation of Guineans contributed most to the creation of a positive imaginary about the last decade of the colony (see Cussack 1999).

The nostalgia for the decades prior to independence is a recurrent trope in the conversations I have had with middle aged Equatorial Guineans. Many Guineans have told me that Equatorial Guinea used to be 'the African Switzerland', where the people drove better cars, were better dressed and had better lives than in the metropolis itself, which was still recovering from the hardships of the civil war. Meanwhile, for Equatorial Guinea's Nigerian immigrants 'Pañá' (Fernando Poo) had contradictory meanings. Whereas it was widely known that the working conditions on the island were brutal, the work allowed them to bring all sorts of commodities back to Nigeria which were highly valued and were central in the imaginaries of what having 'a good life' implied. Alcohol, clothes and ironmongery were brought back to the *braceros'* home villages, along with radios and sewing machines. Smuggling and trading with relatively small quantities of goods became crucial among the workers who circulated between Bioko and the mainland. The geostrategic position of Equatorial Guinea, being between the (former) French colonies and close to Nigeria, encouraged the consolidation of Guinea as an entrepôt and enclave for commerce and smuggling.

I will discuss later in this dissertation how the nostalgia for this past has resulted in a particular vision of the quality of the goods that were available in the market in this period. Guineans often recall *los tiempos de Ondó Edú* (literally 'the times of Ondó Edú', the president of the autonomous region of Guinea) as especially prosperous, and the goods associated with this period are considered the best one can

find on the market³⁶. However, in spite of this nostalgia, the reality is that only a very small portion of the population of Equatorial Guinea had access to this prosperity which so many yearned for. The sense of former abundance and widespread prosperity during these years could be seen to serve as a commentary on the years to follow (Abaga 1997: 28-29). The distribution of wealth that appeared in the statistics for the late 1950s and 1960s was limited to foreigners and a small African elite. This reflected the fact that the production of such riches was totally dependant on foreign actors and institutions, and that the revenues were accumulated outside of the country (see Ndongo 1977: 151-152). Nowadays, the nostalgia for this hopeful historical moment has an impact on the perception and articulation of 'what is good and not so good' in regard to consumption, and also influences current expectations of development and public infrastructure.

The coming of independence in 1968 made the weakness of Equatorial Guinea's extravert economic system evident and resulted in its collapse. By 1972 most of the trading companies had abandoned the country. The economy of the small Equatorial nation could not function without the constant influx of metropolitan investment or the presence of foreign trading companies. The first economic agreements after independence were meant to ensure smooth relationships between the new country and the ex-metropolis, providing the basic financial structure for the creation of a National Bank of Equatorial Guinea (Sundiata 1990: 92). However, this agreement would not last more than a few months. When the relationship between Spain and Guinea broke down after a political crisis in 1969, all such agreements were abandoned, resulting in a total economic breakdown within Guinea itself.

Not only did the economy collapse, so too did the ideology of consumerism that was crucially entangled with the civilizing enterprise brought by the Spanish colonisers. In response, the new regime concentrated its efforts on the promotion of a re-traditionalisation or decolonisation of consumption, mirroring la *politique de l'authenticité* of Mobutu's Zaire. Such authenticity, however, corresponded primarily

³⁶ Bonifacio Ondó Edú was the president of la Autonomía (1964-1968). In 1959 Equatorial Guinea was declared to be a province of the Spanish State, but in 1963, after a referendum, the colony changed its status to that of an Autonomous Region. This was meant to be a step towards the independence of almost five years later. Sundiata recalls the privileged treatment the colony had during this period: 'In 1962 Admiral Carrero Blanco, head of the Dirección General de Plazas y Provincias Africanas, announced that state expenditure was higher for the whole of Equatorial Guinea than it was in the metropole: 1.825 pesetas per capita versus 1.800 in the metropole' (Sundiata 1990: 51).

to a particular way of understanding and interpreting only one of Equatorial Guinean's cultural traditions: the Fang tradition, which was imposed on the other cultural groups in the post-colony. The mystification of a glorious Fang past that had resisted foreigners and their influence became the justification for their domination over the other ethnic groups, who were considered to have served the colonialist interests as middlemen and, therefore, to have been privileged contributors to colonial hegemony.

In order to reverse the colonialist discourse and consumerist economic logic, President Macias Nguema advocated for new global partners (including the USSR, Cuba, North Korea and China) and new consumer goods. He nationalised trade and commercial activity which led to a scarcity of wealth and products within the country. The resulting shortages and low quality products characterised Macias Nguema's rule. As I will show later, scarcity and precarious livelihoods added a material violence to the brutality of the regime and played an important role in the collective memory of the period.

After Teodoro Obiang's coup in 1979, old routes and networks were partially restored. However, while new partnerships and horizons emerged, a 'Fanguitization of politics' continued, consolidating the hegemony of the clan of Macias Nguema, the Essangui. The new regime, headed by the nephew of the previous dictator, did not purge the main actors responsible for the violent repressions and – in spite of an initial will to differentiate from the post-coup regime – most of the repressive devices and practices inherited from both the colony and the Macias regime remained. Obiang had to rely on Breton Woods institutions for the first fifteen years of his mandate and therefore had to comply, at least nominally, with the conditionalities of structural adjustment. This obligations, in turn, entailed the minimising of human rights within a staged democracy.

The arrival of the oil boom provided resources for the maintenance of the regime without having to comply with conditionalities set by the international financial institutions. It also meant the arrival of new goods, and of people who introduced new ideas about consumption and valuation. These ideas were articulated according to particular ways of understanding the past and its imagined and material legacy while also providing ideas about projected futures and aspirations. These ideas about the past and projections towards desired futures are key to this thesis and will unfold throughout the text.

Having sketched a general genealogy of the historical trading connections of the territories which nowadays form Equatorial Guinea, I will move on to the exploration of other historical genealogies. In the following section I will focus on the historicity of the Fang idiom for wealth, and I will show how it plays a crucial role in the construction of a Fang historical narrative of the past and their relationship with the Atlantic trade and the colonial occupation. The Fang concept of wealth will be crucial to understanding the processes of political transformation that run concurrently with the history of its connections with foreign entities.

1.3 Wealth and power genealogies: the search of the akúm³⁷ and the making of connections

The way wealth and accumulation have been understood in the societies that have become part of Equatorial Guinea has been fundamentally transformed through involvement in Atlantic trade. Historical and ethnographic accounts of Equatorial forest societies agree in considering them as segmentary societies, with a fragmented kin structure and without a commercial tradition before contact with European traders. As shown in the previous section, however, trade affected all societies whether in the Equatorial forest or in the insular territories (note that the Bubi had a different political organisation), either through many intermediaries or directly on the coast (Vansina 1990, Balandier 1955, Guyer 1986). The evolution of ways of understanding wealth and accumulation allowed for the creation of new forms of power centralisation, which would later be transformed and re-transformed with the imposition of the colonial and postcolonial state. In this section I explore the meanings of a crucial idiom used in Fang people's understanding of the relationship with foreign entities and materialities: the notion of *akúm*. Tracing the genealogies of this concept enriches our understanding of how relationships with 'the outside' have been crucial in structuring power as understood in the terms of Eric Wolf: 'the power to create the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behaviour possible, while making others less possible or impossible' (Wolf 1990: 587). I will

³⁷ I am using here the transcription of the word as my Fang Ntum informants use it in Equatorial Guinea. The Guinean anthropologist Joaquín Mbana and the linguist Julián Bibang coincide in the use of *akúm* instead of *akúma*, the term used by scholars who based their research in South Cameroon (e.g. Jane Guyer, Labourthe-Tolra or Abega).

show how this idiom also entails frequently contested and negotiated gender relations. As I have already indicated, since the independence of the country, there has been a 'Fanguitization of politics'. I will argue that Nguemism has adopted and adapted the idiom of *akúm* to practise and make legible the accumulation of wealth and power.

The use of genealogies in order to establish connections through time and space is an old methodology in the historicity of West and Central Africans. Genealogies are basic structures for the Fang historical imagination, and as John M. Cinnamon puts it: 'they can tell us a great deal about how social actors have used the lineage idiom to express, manipulate, negotiate, create, and conceal ever shifting individual, local, regional and even inter- 'ethnic' identities in the present and in the past' (Cinnamon 1999, 146). In this section I will make use of a genealogical narrative that has become a classic in the Fang oral history repertoire in order to explore the conceptual (Foucauldian) genealogy of wealth and power. Similar exercises could be done on the cores of the historicities of other ethnic groups – like Ndowé peoples³⁸ – which share tropes with the Fang historical imagination. However, I will focus on the Fang perspective of the history of contacts and engagements with the global economy forged in the mid-twentieth century, because of the importance of their perspective in the forging of new power relationships and meanings surrounding consumption practices.

James Fernández has shown that the 'master idea of Fang life was genealogy, a ladder of names extending back in time and out across space – a figurative path leading from birth to death, from new-born down through all the dead' (Fernandez 1982, 97). The *ndan ayong*, a list of ancestors in the patrilineal line, structures memory and brings together both a mythic past and the rendering of lived historical facts (*nkande*, or events seen with one's eyes). In the recent history of the Fang

³⁸ Ndowé peoples of the coast have similar themes and tropes in their historical narratives. Stories that were collected and published by missionaries in the late nineteenth century are staged and enacted in folkloric festivals – the annual Djombé in Corisco constitutes one example. Benga people from the area of the Muni Stuary represent their arrival to Corisco according to a text and a song that it is kept by one of the chief authorities on the island. The text was part of the literary production of the Presbyterian mission. It recalls the escape of the Benga from the violence of 'a ferocious tribe', including fleeing towards the forest, the crossing of a big river with the help of a mythological animal (Djombé) and the arrival to the coast or the beach (*manga*). The Djombé festival consists of a re-enactment of the migration, the river crossing and the encountering of the coast. It is performed every 16th of September, and Benga participants from other points of the Muni Stuary travel to the island to celebrate.

peoples these stories played an important role in traditional education – a mnemonic device 'whose recitation brought through important information for the group' (Fernandez 1982: 76). One could be instructed in the council house (the *abá* or *casa de la palabra*) by an expert or an elder sage, or one could listen to a Mbom Mvet (troubadour) recite, with the help of his special guitar. These performances would combine the history of the kin group with mythological stories about the creation of the world, the spirits of the forest and the immortal beings³⁹.

These genealogies were especially useful during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when Fang traditions were 'under stress' due to the imposition of the colonial states (Vansina 1990, 235). The rise of coastal trade with Europeans and the strength of a new leadership generated an increase in tensions and warfare between groups (Cinnamon 1999; Okenve 2007, 62). The reconstruction of kinship ties through time and space became a way to prove a sense of brotherhood between clans and to avoid violence and facilitate hospitality (Balandier 1955, 76). It is through a genealogical way of explaining and memorializing history that Fang peoples have made sense of their entanglements and disentanglements within global processes. To put it simply, genealogical (re)constructions served to recreate a tight 'interior' – which had multiple levels: the clan, the lineage, the ethnies – and made sense of the creation of limits and boundaries that marked a relationship with an imagined, and material, 'exterior' which also had various layers, such as the neighbouring clans, ethnies and the soon to arrive trading institutions and peoples.

Nowadays not many people in Equatorial Guinea can enumerate the long lists of ancestors that ethnologists collected in the first half of the twentieth century, which traced back twenty generations. However, recalling shorter genealogies and kinship ties is still of crucial importance in identity narratives, within which proving one's belonging to an ayong (large kin group or, as Fernandez and Labourthe-Tolrá would say, clan) is of central importance. The reciting of the list of ancestors in the *abá*, or council house, as a particular site for memorialisation, has given way to other forms of tracing back the history of different groups and communities, including for

39 This particular manifestation has fascinated anthropologists and folklorists, and a considerable literary tradition has arisen around it. For the case of the Fang of Rio Muni, the recent work of Ramon Sales and Domingo Elá is considered the most important compilation of *épopées* by Eyí Moan Ndong, one of the most celebrated troubadours in Equatorial Guinea.

example: Mvet Oyeng, other folkloric manifestations like the invention of a national dress to which I will refer in the epilogue, and the publication of oral stories which have been turned into texts.

The justification of a political unit from the genealogical ties of the Fang clans was the aim of one of the first orally transmitted stories that was reproduced as a text. That story was *Dulu Bon Be Afri Kara* (The Journey of the Children of Afri Kara), a historical account of which one version was written in 1948 by the Ondua Engutu and published in Bulu by the American Presbyterian Mission of Ebolowa (in Cameroon's South Region). The text was translated into Spanish and edited by the linguist Julian Bibang for an Equatorial Guinean readership in 1995, but by that point it had already been orally circulated around the entire Fang territory. It was often recited to me in conversation about the history of the Fang people. Whereas very few of the elders I spoke with between 2008 and 2012 could recite the long list of clan ancestors that ethnographers like James Fernandez and John M. Cinamonn had collected in the latter decades of the twentieth century, almost all would offer short versions of *Dulu Bon* and on occasions I was directly referred to Julian Bibang's translation.

The narrative was a crucial justification for the *Alar Ayong* (*E'Lat Ayong*) political movement – literally the 'sewing' of a clan (Cinnamon 1999: 370; Okenve 2007: 42). *Alar Ayong* (pl. *Ilar Meyong*), forged after the First World War and consolidated after the Second World War and therefore was of fundamental importance in the shaping of a modern Fang identity. It became a movement of resistance to European colonisation at a time of increased pressure for the colonial occupation of the Equatorial forest. During the first third of the twentieth century the region of Rio Muni saw a population increase due to the pressures that first German and then French administrations exerted on the people living in the Equatorial forest in areas that are currently part of Cameroon and Gabon. These pressures came in the form of war recruitment, forced labour and taxation. A weaker Spanish presence in the territories of the Muni also favoured migration towards the South-West⁴⁰.

Following the Biblical structure, *Dulu Bon* explains the common origin of the Fang in a northern country close to a 'Salted Sea'. It describes how the sons of Afri

40 For detailed account of the definitive Spanish occupation of the Rio Muni area see the work of Gustau Nerin *La Última Selva de España* (2010); for an account of the political reawakening of *Alar Ayong* see Cinnamon (1999: 359-389).

Kara started their long pilgrimage south to escape from the 'Redman' that wanted to enslave them. In their journey across the Equatorial forest they lost most of their material culture and their technological knowledge. Following the suggestions of their patriarch, Afri Kara, the Fang peoples, divided into different clans (meyong) all taking diverse paths, kept migrating to the South-West expecting to meet the sea again. On their journey to the South-West, they found the 'Whiteman', and they managed to restore their 'wealth' with the goods that they acquired from the European traders (Ondua Engutu 1995).

The main reason given for the migration to the South-West was a search for *akúm*, which Julian Bibang translates into Spanish as *riqueza* and I translate here as 'wealth'; the 'Whiteman', with all his goods, had plenty of this wealth. One of the scenes of this narrative depicts how two Fang men were sent down Ntem river to find the Whiteman on the coast. When they came back to the Fang, settled in the high Ntem, they brought some of the objects they had found:

We have seen the Whiteman that Afri Kara recommended in the settlement of Bata. We have also seen the sea and the sunset.

They [the envoys] showed everyone the objects they brought with them; salt, clothes, gunpowder, watches of all types and necklaces, and the feet sounded song song [...] They said to their brothers that living with the whiteman was convenient because 'they bring us a lot of wealth' [...] All of us can be rich! (Ondua Ngutu, 1995, 133)⁴¹

The encounter with the Whiteman (ntangan) brought goods but also led to a period of turmoil that was registered in the text where it describes the war with Oban (South-West, now Gabon), the German occupation, and the escape from French taxation. As I will develop throughout the text, this particular notion of wealth being dependent upon relations to the 'outside world' always has risks attached, which have to be managed and neutralised.

There is no doubt that Dulu Bon, like many other oral narratives of the period, was deeply influenced by Missionary historical thinking – from the structure of the

⁴¹Sp.: 'Hemos visto en el poblado de Bata al hombre blanco que nos recomendó Afri Kara, también hemos visto el mar y como se ponía el sol. Mostraron los objetos que traían: sal, telas, pólvora y relojes de toda clase, collares para adornar el cuello, y los pies sonaban song song. Dijeron a sus hermanos que convenía vivir con el hombre blanco porque 'nos traen mucha riqueza'. [...] ¡Todos podemos volvernos ricos!' (Ondua Ngutu, 1994: 133)

narrative to the positive valuation of European goods and technology⁴². However, what I want to highlight here is that the search for imported goods was rendered as the principal driver of Fang migration and history. That being said, this search for wealth was not related to regulated work or speculative commerce, and the *akúm* was not limited to the possession of imported goods. The notion of *akúm* was tightly related to bride-wealth; access to and control of these goods allowed gaining control over people and the creation of new social hierarchies. In Dulu Bon Be Afri Kara a relevant social authority emerges together with the wealth encountered with the Whiteman: the *nkukuma*, the rich man (Ondua Engutu 1995, 121). The wealth of the *nkukuma* was measured in terms of control over people as part of not only of a wealth-in-material-resources but also a wealth-in-people system (Guyer & Belinga 1995). The *nkukuma* could marry many women and his wealth was precisely measured through his capacity to contract marriages with women from other meyong (clans), therefore establishing a wide network of alliances.

European descriptions and ethnographic accounts of the first half of the twentieth century emphasise the existence of 'indigenous currencies' used for marriage payments. The existence of social currencies has been a focus of anthropological investigation in Central Africa. In a comparative analysis of bride-wealth amongst the Pahouin (in the Fang-Bulu-Beti linguistic region), Jane Guyer collects these descriptions and identifies regional variations of their uses and evolution in relation to the moment of contact of these populations with global trade and colonial occupation. The result of such contact with foreign goods and transformations of notions of wealth, in conjunction with the intervention of the colonial state, was the abandonment of social currencies. However, the paths towards their debilitation were different: in southern areas forms of marriage without payment gained ground, whereas in northern areas polygyny increased substantially, and the high demand of iron currency together with the lack of collective control over its production or distribution prompted the devaluation of social currencies (Guyer 1986).

The *ekuele* (pl. *bipkuele*), the single-use currency dedicated to the payment of the *nsoá* (*nsuá*), the bride-price, has occupied a central place in many ethnographic accounts of the Fang in the first half of the twentieth century (Tessmann [1913] 2003:

⁴² See as an example the analysis of this genre of epic tales in the work of Jacint Creus (2006).

536-542; Mbana 2014: 167). According to Tessmann – but also to more recent ethnographers and Fang cultural sages like Joaquin Mbana and Felipe Osá Angüé – iron pieces in a spear or sword shape were presented in bulk, either 10 (awom bipkuele) or 100 (ntad bipkuele) at a time, and they represented the *akúm*, the wealth of a man, and his means to marry women, have children, give his daughters in marriage and contribute to the payments of the nsoá of his sons⁴³. The nsoá was the mechanism for maintaining alliances with other families or clans and managing the clan exogamy. To the main payment of the nsoá other goods were added, including those imported from other places. The groom entered into debt with the bride family and he had to contribute with his labour and his possessions to the needs of the family to which he was now linked through marriage.

Currencies, wives and trade goods all represented different categories of wealth, as the very existence of a social currency implies. However as Jane Guyer argued: 'trade goods were a different type of good but whose flow entered increasingly and variably into the flows of indigenous wealth during the 19th century' (Guyer 1986, 578). The interconnection of the three types of goods in the narrative of Dulu Bon evidences how, until at least the mid 20th century, they were not fully separate spheres of exchange.

The ethnographic accounts of the first half of the 20th century agree in their claims that Fang people did not have a 'commercial tradition' (Fernandez 1982, 139; Alexandre & Binet 1954: 34; Balandier 1982: 174). The existence of a currency for a specific purpose and the circulation of long distance goods did not imply the existence of commerce amongst the Fang peoples. According to Jan Vansina: 'After centuries of trading, goods still retained their value as items of use rather than for exchange' (Vansina quoted in Guyer & Belinga 1995, 92). Balandier (1961), and later on Alexandre (1965) and Labourthe-Tolrá (1981, 360) described the system through which goods were distributed through the Equatorial forest: the *bilaba*.

Balandier offers the most detailed account of the *bilaba* ceremonies, which would take place in the course of a stranger's visit. The host would make gifts to the guest in a lavish show of prestige (see Tessmann's description of 'hospitality' [1913])

⁴³ This adoption of the decimal system that appears in the early ethnographic accounts of the Fang is intriguing. Why they would adopt it? The list of prices that he elaborates is also puzzling. If the Fang did not have commerce and the currency was for a particular use, how could Tessmann elaborate such a list?

2003, 534-535). This gift giving competition, or 'economic drama' (Fernandez 1982: 136), was 'staged by two headmen who were symbolically and geographically differentiated from one and other, and who offered entirely different goods in the exchange' (Guyer 1997, 41). The two parts of the competition represented opposite notions that, according to Balandier, can be summarised according to the following table:

North (or West)	Right hand side	Male	Exterior	Manufactured goods
South (or East)	Left hand side	Female	Interior	Traditional goods

Figure 10 Bilaba exchange, from Balandier (1961)

The bulk of goods one could find under the category of 'exterior' would be manufactured goods like textiles, guns or iron tools and iron currency (*bipkuele*), whereas the goods under the category of 'interior' related to traditional activities destined for consumption (goats, chicken, palm fruits, peanuts, etc.) as well as trading goods (such as rubber, ivory and coffee) (Balandier 1961; Guyer 1997, 41). It is interesting here that the iron currency, which was locally produced by specialist blacksmiths in the interior of the Equatorial forest, was associated with the 'exterior' side of the staging. In this example, the substantial geography that the objects carried was not as relevant as the imagined or semantic attribute that the staging of the *bilaba* provided. I will show how this is also the case for some of the imported goods I have dealt with in my ethnography. The gender attribution to different notions of space and place is also relevant here, and it will be crucial to understand gender relationships in the ethnographic analysis.

Nowadays, a similar type of gift exchange to the *bilaba* described by Balandier is staged as a fundamental part of certain ceremonies and celebrations. At weddings and funerals, members of different families must exchange goods of a particular category. There are certain elements that should be part of the *nsoá*: imported liquor, pots for the kitchen or a dress for the future mother-in-law, together with all sorts of foodstuffs and a particular amount of cash⁴⁴. The contents of the gift exchange are

⁴⁴ For a detailed description of a funeral gift exchange in the second half of the twentieth century see James Fernandez (1982, 139-140).

meticulously written down in notebooks that keep lists of the names of the contributors and the quantities of the items deposited. The process of the abandonment of the iron currency and its substitution by colonial money did not end with bride-wealth and the notion of *akúm*. Enrique Martino has stressed how the colonial state tried to articulate the need for a workforce with the existence of bride-wealth by creating equivalences and trying to establish prices with colonial currency. However this strategy of proletarianisation backfired. The inflation of the bride-price that had led Fang males to accept an advance on their wage and to migrate to Fernando Poo's plantations resulted in the collapse of the labour system: once the workers reached the quantity they needed for the nsoá they tended to abandon their plantations (Martino 2016).

The conversion of the payment of the main section of the nsoá into every-use currency is often considered by the elders and Fang intellectuals as the final step in the definitive incorporation of the Fang peoples into the capitalist market economy. According to Joaquin Mbana, this process ended the different spheres of exchange and reciprocity that had been part of Fang ancestral tradition and had resulted in an 'exaggerated polygamy' (e.g. Mbana 2014, 169). The conversion of *bipkuele* into colonial money led, according to this Fang anthropologist, to the equipartition of material goods and people, and therefore to a negatively perceived commoditisation and mercantilisation of people.

However, other analyses have argued that even when single-use currencies disappear and are substituted by colonial 'every use' currencies, there is never an equivalence between different types of assets. I argue that the current complaints about the mercantilisation of people indicate the existence of a moral and value order that does not permit direct equivalences between people and things and, for that matter, different categories of things. As David Graeber puts it, in summarizing the argument of Philippe Rospapabé: 'bridewealth money is presented not to settle a debt, but as a kind of acknowledgement that there exists a debt that cannot be settled by means of money' (Graeber 2011, 133).

However, the idiom of wealth (*akúm*), which entails the management and possession of foreign goods, people and money, as well as the ambiguity of these relationships mediated by payments and debts, allows for inequality, extortion, violence and control, but also resistance. In Chapter 6 I explore how, through

consumption practices, women get to reverse the masculine logics of the *akúm*, gaining access to people, money and foreign goods.

1.4 Managing the power and the risks of akúm

The incorporation into the market economy produces, inevitably, an adjustment of the moral understandings of transactions and obligations. Different strategies to explain and deal with the negative side of wealth (*akúm*) and accumulation arise with social change. I will now show how ideas about the trade and consumption of foreign goods have been at the centre of a moralizing discourse in which magic and witchcraft serve as a framework. I would like to state, however, that magic and witchcraft are not the only moral 'worlds', 'repertoires' or 'programmes' which explain social action and change (Olivier de Sardan 2015, 74). They exist alongside other explanatory strategies and tactics that I will address in later chapters.

The accumulation of wealth as socio-political power has a tight link with the possession and manipulation of occult powers. According to ethnographers of the Fang-Bulu-Beti groups, in the local cosmovision these powers make sense through the existence of the *evú* (*evusu* for the Ndowé, Fons 2004: 38, 39). This notion, according to Lluís Mallart in his study of the Evuzoc in South-East Cameroon, constitutes a signifier that can be charged with very diverse meanings resulting in very different, even contradictory, experiences (Mallart-Guimerà 1975, 35; see also Abega 1987, 168 for the Beti). Considered 'ni dors ni ventre', the healer, the Mvet troubadour, the wizard and the diviner, possesses this substance in his or her belly, and uses it to 'see beyond what the others can see' for the benefit of the society. However, the same powers can be used by the witch for his or her individual benefit, causing damage to other members of the society. According to Joaquin Mbana the *evú* needs to be fed with blood and flesh, and this is why the Ndong Mba dancer⁴⁵, for example, needs to be offered a hen so that he can swallow the blood straight after the performance in which he has used the power of his *evú* (Mbana 1981, 7). Witches, persons with 'bad *evú*', use human blood and flesh to feed their bellies, and they are

⁴⁵ The Ndong Mba initiate establishes a dialogue with the *nkú*, a slit drum, and he lies on top of a timber post several meters high, balancing the weight of his body with no more than his belly while forming the shape of a T. The Ndong Mba that is performed nowadays is only one section of a more complete initiation ceremony that was described by Tessmann, which no longer takes place (Tessmann [1913] 2003: 385).

able to travel far away and to manipulate Western technology during the night. A child's death, an inexplicable illness or a lack of social success can be the outcome of an *evú* that is eating the vital force of the victim. Stories about people who seem to have never left their villages being seen in Europe or Cameroon producing wealth and having workers at their disposal are very common amongst the urban Guineans I was able to speak during my fieldwork. The witch kills to feed his or her *evú*: to satiate its hunger for power. *Ni dors ni ventre*, the *evú* itself is not good or bad, it is not feminine or masculine. It can be anything, and it can be used for multiple purposes (Mallart-Guimerà 1975). The power of the *evú* is utilised in exercising control over people through what are often considered legitimate forms of prestige, but its forces can be simultaneously anti-social and deeply harmful.

This type of magic and witchcraft had already been described at the beginning of the twentieth century by the German ethnographer Günter Tessmann. Tessmann differentiates three types of Fang individuals in relation to the existence and the use of the *evú*: a) the average man (*memieme*), who behaves according to the standards of the Fang society and does not stand out amongst the rest; b) the *menkukum* (plural for *nkukuma*), powerful men like healers, or political or ceremonial leaders who use the occult power to control others; and, c) the ones who possess *evu-mbwo* that have reach their success throughout the killing and the consumption of the life of others (Tessmann [1913] 2003, 457). The presence and the uses of the *evú* serve therefore, within Fang cosmology, to explain the increasing inequality that they experienced at the turn of the twentieth century.

Being the most visible side of the phenomenon, Tessmann dedicates a voluminous section of his ethnography to the description of the anti-witchcraft ceremonies (Tessmann [1913] 2003: 407-421). The *ngui*, a male initiation society whose main goal was to fight the proliferation of witchcraft and to protect Fang society against occult powers, was widespread during the second decade of the twentieth century and occupies a prominent place in his ethnography. However, Tessmann had already identified changes that were happening in the core of the practice, as well as multiple variations across the Fang territory. Together with the *ngui*, other practices and societies for the maintenance of the social order against witchcraft emerged. These variations, such as the *ndendé*, mainly a female society, the Ndong Adrike, originated in Equatorial Guinea and spread throughout the area inhabited by Fang during the second third of the twentieth century. The latter

included the initiation of women and the creation of a parallel police and judicial institution, reason enough for the colonial Spanish State to attempt to repress it. The proliferation of multiple anti-witchcraft cults occurred in what James Fernandez has described as the 'apotheosis of Evil' (Fernandez 1981: 227). According to James Fernandez the mid-twentieth century saw an unprecedented increase of witchcraft accusations and a corresponding growth of anti-witchcraft movements, resulting from:

'increasing frustrations of changing colonial life: the breakdown of the family under the pressure of cash crops and economic individualism, the concentration of population through the regroupment of villages, the sense of deprivation and the decentering brought about by mass communications, and the new awareness of "paradisical" life-styles elsewhere' (Fernandez 1981, 227).

My acquaintances and collaborators remember the *ngui* as a particularly effective mechanism for controlling outbreaks of witchcraft, and they attribute the decline of witchcraft accusations in the late 1950s and the 1960s to the effectiveness of the practice in all its variations. Guineans generally agree that the increase of killings through witchcraft and social sickness during the 1970s was only possible because this powerful institution had disappeared. They believe that the colonial state was effective in its repression and that the dictator Macias Nguema – regarded as a powerful witch himself – was the cause of the *ngui*'s final eradication. Joaquin Mbana shares this nostalgic perception of witchcraft as the major obstacle to the 'development' of the Equatorial Guinean nation. According to Mbana, after the elimination of the *ngui* cults, Fang culture had been dispossessed of the mechanism to maintain the social equilibrium leading to a decline in morality and an undermining of solidarity (Mbana 1981, 23, 44).

It is clear also that witchcraft accusations increased during periods of crisis and turmoil. It seems sensible to assume that the disappearance of the *ngui* was not only the result of the colonial repression, but was also an outcome of the perceived socio-political changes of the decade of the 1960s. It could also be seen to be part of the natural evolution of such of movements – as we observe that the healing strategies and movements keep evolving and changing over time (see i.e. Veciana 1958; Gaulme 1979; Fernandez 1982).

As mentioned above, during the decade prior to its independence, Spanish Guinea enjoyed a certain economic prosperity⁴⁶. For the Spanish settlers, the living conditions were much better than in the metropole. The investment in infrastructure and services in the colony was ostensibly higher than in the metropole, resulting in hospitals and sanitation systems that were in some cases in better condition than in many areas of the metropolitan Spanish State (Sundiata 1990, 51). These changes may have affected anti-witchcraft movements in two ways: first, a perceived reduction of inequality – which, as I mentioned above, was not the same for everybody – might have also engendered a reduction of witchcraft accusations (Okenve 2007, 360). Second, as witchcraft accusations and anti-witchcraft movements functioned as a way for the population to claim agency in wider social, economic and political changes, the possibilities offered by changes in colonial policy meant that Guineans had additional tools at their disposal to challenge and act in response to change. One such way was the political movement for independence, which was forged during this time among Guinean communities, often abroad, fed by an awareness of the general turn towards the ending of colonialism in the international arena (Campos-Serrano 2003).

But the 'new politics' of the autonomy and the independence movements did not last long. The economic crisis and political repression that accompanied the Macias Regime once again stirred old occult forces and practices less apparent during the perceived period of prosperity. Macias Nguema, as part of his his 'neo-traditional'

⁴⁶ As for the colonised, their condition experienced important shifts. Although the regime kept its deeply racist and repressive character, the declaration of Guinea as, first, a Province (Provincia 1956-1963), and then an Autonomous Region (Región Autónoma 1963-1968) of Spain, conferred a new status on the colonised. Guineans transitioned from being considered minors and being under the tutelary Patronato de Indígenas to being considered nominally Spaniards – although racist segregation was maintained in most of the spheres of colonial society. A Guinean elite emerged that could study at a higher level than was possible during the first decades of the century, and a significant number of Guineans (considering the small size of the population) attended university in the metropole (Nerin 2015: 141).

Just a quick look through the voluminous nostalgic literature that ex-settlers have been publishing in the last two decades is enough to have an idea of the perceived standard of living in the colony. See for instance Fernando García Gimeno's description of the last decade in the colony, which outlines the availability of all sorts of commodities, and the possibility to earn a relatively high salary and enjoy a considerable amount of free time (1999: 147). More recent examples can be found in the interviews compiled by Antoni d'Armengol in *Els catalans de Guinea*, where the settlers describe how 'Santa Isabel was like a capital of a Spanish province in the late fifties. With its cinemas, its sports clubs and its amateur theater group, the private club for the high society [...] It had electricity, running water, paved and illuminated streets, gardens and modern buildings...' (d'Armengol 2015, 79)

politics, made use of the witchcraft accusations and discourses for political gain, making the most of the ensuing fear and insecurity (Nerin 2016, 108; Sundiata 1983; Decalo 1985, 214). As Antonio Ndong, one of my closest collaborators, once told me, 'Macias was a big sorcerer, he made sorcery himself. This is how he got to kill all these people. But he was not sure of himself and, therefore, he eliminated the *ngui* because he was scared of it'⁴⁷. Antonio Ndong's father was a chief member of the *ngui* society of one of the villages along the road that connects Ebibeyín with Mongomo, the hometown of the dictator, and it was precisely in this area where anti-witchcraft practices were most severely repressed. According to him, the *ngui* was partially kept in secrecy, and the power of the coercion and fear prevented the incorporation of new initiates.

In a post-colonial State ruled by *la politique du ventre* (Bayart 1993), the hungry *evú* has again taken centre-stage in explanations of inequality and the concentration of power. Comments about the occult practices at the heart of the Obiang family are frequent amongst ordinary Guineans, for example. In a context which resonates with Achille Mbembe's descriptions of *La postcolonie*, it is widely accepted that the commandement uses all its resources to 'satisfy their big and hungry bellies'. Therefore, corruption and using the resources of the State for the sake of the family and clients is perceived as an intrinsic practice of the exercise of power (see Mbembe 2001: 1006-007).

The seminal works in the edited volume by Jean and John Comaroff (1993) and the monograph by Peter Geschiere (1997) offered the bases for the understanding of the moral and ritual economies I have described, which develop in the context of the incorporation of African peoples in the market economy, or as a manner to engage 'modernity'. Peter Geschiere stressed how witchcraft beliefs and explanations are relevant in shaping political discourse in contemporary Cameroon, and that it had its historical roots back in the colonial encounter. The modalities of witchcraft that he describes have also been widely spread throughout Equatorial Guinea in the past few decades. What Peter Geschiere's collaborators call the *ekong* is referred to as *kong* in Equatorial Guinea, where it is now the most common form of sorcery. As an explanation of wealth accumulation, the *ekong* or *kong* sorcerers no longer eat their

⁴⁷ Conversation with Antonio Ndong in February 2010. Sp.: 'Macias fué un gran brujo, hacia la brujería él mismo. Es así como llegó a matar a tanta gente. Pero no estaba tan seguro de si mismo e hizo eliminar el *ngui* porque le tenía miedo'.

victims. Instead, they 'transform them into a kind of zombie and put them to work in invisible plantations' or any other type of business far from home and kin networks (Geschiere 1997, 139). However, the major innovation of the *kong* is that, in principle, anybody can be suspected of practising it and anyone can become its victim. In this sense the manipulation of occult forces and the knowledge about them has been 'democratised'. Disappointment, jealousy, anger or a hunger for power can motivate the practise of this type of 'bad medicine', intended to cure inequalities and injustices, but also responsible for creating them⁴⁸.

Success and accumulation are always related to control over people. As I have suggested above, wealth, *akúm*, is understood not only in its material aspect (wealth-in-goods) but also in its social form (wealth-in-people). Therefore the excessive accumulation of material goods and the lack of redistribution and socialisation is considered suspicious, in the same way that, as I will show through my ethnography, possession and knowledge of certain goods can provide the 'magic' of attracting, accruing the favour of the powerful while gaining access to their social networks.

The practice of accumulation by means of trading activities has been a favourite target for witchcraft accusations. In some of the conversations I had concerning the topic I was told that some types of witchcraft practices are actually brought to Equatorial Guinea in the hands of traders (the Hausa and the Igbo are frequently blamed for having brought in these types of practices). These practices are sometimes referred to as 'the Magic of the Whites', as they are considered to have arrived together with trade and colonialism. One of the most paradigmatic cases of a trade sorcerer is the figure of Maximiliano C. Jones (1871-1944). Jones is considered as one of the 'Big Men' of Guinean history. Being a black Fernandino, he became one of the richest planters on the island, owning a number of trading stores that sold imported goods. He was a very influential personality, who became the president of the Chamber of Agriculture (Cámara Agrícola de Fernando Póo) and contributed to the construction of infrastructure and transport that the Spanish State could not provide. It is currently thought that Maximiliano, who had a number of West African workers on his cocoa *fincas*, would go to Nigeria or Sierra Leone to 'eat' people to then 'vomit' them on his *fincas* so that they could work for him. During a trip to Lubá (colonial

⁴⁸ For a recent ethnographic account about the *kong* in Equatorial Guinea see the work of Josep Martí (2014 and 2008).

San Carlos) in August 2008 I visited the house where Jones used to live with his family and where he had his trading post. The neighbours explained that nobody wanted to live in the house because it was supposedly bewitched. It is said that Jones used witchcraft to stock his factory, because it was always full of goods ready to be sold. In a more recent trip to Lubá (2011) the building had been rented out to a foreign building company in charge of the works of the Lubá harbour and maritime promenade. A neighbour told me again that 'no Guinean would ever live there'.

There are many other famous cases of traders that became successful thanks to witchcraft. Take for example the case of Djoo, a Nigerian worker on a cocoa plantation who, after the end of his contract, decided to stay in Santa Isabel (Malabo) and started a trading business that became fairly successful. This was in the 1960s, and he managed to acquire a lot of properties in the centre of the capital. According to my collaborators, Djoo was a very good-looking man, always very well dressed, but he had one lame foot. This foot was considered proof of his relationship with a *mamiwatá*. The *mamiwatá* – a mermaid – a widely known creature, appears close to the shores and offers wealth to lonely men in exchange for loyalty and a part of his body. It is said that Djoo offered one of the toes of his left foot, and that his lameness was the price he paid for his subsequent wealth and success.

According to Antonio Ndong, one of the first, biggest, and most publicly debated cases of *kong* took place amongst a group of traders from Ebibeyín in the mid-1980s. This group of traders became considerably more prosperous after Obiang Nguema's coup d'etat, even unseating the Ebibeyín traders who had inherited the colonial trading *factorias* and had accumulated wealth during the first years of the Macias dictatorship. Accusations of witchcraft quickly fell on this group of wealthy traders, who owned a number of grocery shops, local and intercity public transport businesses, restaurants, bars and discos. When two unexpected deaths happened in Ebibeyín (one being a victim of a traffic accident and the other of an illness) the accusations grew stronger. The two deaths were the evidence that the traders owed their wealth to the practice of the *kong*. Some witnesses claim to have seen one of the victims working for a firm in Cameroon, 'working the wealth' of the traders. The issue was taken to the official authorities and a murder trial was held in the Ebibeyín Court. In this case the defendants were acquitted due to a lack of evidence. In a second trial, though, a special healer (*nganga*) set up a ceremony in order to find evidence of the practice of the *kong*. A set of boxes was found buried next to the house of an elderly

woman near the entrance of the town. According to Antonio, the boxes contained the powers of the *kong* practice. The traders were accused of being responsible for the two deaths through witchcraft, and some of them were convicted and dispossessed.

Not only male traders have been accused of sorcery. Women can be also accused of witchcraft and, although it may seem like such accusations are not related to wealth and accumulation, I argue that they are actually strongly related established means of understanding the *akúm* and self-realisation. A common accusation thrown at market women is, for example, the exercise of *abatong* or *tobosí*. These two forms of sorcery have to do with control over men and, while one type entails making a man fall in love with a woman, implying that he will give her gifts and provide her with cash to invest in trading goods, the other type imprisons the partner: not allowing him to commit any infidelity and therefore making sure that he will not 'invest' in other women.

As I will describe in the fifth chapter, market women mainly receive their investment resources from family members and, especially, from the men with whom they maintain romantic relationships. Whenever I asked my collaborators in the marketplace whether they really engaged in these practices or not, they were keen to have me believe that they did. When discussing these matters they always left room for ambiguity, as they wanted to be regarded as powerful women: or, for that matter, as female *mikukuma* who were wealthy in both goods and people (romantic partners in this case).⁴⁹

1.5 Extraversion, clothing consumption and colonialism

As we have seen, the narrative of witchcraft is tightly related to a narrative of consumption: the consumption of foreign goods is associated with wealth and power, as understood both in material and the social dimensions⁵⁰. Much of the time, wealth

⁴⁹ Similar cases of women acquiring bad reputation when participating to economic activities that allow them to accumulate wealth have been explored for instance in Burkina Faso by Katja Werthmann. Werthmann explores how women migrating to mining towns perceive their journey as an ambivalent one. As they are able to find sources of wealth, accumulation and, therefore, independence from kinship networks but at the same time they face the risk of damaging their reputation. Often they are considered to have illicit sexual relationships. (Werthmann 2009)

⁵⁰ The 'magic of consumption' has been explored in the very visible case of the SAPEURS in Congo. Slum dwellers wearing haute couture suits as a form of acquiring social capital has attracted social scientists but also artists and Western photographers (Friedman 2005).

has been dependent upon relations with those considered to be on the 'outside' or the 'alien'. The *akúm* which makes the *nkukuma* (the wealthy and powerful person) is not generated by means of work or productive activities but rather through the strategy of extraversion: a powerful person is one with access to foreign sources of goods and rent. Commanding 'the outside' allows for the perpetuation of social hierarchies, both in 'the interior' of the society and between the rich man and the external sources of wealth, for example, extracting companies, foreign states and the colonial metropole. I understand the political economy of contemporary Equatorial Guinea as a system based on 'the creation and capture of a rent generated by dependency and which functions as a historical matrix for inequality, political centralisation and social struggle' (Bayart 2000, 222). This 'historical matrix', when rent seeking is both at the core of the 'how of capitalism' in Equatorial Guinea (see Appel 2012) and the guarantor of the maintenance of the regime, has continued from the 19th century up until today.

As was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the capture of rent is accompanied by the acquisition of prestige goods from the 'outside'. The surface of the physical body, through the display of prestige clothing, has been one of the sites where the possession and commanding of this 'outside' has been exhibited, discussed and contested. Clothing practices have been central to how Africans have appropriated the state (Bayart 1996, 218) and have constituted a relevant arena for the expression of colonial and post-colonial tensions (see Allman 2004). Meanings, values and practices have been forged through dialogue between differing moral and political understandings, which I will outline in the following paragraphs.

Colonialism had a fundamental impact on the transformation of meanings, values and consumption practices within Equatorial Guinea. However encompassing, colonial practices did not wipe out previous ideas and values associated with the social presentation of the body, but rather overlapped and conflicted with them. Being already part of global trade and capital circulation, the integration of African peoples into the colonial economy – the shared goal of the European traders seeking wider markets, of plantation owners searching for a workforce, and of missionaries hawking 'civilisation' – did not happen without struggle. These tensions are notable in records held in the colonial archives and Africanist historiography has made substantial efforts to elucidate them. Indeed, discussions about body appearance and clothing have become a prevalent theme

within the study of colonial tensions, impositions and resistances (e.g. Hendrickson 1996, Commaroff & Commaroff 1997, Allman 2004, Rich 2005).

In the historical texts produced by colonisers the body image is an invaluable source of knowledge about the colonised; it becomes a crucial piece in the dialectic puzzle in which the identity of the coloniser is constructed. In the vast majority of the texts the use, consumption and taste for clothing are considered positive values, typical of civilisation, whereas their absence stands for savagery, primitiveness and the poor hygiene associated with these traits. Borrowing the words of Philip Setel, colonial discourse constitutes 'a conceptual domain in which health, illness and techniques of bodily display linked Africans to notions of race, moral status, and savagery ... [a] hidden template against which the African body/person was measured (Setel 1991, 13 in Burke 1996, 193). Philip Setel and Timothy Burke's works on Zimbabwe resonate with what I have observed in reading colonial and traveller's accounts of the territories of Equatorial Guinea, which reproduce exactly the same 'template' (see Sampedro 2008, Molina 2011, F.-Figares 2003). However, in the same texts one can also get a sense of African agency in the trade and colonial encounter. I turn now to an overview of these kinds of representations and specific allusions to clothing, in order to trace the historic genealogies of the ideas about dress and body appearance that inform current practices observed in my ethnography⁵¹.

During the nineteenth century, Europeans frequently commented on the clothing practices of the indigenous Bubi people of Bioko in terms of their alleged nakedness. The nineteenth-century British traveller Mary Kingsley found that the Bubi people presented themselves 'ostentatiously unclothed', and she concluded that African peoples that showed their naked body in the most shameless manner. She even reported some of the attempts by the Spanish authorities to 'civilise' them:

The Spanish authorities insist that natives that came into the town should have something on and so they array themselves in a bit of cotton cloth, which before they are out of sight of the town on their homeland way, they strip off and stuff into their baskets, showing in this, as well as in all other particulars, how unidentifiable by white culture they are (Kingsley 1897, 58).

⁵¹ In a special edition of the journal *Debats*, edited by Benita Sampedro-Vizcaya, I collected and analyzed a relevant number of colonial descriptions of body appearance of the peoples of Equatorial Guinea (Valenciano-Mañé 2014).

The British literature of the late nineteenth century establishes a cause and effect relationship between nakedness, symbolic of a lack of civilisation, and Spanish mismanagement of the territories (e.g. Balfour 1854, 344-345; Trotter et al. 1841, 192; D'Avezac 1848: 238). The descriptions pointed towards particular body practices that were considered unhygienic and extravagant. Thomas J. Hutchinson, British consul between 1856-1861, considered that 'the Bubi was, in his own way a dandy', drawing attention to the practice of ntola – a red substance Bubi people used to rub on their bodies (Hutchinson 1858, 189). The first attempted ethnological description, by Oscar Baumann, similarly focussed on the nakedness and the practice of ntola, but also described other aspects of their appearance, such as the scarifications and the shell beads – lokö, ipá – that decorated their bodies (Baumann [1888] 2012). The German ethnographer Günter Tessmann ([1923] 2009) also pointed out the lack of clothes in the traditional costumes of the Bubi (75), reported on the facial scarifications (78), and carefully described the different types of headwear.

The Bubi wore a wide variety of hats, some locally manufactured and others imported. In fact, such imported garments are part of what are now considered 'traditional costumes'. For instance, the king of Moka wears a felt hat and coat (see figure 8 king Moka wearing hat). Tessmann supposed that locally produced hats were just 'copies of European headwear' that had arrived to the island; however his informants refuted this assumption, declaring that 'the Europeans had copied the hats of the Bubi' (ibid. 74). Regardless of the direction of flow of fashion influences, it is clear that the Bubi were not 'naked' when Kingsley, Tessmann and Baumann visited, but had their own clothing practices which included foreign goods as well as locally crafted items.

The texts and chronicles of the late-nineteenth century rhetorically described the Bubi as an 'isolated tribe', with customs frozen in time and with little contact with the Europeans and Krio who had settled in Fernando Poo. For instance, Kingsley noted that Bubi people covered their consumption necessities with 'a little rum, a few beads, and finish cloth, then he will turn the rest of his attention to catching porcupines, or the beautiful little gazelles, grey on the back and white underneath with which the island abounds' (Kingsley 1897, 57). However, the same texts tell us how nineteenth century Bubi participated in the exchange of commodities with foreigners (e.g. Navarro 1858, 144), how they produced palm oil to exchange for foreign goods, and how amongst these foreign goods clothing and attire-related items

had a relevant role (Trotter et al. 1841, 232). By 1890 Bubi peoples were fully integrated in Atlantic capitalism through the production of cocoa (Clarence-Smith 1994). Clearly, foreign commodities had a history of domestication that extended long before the arrival of the missionaries and their 'civilizing mission'.

Foreign goods were incorporated in and adopted to local uses and repertoires, and this was also registered in colonial European descriptions: a Bubi man wearing a hat, waistcoat and boots over his naked body in 1860 (San Javier 1862: 52), and the king of Banapá wearing a ship captain's frock coat on his bare waist (Navarro 1858, 78) are described by explorers and colonial administrators in their reports, clearly indicating that imported goods were locally appreciated as prestige goods. Clothing consumption and practices often confused factoria owners and traders, who had to learn about the diverse preferences of their heterogeneous clientele: the tastes of the Bubi were dramatically different from those of the inhabitants of Santa Isabel, who had been using western-style clothing since the town's foundation in 1827 and whose conspicuous consumption was also considered too extravagant by Europeans (Hutschinson 1858).

In 1862 the British trader J.B. Bayne sent a letter to his colleague John Holt, who was about to leave Liverpool for Fernando Poo, indicating the type of garments he would need on the island. He specifically advised Holt to bring along a lot of clothes and not to worry if an item did not fit properly, as he would 'be able to sell it to the blacks' (NML 1862a). The young Holt arrived in Santa Isabel to work under Lynslager, the British Consul of Fernando Poo and a trading factory owner. In his letters to his family John Holt emphasised 'the high level of civilisation' that the inhabitants of Fernando Poo had, with special mention of Lynslager's wife, a Fernandina with whom Holt would work closely together and without whose advice and guidance he would not have been able to succeed as a trader (NML 1862b). Holt, who later became one of the most prosperous British traders in West Africa, kept in his diary the bewilderments of his lack of knowledge of the consumption practices of his customers and the lack of authority he held in front of his African employees (Davis 1993, 30, 55)⁵².

⁵² Holt stated that one of the most sold products in his shop was the underwear that Fernandinas used to wear under their Victorian styled crinolines (Davis 1993: 31). One of the episodes of tension rendered in his diary describes when Lynslager's spouse refused to accept the high price of underwear Holt had shipped in from Liverpool. Lynslager's spouse usually

Similar observations were made about the Benga, inhabitants of Corisco and the Muni Estuary, who were considered 'well dressed and highly civilised' (Navarro 1859: 129). However, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the colonial discourse shifted and, rather than being seen as a 'dressed and civilised society', the Bubi came to be seen as having been 'perverted by the contact with European traders' (Iradier 1887, 190; Armengol Coll 1888, 35).

As we have seen in previous sections, the Spanish State stepped up its attempts to effectively occupy the Equatorial territories at precisely the end of the nineteenth century. The colonial expansion was carried out by the Claretian Missionaries (Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María), accompanied by the Conceptionist nuns, who, sent on a *misión de estado* (State Mission), would perform the role of the State in the colonial territories, acquiring the roles of resource managers and administrators of colonial authority and violence. The missional system of occupation was organised around *reducciones*, settlements of Christianised populations with orphanages and boarding schools, which were supposed to acculturate the locals. The first step in incorporating Africans in the 'civilising' missions was to eliminate a supposed image of savagery which was, as we have seen, associated with a particular body appearance (Creus 2007, 526).

The Body of the colonised became the locus of the civilizing process. Dress, hygiene and health thus became the main concerns of the missionaries and target areas for the exercise of colonial power and violence (see Medina-Domenech 2002 and Sampedro 2016). The Fang population was considered the perfect target for this, as they were rendered as yet unspoiled by the 'bad side of modernity' (Iradier 1878). Depicted as *bon sauvages* – which differed from the image of barbaric anthropophages in the literature of the beginning of the century – they were perceived as a *tabula rasa* on which to impose the values of civilisation while reproducing them as the labour force the colony needed (Bonnelli 1888, 23).

The colonial narrative posits on the one hand a 'native' who did not engage with the manners and consumption habits of the Europeans and that therefore was considered backwards and in need of incorporation into the system. On the other

decided on fair prices for the imported goods. In the face of Mrs. Lynslager's aggressive attitude he stated that 'not having had the privilege of learning the duties belonging to that class of society, I am lost' (30).

hand, the communities that were already consuming were considered morally depraved and in need of being repressed and controlled. Either way, these narratives legitimised colonial intervention . Africans were generally considered incapable of making decisions regarding the field of consumption (see e.g. Iradier ([1887] 2000: 208-209; Perlasia 2009). In my interviews with a group of Coriscan women who attended school with las Concepcionistas and later on went to Santa Isabel (in the 1950s), I was told that colonial authorities and missionaries used to complain about their clothing style:

'we used to sew our own dresses in the styles we liked from Santa Isabel. Our favourite style was called 'scandalous fashion'. Missionaries eventually prohibited Benga women from wearing 'scandalous fashion on Sundays' (Corisco, Ibenga February 2011)⁵³.

The expression 'scandalous fashion' is still used by Coriscans to refer to a specific type of dress with buttons on the front. What for the missionaries was a moral judgement of a type of garment is nowadays just the name of a dress. The National-Catholic ideological deployment, which marked for more than two decades what was appropriate and what was not, continues to inform the way Guineans evaluate and give meaning to certain commodities. It would be possible to argue that specific dress codes and moral judgements in current Guinea entail colonial attitudes, but such a claim would not be simple to make. In my interviews, however, I observed a clash between generations about what it is acceptable to wear or what is not on particular occasions. A common complaint amongst Guineans who had lived the last decades of the colony is that nowadays the availability of second-hand clothes of different types and registers has generated 'wrong practices'.

According to the public personality Trinidad Morgades, the affordable second-hand clothing that has been arriving on the Guinean market since the late 1980s has increased the possibilities of clothing consumption for Guineans, but has not totally altered the way people dress. Trinidad echoes the colonial discourse when she affirms that the taste of her compatriots has not adjusted to the wide range of types of

⁵³ Sp.: 'nos soliamos coser nosotras mismas los vestidos con los diseños que nos gustaban en Santa Isabel. Nos gustaba sobretodo lo que llamaban la 'Moda escandalosa'. Los misioneros llegaron a prohibir a las Benga que vistieran moda escandalosa los domingos' (Corisco, Ibenga February 2011).

garments that one can find in the bales of second-hand clothing, and that these consumers therefore make 'wrong decisions' about when to wear a particular garment: 'you can see young women going to the marketplace in a cocktail dress'. She asserts that in colonial times most Guineans knew how to dress well (Trinidad Morgades, Malabo December 2011).

In a similar vein, whereas in a private or semi-public space like the marketplace or the front of one's house it is appropriate to have a bare chest, or to wear a big popó without a bra, leaving part of the breast visible, this is definitely not appropriate in a public or institutional space such as a school, a state building or paved streets, squares and promenades. An obsession with shoes could be considered another legacy of the colonial codification, within which one of the main features of the savage and uncivilised was to go bare-foot. Flip-flops and other cheap footwear options are not allowed in public buildings or in State celebrations. Flip-flops, which are the type of shoes mostly used in the everyday life of ordinary Guineans, for instance, are specifically banned in churches and official ceremonies.

While all these examples may seem to indicate the success of the National-Catholic enterprise of Franquist colonialism, there are other practices that appear to indicate the complete opposite. The conspicuous consumption of the elite, for example, echoes the values associated with the idiom of akúm, rather than colonial Catholic morals. In the following section I give some examples of the dialogue between colonial ideas and pre-colonial understandings in the context of *longue-durée* power and material extraversion.

1.6 'El popó del Presidente': the decolonisation of consumption?

'Here, in Equatorial Guinea, how many arrived wearing shorts, and returned as millionaires? Spanish bakers, Spanish sweepers, people whose work was cleaning toilets who when reaching Equatorial Guinea turned into millionaires' (Speech by Macias Nguema, 1968 in Muntanya 2007).

With this assertion Macias Nguema began one of the speeches in his post-elections tour in 1968. The tour was televised, and some images and discourses have

been kept in the Filmoteca Española, in Madrid⁵⁴. The discourse of the new president was clearly anti-colonial, and would become increasingly so in the following years. In the above quote Macías uses the colonial signifier of 'short trousers' as an indication of inferior status. Indeed, in the colonial army uniform, shorts had been the main element of distinction between Africans and Europeans, who wore long trousers. The image of a Spaniard in shorts was extremely powerful in the aftermath of independence, as had been the image of nakedness that colonial narratives employed to evidence 'native' inferiority and thereby justify domination. While talking about Spaniards in shorts, Macías and his escort were dressed in black dinner jackets, white trousers and bow ties. Indeed, Macías wore formal suits for most of his public appearances, but at some point during the mid-1970s he started to wear the abacost, popularised by General Mobutu in Zaire, seen as a more 'authentic African' alternative to Western formal dress. I will use this image here to reflect on the dialogue between colonial ideas and non-colonial ones in the evaluation and signification of goods and clothing practices in postcolonial Equatorial Guinea.

The association between short trousers and an inferior social status (or one tied to physical labour activities that require little intellectual effort) had its origin in colonial times and has become deeply rooted among Guinean people today. After independence, one of the first changes that the army and the presidential guard experienced was a change in uniforms. During the colonial era, the 'Native Troop' of the Colonial Guard used a different uniform from that of the European Troop and those of the leaders and officers. The upper part of the uniform, consisting of a rayadillo guerrera, was the same for all members of the Colonial Guard (Africans and Europeans). However, the trousers of the Native Troop only went down to the knee, and were fastened underneath by two buttons. Furthermore, most African soldiers were barefoot (Nuñez 2000, 11-12).

None of the sections of the Equatoguinean State's security forces has maintained short trousers in their uniform, and closed footwear (high leather boots) is used in all military establishments. In most contexts, wearing shorts is considered

⁵⁴ The lack of local press, the hermetic character of the regime and the systematic destruction of any documentation makes it difficult to source any research about the period. Moreover, oral material is equally difficult to acquire. Whereas general references about the period are often made in small conversation, reaching the details of the articulation of the regime and its repressive apparatus constitutes a challenge. Victims and prosecutors are forced to cohabit in the current regime and there is still fear when addressing sensitive topics.

inappropriate, being limited to matters of physical urban work or to youngsters who emulate the style of their favourite American hip-hop and *reaguetón* stars. In State or official PDGE (Partido Democrático de Guinea Equatorial – the single party) celebrations there are widely accepted rules with respect to appropriate attire which are sometimes explicitly transmitted through the radio and other means of communication and, at other times, implicit and assumed by the participants. Short trousers and rubber or plastic footwear are completely unacceptable attire (as I will develop in chapter 4).

Macías, who had been a loyal clerk of the colonial administration and had been the mayor of Mongomo in 1964, never wore shorts in public. His formal clothing was carefully tailored by a specialist seamstress who became one of the closest persons to the dictator. Alfonsina Ngale, with whom I had an interview in November 2007, had been educated in the Escuela Taller of the Feminine Section of the Franquist party in Santa Isabel. Opened in 1964, the school was created to train Guinean women to 'become clean and obedient housewives' (Stehrenberger 2009, 240). Some of the best pupils were sent to summer camps in Spain, and a few attended the Escuela de Instructoras (School of Instructors) in Spain. Not long after independence (in 1969), the women who had been trained in the core of the Sección Femenina abandoned the Spanish single party and created their own institution, which ended up being the Feminine Section of the PUNT (Partido Unico Nacional de Trabajadores, Macias' single party). The new Sección used the same mechanisms as the Franquist one: it kept the education of the girls the same, organised *cuadros gimnásticos* (collective gymnastics), staged folklore exhibitions, and held receptions and provisions for government cadres on their tours around the new state.

The state that resulted from the declaration of independence of the 12th of October of 1968 inevitably inherited the colonial institutions of the Franco Regime, but it had to create its own distinctive discourse and rituals. Macias and his close collaborators had to find a way of assuming the symbols of sovereignty that had been exhibited within colonial rule while, at the same time, distancing themselves from them (see Nerin 2016). Performance and materiality became crucial tools for the (re)creation of the new nation. As we have seen in the above quote, transforming the meanings of goods, adopting signifiers and reversing the discourse was a recurrent strategy: Macias wore a western-style suit in a village in the midst of the Equatorial

forest while asserting that the Spaniards arrived *en cortos pantalones*, symbolic of low status and non-intellectual work.

Macias' discourse was clearly anti-Spanish but the rituals he used to perform regarding the State were the same as those that General Franco's regime used for the metropolis. Soon after he took power, 'Macias organised tours around the country where the masses were forcefully obligated to attend, his arrival was celebrated with festivals prepared ad hoc, in which the 'cuadros gimnasticos' offered by the Feminine Section and the folkloric performances could not be missed' (ibid. 102). The country had received its independence from Spain with a paradoxical democratic constitution (whereas Spaniards still had to wait for the death of their dictator), which was modified in 1970 when Macias proclaimed himself president-for-life and made his party the single ruling party (Artucio 1980). Mimicking La Falange Española, Macias' PUNT had its impositions, including, as mentioned, the Feminine Section, a youth section which was responsible for creating a climate of terror amongst the population, and obligatory attendance to mitins (political meetings), where a strong anti-imperialist discourse was propagated.

The mechanisms to perform the State were directly inherited from the colony, although the contents of the discourse were profoundly anti-colonial. In the first years of his mandate Macias proclaimed his alliance with the Eastern block. The struggle against imperialism became a recurrent justification for the brutal repression of the Guinean population. Certain foreign goods were characterised as the materialisation of the 'devils of imperialism', and to desire their possession was evidence of an imperialistic attitude which was subsequently severely repressed. In the conversations I had about this period during my fieldwork, Guineans often referred to the material misery they lived in throughout the Macias period (I will expand on this in the third chapter of this thesis). The generation which grew up during the 1970s recalls how, in the political meetings they were obliged to attend, they were constantly told which types of foodstuffs and imported goods were considered imperialist. Bread and candies were rendered as 'dangerous for the African children', who were taught to be 'good patriots who did not desire western treats'. They were expected to desire African treats instead, such as fermented cassava or sweet fruits from Guinean trees. In the same manner, certain dress styles were considered imperialist, and walking in the street in new and well-maintained western-style clothing could be considered a challenge to the regime.

An association between material scarcity and moral misery during Macías dictatorship is very present in the memory of the period. In Donato Ndongo's novel *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) a Guinean lawyer returns to his country with his family, after finishing his studies in Spain, and is confronted with the situation of his compatriots. The novel uses many instances of this association, for instance in the following passage, where the image chosen is that of people's clothes, and of attitudes towards the protagonist:

'the few people you passed by were dressed in a similar manner, following Chinese fashion. The same shirt was repeated on four or five pedestrians until it created the illusion of a uniform. Shirts were hanging out over poor quality trousers. Almost everybody was wearing blue slippers, and on their chest or in the collar of the shirt they wore a medal with Macías' portrait. The majority, though not all, also wore the insignia of the PUNT [...] How could you be surprised to be observed with fear and as untrustworthy when you were dressed in such a different way, like a European middle-class person, and when your attitude was so strange in that extremely closed society? You represented the spirit of modernity that they were trying to crush at all costs' (Ndongo [1997] 2015, 57)⁵⁵.

The allusion to this 'spirit of modernity' is worth exploring here. While for Donato Ndongo, as for many Guineans, the situation of the country under Macías' rule was backwards and opposed to the 'modern', Macías and his followers embraced an alternative notion of 'modernity'. This modernity was materialised in Chinese and Russian imported technology and with the adoption of strategies and symbols that other African regimes had already started to implement. For instance, in 1971, in an official trip to Congo-Brazzaville, Macías visited a textile factory that a Chinese company had built for Marien Nguabi's regime that printed African style clothes (popó) (Fernandez 1977, 159). He was particularly interested in commemorative

⁵⁵ Sp.: 'Las pocas personas con las que os cruzabais iban vestidas casi iguales unas a otras, a la moda china, la misma camisa se repetía en cuatro o cinco transeúntes hasta hacer el efecto de uniforme, la camisa descolgada sobre el pantalón de burda tela, y casi todos calzaban unas zapatillas azules, y todos llevaban en el pecho, o en la solapa de la camisa, una medalla con la efigie de Macías, y la mayoría, no todos, lucían también la insignia del Punt [...] ¿Cómo podía extrañarte que os miraran como a aparecidos, con desconfianza y con temor, si vosotros ibais vestidos de una manera tan diferente, como personas de clase media europea, y vuestra actitud era tan extraña en aquella sociedad tan cerrada, y representabais el espíritu de modernidad que a toda costa se trataba de aplastar?' (Ndongo [1997] 2015: 57)

clothes: printed fabrics with specific messages relating to the president-leader or the single party. That same year he adopted commemorative clothing as a key element for the celebration of Independence Day, and he ordered the design of a commemorative cloth with his own portrait. The cloth was sent to all the diplomatic cadres, who were told to tailor their clothes with it and wear it for the 12 de octubre celebrations.

The incorporation of elements of a post-colonial Africanity increased throughout Macías rule. In the images of the Independence Day celebrations for the period 1971-1973 that have been kept in the Filmoteca Nacional Española one can observe the gradual incorporation of supposedly 'traditional objects and styles'. The structure of the celebration that appears in the documentaries is the same as what could be observed in the celebration of El Día de la Raza under colonial rule: a beauty pageant, where the Miss Independencia candidates would march in different clothing styles. In addition a military and civil parade, which involved all associations and institutions, would follow a speech by the authorities.

In the 1972 march – apart from the military troops, the cadres of the PUNT, the feminine section and the youth – there were representations of the diverse ethnic groups and regions of the country. Each of the ethnic identities was represented by means of their clothing and complementary objects: Bubi appeared with their hats and tools to climb their palm-trees, Ndowé with their baskets and fisherman utensils, Fang with their crossbow and arrows, etc. The participants in the march would wear a sort of 'traditional dress' which emulated pre-colonial attire. Both men and women marched with naked torsos, which would have been inadmissible during colonial rule, when female participants in so-called traditional *baleles* (folkloric performances) were obliged to wear bras or other means of covering their breasts.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided key idioms which will help us understand the ethnographic material of this thesis. I have provided an overview of the historical genealogies of trade connections to explain how a long-established way of understanding wealth and accumulation, together with the extravert nature of the Guinean State, have shaped the values and practices that I found in the field. The Equatorial-Guinean State has a long trajectory of economic and political extraversion. This history of extraversion has material legacies, and draws on particular

geographies and connections which Guineans have to make sense of. Ordinary Guineans experience extraversion in many aspects of their lives; a particularly important one is the material. Clothing, together with other forms of consumption and representation, has been employed as a mechanism to make sense of – and to represent relationships with – wealth and materiality that come from faraway places and institutions. Colonialism has a crucial role in the story. It is clear that it has shaped Guinean attitudes and subjectivities, and this is reflected in how they imagine and envision relationships with the outside and its materiality.

In the following chapter I will explore how this 'exterior' is constructed in relation to a notion of 'interior'. I consider how both imagined and substantial geographies are materialised in the physical structure of the market alongside ways the circulation of goods and people is organised.



Figure 11 King Moka. 2011



Figure 13 Still from 'Al Pié de las Banderas' Hermic Films, 1945. ©Hernandez Sanjuan



Figure 12 Child from the Guinean Ambassador in Ethiopia wears Macia's Uniform in the early seventies. ©Archivo Morgades-Memba

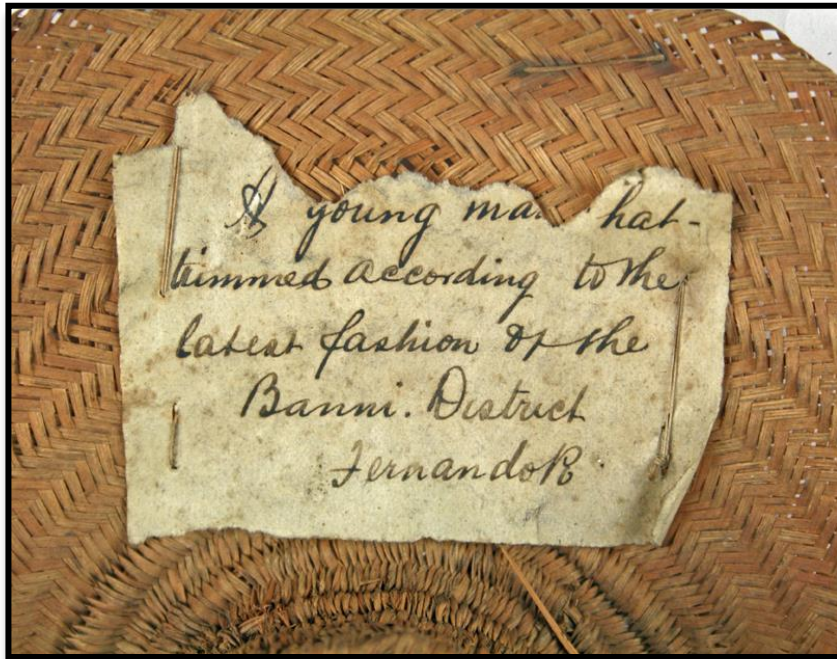


Figure 14 Label of a Bubi hat collected for the National Museums of Liverpool at the late 19th century: 'Young man hat trimmed according to the latest fashion of the Banni (Beney) District' © National Museums Liverpool (World Museum: 26.6.99.64)



Figure 15 Man wearing an old *popó del presidente*. 8th of March 2010

Chapter 2

El exterior y el interior. Circulation, space, and belonging

2.1 Introduction:

During my first two months in Equatorial Guinea I was confined to the town of Bata, the main urban nucleus and capital of the continental region, Rio Muni. My passport was being held in the Police District Headquarters, awaiting a visa stamp and without proper documentation and an updated visa, it was impossible to travel around the country. One of the many lessons I learned during these first two months in Bata was that, though I was living in ‘the city’, in Equatorial Guinea there was another place which every Guinean seemed to visit once in a while to which they had a close, at least imagined, attachment. This place was called *el interior*. *El interior*, which can be defined approximately but inaccurately (as I explain later in the chapter) as ‘the hinterland’, was ‘everything but the city’. There was also a fluent circulation of people and goods between the city and *el interior* and this circulation often featured in urban dwellers' conversations as a way of making sense of differences in belongings and identities.

In this chapter I will show how specific geographical constructions – in particular this notion of an ‘interior’ as an opposition to the urban space – have an important role in (re)creating socio-political categories. These imagined constructions, such as kinship, gender, ethnicity or the sense of belonging to a particular rural community, provide a substantial dimension to the creation of networks in which materiality circulates.

In the first section, I will show what the iconography and emic interpretation of a ‘national’ dress for International Women’s Day reveals about the way in which my interlocutors imagine their belonging to different communities and political entities, for example: the global community, Africa, Equatorial Guinea, an ethnic group

localised in specific location in the national geography, the 'home village', or a gender category. A sense of belonging to these groups seemed to correspond to a particular way of organizing and giving meaning to spaces. Indeed, I emphasise gender is also represented as belonging to certain spaces and these are constantly negotiated, challenged and sometimes contested. In the second section I explore how the notion of 'the village' structures senses of belonging amongst urban Guineans, which leads to the third section that explores the fluidity of the relations between urban and rural space. In the fourth section I describe how an imagined 'interior' serves to organise political alignments and how these are made visible by means of material assets. In the following section I will describe how marketplaces function as a crucial locus in the construction of an 'imagined exterior' as they have always been virtually and physically placed in 'the outside'. In the section that follows I deal with the *factoria* and *bayamselam* systems, with which goods are domesticated and transformed to arrive to peoples' hands. This will lead me to the final section of the chapter that deals, precisely with the infrastructure that makes possible the circulation of goods and people.

2.2 El popó de la mujer. Dresses and gendered places

Women fill the streets of Equatorial Guinea every 8th of March wearing *el popó de la mujer*: colourful dresses cut from official cloth produced specifically for the celebration. In each neighbourhood, the wife of the Chief of the *Comunidad de Vecinos* [Neighbours' Community] organises a local celebration where citizens show their support to the single party authority. The 8th of March celebration is one of many festivals through which the regime of Teodoro Obiang performs and reaffirms its hegemony – a theatrical exercise of power similar to what Achille Mbembe described for post-colonial Cameroon (Mbembe 2006).

Paradoxically, this celebration allows women to express themselves in ways very different from the approved behaviour of officially-sanctioned womanhood, as women enjoy drinking and partying in bars and improvised venues all the day and part of the night. For one day, women abandon their *faa* (domestic, private space) to actively occupy *nseng* (the public, the outside), as the Guinean Philologist Veronica Nyengono puts it (Nyengono 2016). Parallel to the official setting, women's affinity groups organise alternative *djangués* (ROSCA – for common collaborative budgets

see Geertz 1962) to subsidise the food and the enormous amount of alcohol that is consumed during the day.

The celebration of International Women's Day completely alters the normal course of daily activities in Guinea's urban spaces. The institutional celebration, organised by the Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales y Promoción de la Mujer, consists of a Catholic mass in the main churches of the country – those of the capitals of the seven provinces – attended over by: principal female authorities, such as the First Lady; the Minister and delegates of the Social Affairs Ministry; the Minister and delegates of the Ministry of Culture; and also the wives of senior officials. After the service in the two main cities, Malabo and Bata, the authorities and other attendees march through town in a peaceful demonstration. The demonstration ends with speeches by the Minister or Delegate and by representatives of women's rights associations that have been officially registered in the country. Every year, the messages from the organisations consist of an interpretation of the slogan launched by the United Nations in the framework of its programme for Women's Rights (see figure 11).

An analysis of this discourse helps us comprehend the political and ideological dimensions of gender relationships in Guinea and, in particular, its unique understanding of female rights. As I will show in later chapters, the commemoration and adoption of such an international celebration is one of the strategies that Guineans utilise to both produce and claim their membership to a global imagined community (Ferguson 2006, 114-146). The UN discourse is not uncritically incorporated into the repertoire of the Guinean State however. On the contrary, it is interpreted and re-crafted according to particular political ideas. In 2013, for instance, the UN's main slogan for International Women's Day was: 'The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against girls and women'. For the Guinean Minister, women are both the cause of domestic violence and the solution for its eradication: 'what is going to make us better is to assume our obligations [...] communicating with our families and children will prevent violence at home. My sisters: No more violence!'⁵⁶ One statement that is repeated year after year by the

⁵⁶ Sp.: lo que nos va a hacer grande es cumplir con nuestras obligaciones [...] dialogar con nuestras familias y niños nos evitará que haya violencia en nuestro hogar. Hermanas mías, ¡no más violencia! (Ministra de Asuntos Sociales y Promoción de la Mujer, Malabo 2013) See more fragments of the speech in:

different speakers is that 'Guinean women have rights but that does not mean that they can abandon their children and husbands'⁵⁷.

Nevertheless, the popular celebration of International Women's Day revolves precisely around 'abandoning' the household for a day and celebrating female independence with friends and acquaintances in a carnivalesque manner. Gender roles are reversed for the day: women do not supply the household with food and they do not cook, they do not attend to their personal business or jobs and they leave their children with their male family members. Some of my acquaintances noted that the celebration usually ends in a fight with husbands and male family members that can easily end in physical aggression. This final violence then re-establishes the 'normal order' and becomes part of the ritual of the festivity. One of my interlocutors repeats every year that 'women know that when they get home after the day they'll receive a beating but, even so, they decide to go out and drink until they get wasted'⁵⁸.

Here, as an illustration, I present two images and their ethnographic context (see figures 17 and 18). The first one shows a detail of the official cloth distributed by the Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales y Promoción de la Mujer [Social and Women's Affairs Ministry] for the celebration of the 2011 International Women's Day. Women participating in the official events purchase a few yards of the patterned cloth that is distributed by the Ministry through women's associations. The contract to print the cloth is usually awarded to CICAM-CAMAIR, a textile factory in Cameroon, although since 2010 a Chinese company has been producing part of the consignment. The women then take the cloth to a tailor or seamstress to have it sewn into a dress fashioned to their own personal taste. This tailored dress, or *popó de la mujer*, is essential for the celebration. To wear *el popó de la mujer* is the principal way of signifying belonging to the celebration and of showing affection for the regime.

The second photograph was taken during the commemoration of the 8th of March of 2008 in a popular neighbourhood in Bata, where I could join a private

<http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=3587&forcedfoto=1362773122.jpg&lang=> (accessed 26 January 2015)

⁵⁷ Sp.: La mujer guineana ya tiene derechos, pero esto no quiere decir que deba abandonar a sus hijos, a su marido. The discourse of the Minister is annually published in *La Gaceta* and/or in the official website of the Equatorial Guinea government: <http://www.lagacetadeguinea.com/>; <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/> (accessed 26 January 2015)

⁵⁸ Sp.: ¡Las mujeres saben que, al llegar a casa, les van a dar una paliza! Aún así salen a emborrachar.

celebration in which participants were wearing dresses sewn from an alternative patterned cloth (see figure 18). This alternative cloth was purchased from one of the West African traders that sell imported African prints. The choice for an alternative cloth for the celebration was not arbitrary; it became part of the performance of a political discussion that I will describe below.

Most of the women that participate in the celebration decide to wear the cloth pattern that the Ministry provides. This cloth, according to the delegate of the Ministry in Bata, was first printed in 2004, so it has now been printed for over a decade:

The aim was to show the unity of Guinean women on the day of the celebration of The Woman. To represent this, the type of cloth chosen is popó [African fabric], because we do not celebrate just any woman, we celebrate the African woman! The pattern used for the celebration is called popó de la mujer. Every woman can choose between four different backgrounds that correspond to the colours of the flag of Equatorial Guinea: blue, white, red and green. The pattern itself is composed of small flags spread along the cloth and a medallion with a representation of the 'women of Equatorial Guinea': *mujer fang*, *mujer ndowé*, *mujer annobonesa* y *mujer bubí*. We were looking for a dress that dignifies and represents the Guinean woman. This is what we want to transmit with the use of the popó de la mujer guineana (Eloísa in Bata March 2008)⁵⁹.

The fabric that makes the wearers of *popó de la mujer* a uniformed group is not just any type of fabric, it is an African print. 'Africanity', then, is one of the semantic units that is juggled in the semiotics of dress and is shared by the two groups represented in the photographs. Guineans take part in the global celebration consciously from within their position as Africans. Yet, in the same fabric there are other categories that come into play. For Guinean governmental authorities and their supporters, the idea of national unity has to be explicit in the pattern of the African cloth. However, their representation of 'national unity' is based on the representation of an ethnic diversity that is geographically distributed. The women in the second

⁵⁹ Sp.: El objetivo era enseñar la unidad de la Mujer Guineana en la Celebración del Día de la Mujer. Para representar esto se eligió un popó. Porque nosotras no celebramos a cualquier mujer ¡Celebramos la mujer africana! El estampado se llama popó de la mujer. Cada mujer puede elegir entre diferentes fondos, los colores de la bandera nacional: azul, blanco, rojo, verde. El estampado mismo tiene pequeñas banderas y un medallón que representa a 'la mujer de Guinea Ecuatorial: *mujer fang*, *mujer ndowé*, *mujer annobonesa* y *mujer bubí*. Queremos un vestido que dignifique a la mujer guineana. Esto es lo que queremos enseñar con el popó de la mujer guineana (Eloísa in Bata, March 2008).

photograph perceive such ethnic classification as divisive, and decided to participate in the global celebration as 'African women' who wear African cloth, but who are not in communion with a regime that proclaims a particular notion of unity-in-diversity national belonging. The women of the second photograph consider *el popó de la mujer* to be the 'uniform of the torch and of big people from Mongomo'. 'The torch' stands for the emblem of the single party in power and Mongomo is the birthplace of Teodoro Obiang Nguema. As I will show throughout the chapter, being from Mongomo and supporting 'the torch' are perceived as being inseparable.

As can be observed in the first photograph, on the *popó de la mujer* the prototypical women from each ethnic group are represented in a rural context, doing activities related to their *faa*: going to their farm, or collecting foodstuffs for the household. The distinctive elements that mark each represented woman's ethnicity are the type of basketry that is used to go to the farm and the little background drawings that suggest different landscapes and locations. The Fang, the Bubi and the Bisió women are represented with a green background that one could consider the bush, whereas the Annobonese and the Ndowé women are represented next to the sea, walking alongside the shore. Taking care of the plantation is the traditional activity that Guinean women, regardless of their ethnic belonging, are supposed to carry out in the rural context. 'La mujer guineana' [the Guinean woman] is represented, then, as an ethnicised woman. At the same time, that 'ethnicity' is tied to the rural, the countryside. Moreover, this 'countryside' is not just any countryside but a specific locus for each ethnic group.

Not all Guinean women feel represented by this dress-discourse and not all consent to being part of this uniformed majority. There are also women who simply decide not to modify their daily life and remain at home during the day. The women in the second photograph, however, made a different choice regarding both how they celebrated the 8th of March and the dress they wore to celebrate it. They did not attend the official ceremony and they did not go to the Catholic mass. They did not feel attached to, or identify with, the organisers of the official event. However, they still decided to have a party. For them, the celebration of International Women's Day started with the organisation of a *djangué*: a collective fund that every one of the ten or so participants contributed to with spare cash or drinks and foodstuffs a few weeks before the event. One of them went to the marketplace and collected some cloth samples of the most affordable African print, and then they organised a meeting to

decide which type of cloth they would use to make their dress. In 2008 the final choice was a white and blue pattern with floral motives and the word 'L'espoire' printed in thick black letters. Eudisia summarised the aims of their particular choice:

We are women like them, we also want to celebrate [...] but not with 'big persons', nor with their uniforms. I won't wear the uniform of the torch! We, ourselves, have our own party and our uniform as Ndowé women. The ones from Mongomo are the ones that wear 'la promoción de la mujer' (Eudisia in Bata, March 2008)⁶⁰.

The clothing choices of the groups in the two photographs show how dress has a key role in both political discussions and in making visible the ties of imagined communities. If we try to unpack the 'scheme of cultural categories' (Sahlins 1976,179) associated with the clothing used in the celebration of International Women's Day, we find a constellation of meanings that overlap. It seems clear that wearing a *popó de la mujer* is a fundamental feature of the 'women who celebrate' and, thus, for the ones who take part in the 'global event'. This shared outfit makes a delimited community visible and evident. The alternative emic term used to refer to this type of *popó* is that of *uniforme*. This 'uniform', though, does not require its wearer to submit her individuality completely to the group, as each individual fashions it according to her own taste and possibilities. Status, age and wealth can be read in the different tailored styles, as I will discuss below.

Jean-François Bayart directed my attention towards the important role of materiality and, specifically, clothing in the politics of *l'imaginaire* in his response to culturalist approaches that de-politicise difference (Bayart 2005, 195). The *popó de la mujer's* cloth, which portrays a unity within an ethnicised and rural 'interior', is displayed in the urban space in a performance oriented to 'the exterior', an imagined international community. At the same time, like most of the objects consumed in Equatorial Guinea, this cloth is produced outside the national territories. The style is clearly African and the pattern associates women with a rural and domestic space. In doing so, the Guinean state makes use of colonial legacies such as the ethnicisation of the territory and a national-Catholic perception of femininity and gender roles, together with their interpretation of a 'tradition' (women in *faa* and man in *nseng*),

⁶⁰ "nosotras también somos mujeres, también queremos celebrar [...] pero no con grandes personas o con sus uniformes ¡Yo no visto el vestido de la antorcha! Nosotras mismas tenemos nuestra propia fiesta como mujeres Ndowé. Las de Mongomo si visten 'La Promoción de la mujer' (EE in Bata, March 2008)

in order to perform its hegemony; a hegemony which is expressly Fang, *Pedegista* (linked to the Ruling Party) and eminently masculine.

An analysis of the dress practices in the celebration of International Women's Day suggests that the urban-rural/city-interior connection constitutes a key element, arguably the most important one, to understand the various political alignments which underlie the choices made by women as they prepare for the event. The widespread pattern of strong urban-rural networks drawn upon in the preparation of the garments raises the issues of socio-economic context alongside modalities and political implications (Gugler 2002, 23). I now address urban rural relations specifically.

2.3 Belonging to a village

In my first months in Bata I made the acquaintance of people from many different areas: Combe, Buiko, Mari and One people from the northern coast; Benga from the South and Corisco island; Fang Ntum from the northern hinterland; Fang Oká from the southern hinterland, Basek from Yengüe (North hinterland); Bisió from Bata's outskirts and so on. All my acquaintances belonged to a pueblo or poblado (a village), which they would visit frequently, and all these villages were, at the same time, located in el interior. It did not matter if the village was on the coast, next to a town, far away, or close to the Cameroonian border; they were all referred to as part of el interior. Most of my interlocutors were born in Bata but, even so, they held a very strong sense of belonging to this 'interior' by maintaining ties and establishing networks with people from their family's village of origin.

While I was sorting out my legal situation in the country I had several conversations with my neighbours about the different identification documents that the Guinean State issues. I was applying for a residence card, which was supposed to allow me to remain in the country for a year, and it was also meant to act as a dissuasive element for the soldiers in the military checkpoints spread all over the country. Some of my Guinean interlocutors did not possess any documents of identification, whereas others had a DIP (Documento de Identidad Personal (Personal Identity Document)). My documented acquaintances were almost all born in Bata but, nevertheless, in their DIP they figured as a 'natural de...' [native of] whichever village in el interior their family came from. Whether their DIP lists the paternal family village or the maternal family village depends on several factors. On

the one hand, for Fang and Ndowé (and also for Bisió and Baseke) patrilineal societies it is the paternal village that takes precedence in the DIP. On the other hand, for the Bubi people in Bioko the maternal village is usually the one that determines their sense of belonging (Aixelà 2012, Aranzadi 2011, Eteo 2013)⁶¹. The nearly one million people that inhabit Equatorial Guinea live mainly in towns and cities and the number of inhabitants within urban areas has increased considerably since the 1980s, while the rural population of the continental areas has declined substantially⁶².

Although the sense of belonging to a particular place, a *pueblo* in el interior, is equally strong for all the peoples of Equatorial Guinea, the terms in which this sense is constructed, its political implications and the actual fluidity of movements between the city and the countryside vary from one territory to the other. The engagement with the village mainly differs between the peoples of Rio Muni – the majority of the population in numerical and sociological terms – and those originally from Annobón and Bioko.

Although infrastructural connections with Annobón have improved enormously since 2007, especially due to the construction of an airport runway and a port in Palea (the island's main settlement), it remains more difficult to travel between Malabo or Bata and this island, as it is situated almost 600 kilometres (350 miles) southwest of the island of Bioko. Therefore, Ambó people visit their *pueblo* less frequently. Nevertheless, like the other peoples of Equatorial Guinea, they keep a strong sense of belonging to their 'place of origin', the island structuring and organizing the networks they form in the city. Although there are probably more Annobonese outside of Annobón than living on the island itself, the reivindication of the Ambó identity is

⁶¹ For the most recent ethnography addressing kinship amongst Fang and Ndowé peoples see Aranzadi 2013 and Fons 2002.

⁶² The non-existence of reliable statistics about the population of Equatorial Guinea obligates me to write on the bases of my intuition. Since 1979 the population counts of Equatorial Guinea have taken place through the electoral census. With a significant sector of the population remaining undocumented, and the non-existence of a rigorous methodology, the numbers lack accurate representation. As an example of the above-mentioned divergence: the total population of the country according to the UNDP is 1,014,999 inhabitants, whereas the official website of the Government of Equatorial Guinea provides a figure of 1,777,275 (both for 2013). The previous census, conducted in 2007, gave a population figure of 685,991 inhabitants

[UNDP: http://www.gq.undp.org/content/equatorial_guinea/es/home/countryinfo/ (consulted in January 2015);

Equatorial Guinea Government official website:

<http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/estadistica.php> (consulted in January 2015)].

present in many spheres: from the claims of writers and opposition activists of the Partido Federal Ambó, to the more fashionable practice of scarification that makes Ambó belonging immediately visible⁶³. While a century ago this body modification was a common practice amongst all the peoples of the territory that now forms Equatorial Guinea, nowadays the Ambó are the only people that practise it as a means of signifying their belonging to the island⁶⁴.

The indigenous people of Bioko island, the Bubi, have not migrated as far as the Annobonese (within the country). Bubi villages in Bioko maintained their population levels, whereas the population of the rural areas of Rio Muni has decreased considerably with the oil-boom (Campos-Serrano 2011). These differences have their roots in their historical trajectory and engagement with both colonial and post-colonial socio-economical systems, as introduced in the previous chapter. Bubi individuals became owners of small crop plantations at the beginning of colonial domination and they have largely retained their socio-political independence. They have been targets of repression precisely due to such ideological and political resistance. Contrary to what happens in Rio Muni, there are Bubi village dwellers that have lived most of their lives in their villages; they visit the city only for very specific activities such as trade, higher education or healthcare. After the roads in Bioko were paved the connections between Malabo and the other localities of the island improved substantially. There now seem to be more Bubi people that live in their village who only commute to Malabo when necessary. Some of my interlocutors who originated from localities like Rebola and Basupú had been living in popular neighbourhoods in the capital for decades (e.g. Los Angeles or Ela Nguema). But now that they have employment and a reliable means of transport, they are building houses in their villages of origin and are commuting for their activities in the city. There is insufficient statistical data to assess the extent to which this repopulation of certain localities is impacting on the number of village dwellers, but from the testimonies of my interlocutors and the general upsurge of autochthony movements observed in neighbouring African contexts (e.g. Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998, Geschiere 2009), one is given the impression that the population in the villages of Bioko is increasing.

⁶³ See the blog of the Annobonese writer Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel as an example of what is being said. <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=blog/18> [accessed in January 2015].

⁶⁴ Josep Martí has written about the current practice of body modification in Equatorial Guinea: see Martí 2013.

The improvement of road connections along with a relaxation of military controls (which had been extremely strict, especially in the years following the Bubi revolt in 1998), has also contributed to increased traffic flows between Malabo and rest of the Bioko's towns.

In the years of the oil-boom, the descendants of a large number of Guineans that had migrated to other countries (mainly Gabon, Cameroon and Spain) during Macias Nguema's dictatorship (1968-1979) in the 1980s 'returned' to their parents' country (Aixelà 2011, Inongo-vi-Makome 2000). During Francisco Macias' dictatorship the diaspora was vast. Although, again, no completely reliable statistics exist, all the data indicate that there were almost as many Guineans living outside the country as there were remaining inside the borders (Abaga 1997, Rich 2010, Serrano 2011). In particular, the financial crisis of 2008 encouraged the 'return' of many of these migrants to the newly wealthy country. A significant number of these returnees were born abroad and have foreign citizenship (Aixelà 2012). As the Guinean State does not recognise dual citizenship, they need to legalise their situation once they arrive in the country if they want to be able to work for the foreign companies or for the Civil Service. I came across some of them when I was dealing with my paperwork and found that they are able to claim Guinean nationality without much difficulty. These descendants of migrants only need to go to a record office and register as 'natural de...' of their relatives' village; they are not required to prove their place of birth with any document or birth certificate. Indeed, record officials themselves issue birth certificates with the locality of belonging rather than the actual birthplace.

Laura Ilombé was one of these returnees I met in Bata. I had once overheard her speaking in Catalan on the telephone, so I grasped that she must have lived or grown up in Catalonia. She had studied architecture in Barcelona and had earned a master's degree in the United States with a grant from a Catalan institution. She had been visiting Equatorial Guinea with her father since the mid-nineties, and in that time she developed an interest in the country. She moved to Bata in her late twenties and started to work for a Spanish company using her Spanish passport. She very soon realised that she would have better opportunities and more comfort if she registered as a Guinean and relatives who had not migrated also put pressure on her to arrange her paperwork as a 'proper Guinean':

'People ask me: where are you from? When I respond that I'm from Barcelona they say: don't say stupidities, you're a Guinean! Where

is your father from? When I respond they go: you see? You're a Guinean. Now I have a DIP and I can request my Guinean Passport. My birthplace is now Punta Mbonda!' (Conversation with Laura Ilombé in Bata, October 2011)⁶⁵

Laura Ilombé's mother, who also visited the record office to request her DIP, was corrected by the official when she declared her place of birth. She stated she was born in Bata but the official requested her to reveal her 'real', 'interior' origin: 'Where are you from, actually? You can't be from Bata. If your mother had given birth in the hospital, would you belong to "The Hospital"? ...'⁶⁶ Laura Ilombé found the story amusing, and she explained to me how every Guinean, even the descendants of migrants who were born abroad, have a place or belong to somewhere in el interior⁶⁷.

During the very first months of my life in Equatorial Guinea, I also learned how common and unproblematic it was to suddenly have to go to 'solve issues in el interior'. My Fang language teacher was absent for a week because 'he had to deal with some issues' in that place as yet unknown to me⁶⁸. As much as I was at first puzzled to learn that this could be a reason to justify his neglect of his teaching duties, I later realised that, actually, this was a widely accepted situation. Most Guineans live in town and have a very tight relationship with their village in the countryside. This close relationship with the countryside and the fluidity of movement between 'the city' and 'the village' is taken for granted. Therefore, 'being in el interior' is itself a sufficient explanation for one's absence from urban obligations as it represents the management of other types of relations which clearly take priority.

⁶⁵ Sp.: 'La gente me pregunta: '¿y tú, de dónde eres?' Cuando les respondo: 'de Barcelona'. Entonces me dicen: 'no digas tonterías, tu eres guineana ¿y tu padre? ¿de dónde es tu padre? ¿ves? Eres Guineana' Me he sacado el DIP y ya puedo solicitar mi pasaporte Guineano ¡Mi lugar de nacimiento es ahora PM!' (conversation with Laura Ilombé in Bata, October 2011)

⁶⁶ Sp.: '¿de dónde tu eres? Tu no puedes ser de Bata. ¿Si tu madre te nace en el hospital, vas a ser de El Hospital?' (conversation with Laura Ilombé in Bata, October 2007). This story has been retold several times in recent years. Many of Laura Ilombé's relatives have been either returning to Guinea or visiting the country for the first time, so they have had to deal with the same bureaucratic procedures.

⁶⁷ The few of my friends that have cars in Bata register them in the province of el interior where they come from, so that it shows on their licence plate. Furthermore the first big investment they make once their housing is solved in the city is to build a house in their pueblo in el interior.

⁶⁸ Sp.: 'tenía unos asuntos en el interior'

In fact, an emphasis on the continuing commitments of urbanites to their 'village' is a feature of the studies of African urban spaces (see Gluckman 1940, Mitchell 1969 and Geschiere & Gugler 2002)⁶⁹. Recent studies have shown how, over the years, after generations of urban life, these ties have strengthened rather than weakened (Englund 2002, Gugler 2002, Geschiere 2009). Guineans seem to invest a substantial amount of creative energy and resources into their home villages (see van den Bersselaar 2005: 63, for the Igbo). Eudosia had been working as a domestic maid for several years. When I met her, she was renting a small room in the popular neighbourhood of Newton, in Bata. When she invited me to her place she told me that although she was living in a rented room, she was a successful woman because she had already built a house in her village⁷⁰. '*Construir*' [to build a house] is an important task that a successful urbanite has to undertake.

Even though the link with 'the village' is common amongst all Guineans, the categorisation of an 'interior' and an 'exterior' is originally a Fang construct as I showed in chapter 1 when referring to the local histories of migration and the notion of *akúm*. While the historicity of Fang peoples has a long standing migration tradition, the revitalisation of Fang identity and the political movements that arose during the interwar period coincided with a process of sedentarisation and the fixation of a 'traditional' understanding of Fang social spaces. The narrative about the social structure of the Fang, the genealogies of the *meyong* (clans) that justified the political union of all the Fang groups, was spatially situated in a geography of migration. In other words, the clan structure could not be understood without an understanding of the territory: a territory composed of an 'interior' homeland and an 'exterior', where imported goods came from. The coast, Bata, in this scheme, was an 'in-between' space: the place where commodities came from (the salt, *nkum*, in Dulu Bon Be Afrikara). At the same time, the *mvogabot* (F.: 'the people from the same village') became a crucial social unit during colonial rule, when the original house-based structure of the Fang dwellings was forcefully dismantled and the population concentrated in villages along the main roads (see Fernandez 1982, 87-94). This latter

⁶⁹ Since the 1930s the study of African cases has provided a relevant theoretical framework for urban anthropology, a field which, since very early in the 20th century, has been aware of the impossibility of understanding the city on its own. Even in the limited case of a city-state, a city supposes a coupling: city and countryside (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991, Hannerz 1980).

⁷⁰ Sp.: 'yo ya soy una mujer de verdad, yo misma ya he construido en el pueblo' Eudosia in Bata, July 2009.

aspect also had an impact on the process of urbanisation, as most of the neighbourhoods and informal housing compounds were initially inhabited by individuals of the same *mvogabot*(extended clan), reproducing the structure of the village in the city.

2.4 Interior-exterior control and fluidity

Fang urban dwellers attend a variety of celebrations in el interior. Indeed, funerals are of special significance, as most of my acquaintances aspire to be buried in *el pueblo*. One may have lived all of one's life in the 'outside', in town, or even abroad, but the return of the corpse to 'the village' is perceived of as desirable, and not being buried in the village can be considered a sign of social failure. A wide social network is activated when a sibling dies, and there is an implicit moral obligation to participate in the processes of mourning and burial. This trend of repatriating corpses has been noted in many ethnographic accounts of the city-village continuum in recent decades (Gugler 2002: 24, Englund 2001, 99; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 2002, 321).

Attending to ceremonies and crucial rites for social reproduction is not the only reason for a Guinean urban dweller to go to el interior. When there is a period of scarcity in town, one can spend some time in the village where food is more readily available. 'Life in the village is simpler than life in town', my Fang language teacher told me when I asked him about his activities in the countryside. The bush provides the basics for subsistence: the fertile soil of the Equatorial forest fuels the harvest that provides carbohydrates and vitamins, while bushmeat or fish provide the needed proteins. Although the trend since the discovery of oil has been towards the gradual abandoning of agricultural activities, some of the *fincas* [gardens] of the villages are kept so that they can provide basic subsistence in cases of emergency.

Like every September in Bata, in September 2007, while I was waiting for my passport stamp, the children of my neighbourhood returned from their summer break in el interior. The best pineapples that I could get in the marketplace also came from el interior. Of all the food one can get in Guinean marketplaces, amongst the most highly appreciated but also scarce are the groceries classified under the label of 'the country's' food ['de país']. Of the range of foodstuffs available, some products have their 'country version': for instance, there are aubergines and country's aubergines, as well as tomatoes and country's tomatoes. These products 'of the country' constitute the scarce revenues of the small family farms that, in some cases,

are sold in the marketplace either by the same female family member that takes care of the plantation, or by another female member of the village community who collects the surplus of the village farmers and brings it to the city marketplace. Nowadays, though, these locally-produced foodstuffs have become rather marginal in comparison to the presence of Cameroonian imports in the food markets, and are therefore well appreciated – although, this does not necessarily translate into a higher price, as most of the population has access to these products outside of the market (Nerin 2008)⁷¹.

As the reader can imagine, after hearing so often about *el interior*, I was very much looking forward to discovering it. My curiosity grew alongside the fact that without a proper identification document I was confined to the city. The police at the time were very strict with undocumented foreigners, and if they stopped me in the street they could arrest me and even deport me to Spain. After all the energy and resources I had invested in getting into the country, I was not going to risk my opportunity to conduct research in Equatorial Guinea. It would have meant losing my livelihood, given that my grant was subject to my successful work in the country. So, I could not do anything but wait and see if my situation could be resolved.

The rapid economic growth of the country after the discovery of the first oil reserves brought many people to Equatorial Guinea from neighbouring countries, as well as from locations further away, such as Lebanon, China, Europe and the US (Aixelà 2010, Campos 2011). Most of the foreigners tend to live either in Malabo or in Bata, as being-in-town is considered safer for them. Unless the President has to travel in the urban area, it is rare to find military controls in the heart of the city and, as there are other foreigners around, one can circulate without raising suspicion or attracting the attention of the security forces. Foreigners are a special target for military officials, security forces and traffic police. As foreigners have to deal with an array of bureaucratic procedures, tend to have an irregularity or two in their

⁷¹ For a specific analysis of a hypothetical creation of a 'national cuisine' in Equatorial Guinea see the work of Igor Cusack (2004). Cusack analyses the discourse of different publications (the magazine of the Spanish Foreign Aid Agency and the Guinean Government website) regarding the creation of a 'unity-within-diversity' national cuisine. Cusack's thesis states that the creation of a national cuisine has been influenced both by Spanish colonialism and a Guinean elite, but that it has not yet been assimilated by the majority of the population.

paperwork while often holding large amounts of money, they are often the target of government officials looking for bribes⁷².

In September 2007 the only two paved roads in the whole country were in the continental area: between Bata and Mongomo (the President's home town) and from Bata to Ebibeyín⁷³. At every few kilometres on every road in the country there was a military checkpoint. Every car was ordered to stop at the barrier [*barreras*], which was usually built out of a couple of old oil barrels and a long bamboo stick that served as a fence. There were four controls surrounding the town: to the south there was one at the fifth kilometre of Mbini road and another in Ekuku; to the east there was one at the seventh kilometre of the Niefang road in a village called Ntobo; the last one was to the north on the road that goes to the airport and to a village called Utonde. Foreigners had to show their passports and permissions in order to be allowed to cross and circulate, but everybody had to stop at the military post. The circulation of goods and people appeared to be extremely controlled and the presence of the State was visible everywhere.

By realizing the existence of this 'interior' I became aware of my location in the 'exterior'⁷⁴. The city was the place for individuals like myself: it was the location for the alien, the space for opportunities and wage labour, the place for institutions and education, the entrance gate for ideas, trends, commodities and people. On the other hand, 'el interior' was much more of an intimate space, where activities related to kin and the maintenance of local personal identity took place. Hence the only reason for me, as a foreigner, to visit el interior would be if somebody invited me to get to know 'his or her place' and his or her family. When I explained to my Ndowé neighbour that I was hoping to visit the Fang villages of the hinterland once my documentation was

⁷²This situation has changed. In October 2012 the President created a fine for anyone who tried to bribe a military officer at the road barriers of the country. Now the situation is even more difficult to manage: if you do not give money to the military they might not allow you to cross, but if you do try to give them money, they can fine you or even arrest you, as you have tried to bribe them.

⁷³As I will describe in more detail, Ebibeyín is a border town. The road that connects it to Bata is an extremely important commercial route.

⁷⁴Note that unlike the concept of interior, this 'exterior' is not an emic term. The way to refer to what it is far from the community or from one's own place of belonging differs from one ethnic group to another. In Ndowé, for example, *na tayedí é motema* ('the far away place') is used to refer both to the city (if one is talking about it from the village) or to anywhere abroad.

sorted out, she said: 'Why do you want to go to el interior? What are you going to do there? Where are you going to sleep? Who is going to feed you?'⁷⁵

In truth, my Fang teacher, after my insistent demonstrations of curiosity, invited me to visit his family in a village close to Ebibeyín. All of his brothers were living in town, but his retired parents were taking care of the family house and their small self-sustaining plantation in el interior. It was a great opportunity for me to discover the hinterland. That same day I received my visa I was ready to plan my trip. However, now that my paperwork was in order, another obstacle arose. My teacher's response to my excitement to plan a trip as soon as possible was rather disappointing: 'Alba: we can't go to the village now. I don't have anything to bring with me. It is better to wait until next month. I can't go to my village with empty hands!' Indeed, one cannot travel to el interior without bringing things for one's relatives, so I postponed my visit until my teacher had gathered sufficient resources to warrant a visit to el interior. The gift to one's family in el interior is often made up of staple products that one is supposed to bring to the village when visiting. Most often these are: cooking oil, a sack of rice, salt, soap, bourbon and wine⁷⁶. A stop at the commercial *factorias* of the neighbourhood of Ngoló, on the road to Niefang, has become mandatory for every trip to the Fang 'interior'. If somebody has more resources to invest he or she can bring some clothes and secondary foodstuffs such as soft drinks or cookies. Upon returning back to town, with luck, the family might provide some bush meat, fruit and tubers (*comida de país*) that will result in a generous meal for the siblings that have remained in town.

The full provisioning of the villages depends on the commodities that urban dwellers bring during their regular visits. While the basics of subsistence can be provided by nearby farms, other commodities that are crucial for activities in the interior have to travel from the city. Weddings and funerals in the village, for instance, cannot take place without the goods and the people from the city. Imported commodities are crucial for the most important events. Imported beer, wine and brandy, for example, are essentials for any ceremony while other imported goods like

⁷⁵ Conversation with DD in Bata (Covadonga) in October 2007.

⁷⁶ Tres Cepas and Tío de la Bota are the brands of brandy and wine, respectively, that are often requested by family members that live in 'the village'. Both are Spanish brands with a long-standing tradition of commercialisation in Equatorial Guinea. They are both produced specifically for exportation and so are not commercialised in Spain.

clothing and homeware are basic gifts for ritual exchange. As a non-productive country, imports are of vital importance at all levels of economic and social life in Equatorial Guinea. 'The outside' provides the goods for reproduction, and, as I will show below, it constitutes the main scenario for social life.

2.5 The political economy of the interior

Analyses of this urban-rural connection have generated striking debates at the core of the studies of urban Africa. In some cases, researchers have described how West Africans 'live in a dual system' in which the maintaining of networks related to the home village makes subsistence in the urban space possible (Gugler 1997). Other researchers have stressed how, for some peoples of East-Central Africa, life in the city plays a crucial role in maintaining or even 'making possible' life in 'the village' (Englund 2002). 'The village' for most South-Saharan societies, and also for the peoples of Equatorial Guinea, is a colonial construct and a result of an attempt to settle a population that had originally had a more mobile life style⁷⁷. Other studies of South-Central Africa have stirred up the debate; Marxists historians state that 'the countryside is the locus of reproduction for a capitalist production in the city', and that this is the main feature of contemporary African societies (Cooper 1983: 9). That social reproduction is tied to this imagined belonging to 'the village', or 'el interior', does make sense for the Guinean context. However, the peculiar notion of 'el interior' has been constructed as an epiphenomenon of urban life. 'The urban', synonymous with 'the outside' and 'the exterior', is where most processes of social life take place nowadays. I mentioned above that for the mid-twentieth century Fang population Bata was an in-between space, but for the vast majority of Guineans nowadays, urban spaces are where they spend most of their lives.

Kin, ethnicity and 'home village' belonging can also be seen as the categories by which the political regime of Teodoro Obiang Nguema organises and 'makes sense of' its client networks. This rhetoric of power alignment in Equatorial Guinea has different layers, kin being the tightest of the networks. The political regime that has ruled the country since its independence from Spain in 1968 has been described with

⁷⁷ In the Guinean case, today's 'pueblos' are the result of two colonial laws of the 'concentration of populations' [Leyes de Concentración de Poblados]. These laws (one from the 1920s and the other from the 1940s) were intended to fix the population in settlements close to the means of communication: rivers and roads (see Nerín 2010: 201).

neologisms like 'Nguemism' – coined by the Swiss essayist Max Liniger-Goumaz, who also referred to the regime as a 'tribal dictatorship' – or 'the regime of the Mongomo clan' (Liniger-Goumaz 1993; Shaxson 2008). Most of the members of the Nguema family as well as closely related Esangui clan members have been able to secure a position inside the State apparatus. Being from Mongomo, a locality in the forest in the South-East of Rio Muni and the capital of the province of Wele-Nzás, seems to imply the chance of a favourable relationship with the ruling elite. Finally, most of the members of the government are Fang. Therefore, the Fang language is the language of the elite, and being able to speak it helps to establish close relationships with 'los grandes' ['the big ones'].

But whereas this rhetoric has mostly been constructed by 'regime outsiders', such as journalists and political opponents, there are also other factors that come into play in regard to political alignments, such as friendships, trust and closeness to the rulers (Okenve 2009). As Josef Gugler stressed in his synthesis of the urban-rural connection, kinship relationships commonly contain an element of patronage, because kinship provides (and we could extend this to ethnicity and 'home village' belonging for Equatorial Guinea) an 'affective element that cements clientelism' (Gugler 2002, 32). The relationship to a specific community commonly entails moral as well as instrumental elements wherein trust is justified by connections to any of these networks (kin, ethnic group, village). These networks themselves, are not determinately closed but flexible and are modelled according to contingent needs.

To give an example of the flexibility of these networks, and how this is 'made visible' through materiality, I will refer to the story of a collaborator I have known for almost a decade. I met Yousef in 2007, and since then we have established a long-lasting research and personal relationship. He is a Bissa from Burkina Faso, specifically from an area close to its capital Ouagadougou. He arrived in Equatorial Guinea in 2005, after finishing his studies at a tailoring school in Ouagadougou. He was the eldest of his father's sons, and he was sent by the family to start a tailoring business in Equatorial Guinea. He rented a small stall in the Monte Bata Marketplace and started a tiny and humble tailor shop. He slowly established a loyal clientele, and he started bringing over his younger brothers to help increase production. He soon became the tailor of one of 'los grandes', a highly-ranked member of the Guinean Army. According to rumours, this person and his wife were always dressed in African-style tailored clothing, and both used skin bleaching creams from West Africa, which

indicated that they had the possibility to travel there often. In the span of only two years, while his relationships with the military officer and his wife grew closer, Yousef opened three new shops, the fanciest of which was opened in a building owned by this grande and was named after his first wife.

In January 2011, during one of my fieldwork stays, I gave Yousef a phone call from Malabo, indicating to him that I was about to fly to Bata. He offered to pick me up from the airport with his new car. I was surprised when I saw the young man I had met in a little stall in the marketplace cloaked in a full abacost suit and standing next to a luxurious car. I was even more puzzled when I saw that the number plate of his car had the letters W-N, referring to the province where the President's home village is located (Wele Nzás, Mongomo). When I asked why he had those letters on the number plate, Yousef laughed but did not say a word. Later on, when speaking with his old neighbours, I found out the reason for the number plate: 'Yusef has become an untouchable person. The military officer adopted Yousef as he was helping him with his dubious businesses in West Africa. Yousef now rubs shoulders with los grandes' (Manuel Ngonon in Bata, January 2011)⁷⁸. Yousef's clothing and car made visible his relationship with the powerful elite. The attire of the military officer and his wife made evident his West-African business connection.

The story of Yousef shows how ties are flexible, and how they are 'made visible', or are translated into a certain materiality. This materiality, which legitimates and highlights political affiliations and network alignments, comes from abroad, from 'the outside', resonating with the Fang idiom of wealth in goods and people, the akúm, that I described in Chapter 1. While the imagined interior is a crucial tool for the setting of social networks and political alignments, it is the imagined and material/substantial 'outside' that maintains them. I argue that this pattern is reproduced at all levels of Guinean society: I observe it in the micropolitical logics of the marketplace, but it can also be observed at a governmental level. As Roitman & Roso described it: the political economic pattern in the Guinea of the Oil-Boom is *'être off-shore pour rester national'* (Roitman & Roso 2001).

⁷⁸ Sp.: 'Yusef se ha convertido en un intocable. El militar lo ha adoptado para que le ayude con sus negocios dudosos en Africa del Oeste. Ya se codea con los grandes de Guinea' (Manuel Ngonon Bata, January 2011).

2.6 The marketplaces at 'the outside'

Up to now I have been describing how the notion of 'the interior' shapes the relationships and networks in the urban space, where most Equatoguineans live and where most of my fieldwork has taken place. Urbanisation in Equatorial Guinea, as for most of the cases of the Central African forest, is tightly related to the development of the Atlantic trade and the colonial state. I sketched in chapter 1 how Clarence (then Santa Isabel and now Malabo) was founded in 1827 by the British completely apart from the Bubi, who would call it *ripotó*, the place for the strangers (see Sá 2016: 141). The origins of Bata are related to the installation of the first trading companies near the Ndowé villages of Assonga and Udubuanjolo. The third biggest urban nucleus in Equatorial Guinea and the gateway of commodities, Ebibeyín, was founded as a military post in the 1940s, intended to ensure control over the hinterland and the borders with the then French colonies. Cities, urban spaces, have historically been associated with the foreign, the alien: an 'outside' that contrasts with el interior that I have been describing.

The main reason for the local population to visit the urban areas was to trade and exchange goods. During the 19th century the system of exchange that was set up between foreigners and locals was the trading post system wherein locals (whether direct consumers or middlemen) exchanged crops and raw materials for manufactured goods directly with foreign agents. The main imported goods at the turn of the twentieth century were cottons, tobacco, kerosene, wearing apparel, salt, wines and provisions, and they were exchanged for cocoa, palm oil, kernels, rubber, gum, timber, pepper cassava, copra and ivory (LRO 1910).

As I sketched in the first chapter, with the introduction of the colonial currency and the deployment of the colonial state, the regulation of such exchanges also took place. In May 1912 Santa Isabel's first marketplace started to operate and was named *el mercado público* (La Guinea Española 1912). In this new infrastructure, which is still in use, farmers could sell their produce, and people, mainly Hausa, started the activity of *bayamselam* (see section 2.7). The resultant regulation of market exchanges developed during the two first decades of the 20th century. In 1914, the colonial authority banned the Bubi from selling eggs, hens, *topé*, bushmeat and other foodstuffs outside of the *Mercado Público* (La Guinea Española 1914). Four years later the *Consejo de Vecinos*, a government organ of the town, ordered the closure of

the space of the market one day a week (La Guinea Española 1918). Finally, between 1923 and 1925 a set of regulations fixed the existence of a physical space for market exchanges in the main villages; the colonial Bubi villages organised around the various Catholic parishes, whereas the main nucleus organised around military posts in the mainland (La Guinea Española 1923).

During the 1920s the regulations became stricter, setting particular spaces and periodicities for market exchanges. The transactions were monitored, the prices strictly controlled, the opening times strictly regulated and a 2% tax became fixed. This latter income for the local authority was supplemented by fines that were charged to the parties if they infringed any rule. The taxes collected by the Jefe de Consejo de Vecinos (Eng.: Chief of the Neighbours' Council) were to be directly invested into the maintenance of the marketplace, including the roads and paths (Sp.: obras y caminos), to benefit the circulation of goods and people (La Guinea Española 1925). As I described in chapter 1, the main aims of the colonial state were to disembed market transactions, generalise the use of colonial currency in order to 'convert' locals into workers, and sort out the labour problem in the Bioko plantations. One of the results of these efforts to regulate and create specific spaces for market exchange was precisely the development of a perception, from the point of view of Guineans, that the marketplace did not belong to this imagined interior I have been describing but rather to the exterior; at best it was placed in a sort of 'in-between' and at worst an imposition.

My interviewees mentioned several times that the urban marketplace used to be 'cosa de hausas' (Eng.: 'a Hausa thing'). The wives of the braceros working in the plantations used to sell produce from their farms. The Hausa community used to trade with goods from Nigeria and Cameroon, goods which they sold both to the Europeans (ivory, artwork and fresh foodstuffs) and to the locals (second-hand clothes, soaps and currencies). They operated as brokers as well, traveling through the territory acquiring cash crops, locally produced artefacts and fresh foodstuffs to sell to the *factorias* and to the urban market retailers (see Perpiñá-Grau 1945, 160-161). They also travelled and did business between colonies (the French and British), becoming extremely effective exchangers of money. There are still three big communities of Hausa businessmen and businesswomen in Bata (in the Newton neighbourhood), Malabo (in Campo Yaoundé) and Ebibeyín, nowadays owning bakeries, public transport lines, African arts shops, pharmacies and general stores.

By the 1960s there were three main marketplaces in Malabo and two in Bata. Most of the sellers were foreigners or self-sufficient farmers with 'fincas' around the urban areas. Ndowé women from the continental coast specialised in drying and smoking fish, which they would periodically bring to the marketplace to sell (Fons 2004). Still, most of the market sellers were foreigners until Macias Nguema's regime. In 1975 the Nigerian government evacuated thousands of workers, due to the deplorable working conditions and repression they were suffering. In 1976 a system of compulsory labour for Guinean nationals was implemented, and between 1975 and 1979 thousands of male workers were recruited from the mainland and forced to work on Bioko plantations in exchange for only a little rice, palm oil and stockfish (Artucio 1979: 8-9). The workers that had higher ranks in the hierarchies of the plantation, the guards and headmen, brought their families along.

In my fieldwork, I identified a group of female sellers amongst the market women in SEMU who were born in the 1940s and 1950s and who had arrived in Malabo in the mid-seventies with their partners – in the midst of the Macias regime. Most of them combined farming with the selling of their products in Mercado Central, which had remained empty after the eviction of the Hausa and the Igbo workers. Mariana Nchama, one of the senior sellers in SEMU, explained that she had a brother working in an *Estatal* warehouse and, even though reselling goods was forbidden, she managed to earn enough to feed and cloth her extended family. However, not everyone was lucky enough to have a contact in the nationalised stores. Market women had to work hard to make ends meet and to survive the State's control over them and their exchanges. My interlocutors often recall how, once in a while, a representative from the government would appear in the marketplace to call them to *ir en cacao* (Eng: 'to go in cocoa'). This meant they had to immediately abandon their activities to go to remove the cocoa beans from the pods in the plantations. They had to do so without knowing when they could return to their household, and in the knowledge that their only compensation was some food for the day. In 1976 and 1978 two epidemic outbreaks killed a large number of workers in the plantations. Most of the women I interviewed lost their husbands in these outbreaks, and they transformed their commercial activities into bayamselam after the coup d'état. These women still sell foodstuffs in the bayamselam section of the marketplace, which in

the last decade was relocated to the SEMU neighbourhood⁷⁹. Some had moved upwards to buy and sell *asamsé* (see chapter 5) and they were currently the oldest sellers in the marketplace. However, as I will explain in further detail in the fifth chapter of this thesis, in spite of their seniority, those that nowadays lead the market women are from a younger generation that arrived in Malabo in the 1980s.

This older generation of market women were amongst the first Fang women to occupy the space the colonial state first, and the Macias' state later, set for market transactions, and which had previously been occupied by foreigners. Colonial marketplaces were built in the urban centres. These marketplaces were mainly inhabited by Fernandinos, Europeans, Lebanese and Nigerians, in the case of Malabo, and Europeans, Indians and Lebanese in the case of Bata. Fang, Annobonese, Ndowe and Bubi populations dwelled, in colonial times, in the urban periphery.

Indeed, one of the first actions of Macias Nguema's regime after independence was to occupy the urban centres. After the evacuation of most of the European settlers in 1969, Fang families, being connected to the regime, recolonised Malabo and Bata and the businesses abandoned by the foreign traders were nationalised immediately. Macias moved his residency to the former casa del gobernador (Eng.: House of the Governor), which became the new presidential palace in the capital of the new republic. However, as his regime became autarchic and isolated, he moved from Malabo to Bata first, and later on to his hometown in Mongomo district, Nzang Ayong (Artucio 1979: 15). In the most hermetic and isolated moments of the regime he managed the state finances from his village in Mongomo. In 1975 Pesetas Guineas, the inherited currency from the colony, was replaced by Ekuelé, emulating the old iron currency which represented the 'traditional wealth'.

⁷⁹ Interviews with the oldest women selling in SEMU in December 2012. All of them were Fang from the hinterland. From a total of ten interviewees, only two had arrived in Malabo before 1975. One of these two arrived in 1959 with her husband, who worked for the colonial cocoa plantation Mayo y Mora. Her husband died, and she remained in charge of the household in the 1960s. Her business since then has been the selling of salted fish. In her interview it was striking that while she use to process fish acquired by Bubi fisherman and, later on, by the Chinese, nowadays she prepares salted fish from frozen produce importers. This makes her product quite expensive (one piece costs between 500 and 2000FCFA), as she has to acquire the frozen fish, which already has a high price, buy the salt and process the fish, which sometimes rots and has to be discarded. I could not figure out if her business was generating any profit, as nowadays one can acquire salted fish straight from importer wholesalers.

After the coup d'état of 1979 he was found in the forest close to the Gabonese border with a suitcase full of the foreign currency of the State (Pélissier 1980, 14). A popular and widely accepted legend says that the national treasury was buried in the faa of Macias' hometown residence in Nzang Ayong. In the public narrative, he took the wealth from the 'outside' and kept it in the most intimate corner of el interior. This is rendered today as a sign of weakness rather than a demonstration of control over the sources of wealth.

After Macias' deposition, the exiles were invited to return and the new regime reconnected with Spanish and Bretton Woods institutions. Regional connections were re-established and Guinea entered in the CEMAC and in the CEFA Franc zone (see chapter 6). The first investments of the oil revenues in Obiang's rule included: the construction of new urban centralities in the periphery of the colonial towns (Malabo II and Bata II); the occupation of the centres; and the construction of infrastructures that ensured a controlled circulation of goods and people. The occupation of the centres paralleled the displacement of the non-elite population to the periphery and therefore the marketplaces. In 2004 a governmental decree ordered the construction of new marketplaces in the peripheries of Malabo and Bata. The colonial building of the central market of Bata was demolished to build a shopping mall that was still mostly empty when I last visited it in December 2012. For Malabo, the spaces of the Central Market and the Public Market are still in use, partly because SEMU market is too small to monopolise all market activity.

However, as I will develop in chapter 4, the commercial activity in the urban centres of Malabo and Bata is now dominated by a particular type of shop: the shopwindow boutique. These shops are normally owned by a grande or a nkukuma, a member of the elite, and they sell imported goods: mainly luxury clothing and accessories. Most of the time these boutiques are not profitable in a strictly economic sense. I argue that they serve, rather, as 'windows for bigmanship'. In other words, they serve as showcases for their owners that allow them to make visible their command of the 'exterior'. This 'exterior' is represented in a less glamorous manner in the marketplaces of the urban peripheries, where most of the commodities are also imported and a number of them require the seller to travel personally to their source. As I will develop in further chapters, market women also command an 'outside', for which they have their strategies to build up their social hierarchies and defend their position as brokers.

2.7 From the 'outside' to the people: the factoria and bayamselam systems

It is true that the maintenance of the interior requires that commodities are acquired from the 'outside'. However, not everybody has the resources and proper network to be able to travel and buy goods to then sell in the Guinean market nor often to reach the places where goods are sold. I will describe now two of the main systems through which imported goods arrive to Guinean territory and are domesticated, re-shaped so that can be consumed by ordinary Guineans. When in 2007 I settled in Equatorial Guinea, I was surprised to learn that the shops where people used to get their imported groceries were still called *factorias*. In fact, the factoria system has been kept in Equatorial Guinea up until today. Since the second half of the nineteenth century trading firms had installed their permanent trading posts in the main urban and strategic areas. When the trading companies moved into the hinterland, this move, together with the military and colonial deployment, brought to an end the earlier system of middlemen through which imported commodities used to circulate from the coast to the hinterland. Some of these trading posts, most of them nationalised during the Macias Nguema regime, are still in operation. The business model has not changed substantially: the owners of *factorias* diversify their activities by providing some of the logistics of the importation. The trading firm Santy, for instance, also owns a logistics company based in the port of Bata and a bottling factory to process beer and soft drinks that are sold in the firm's *factorias* and supermarket. These *factorias* sell overseas commodities in bulk as well as retail quantities that then are distributed through a system of small retail shops still called *abacerías* (grocery shop). These *abacerías* can act as bars or meeting points where some of the goods they sell (drinks and liquors) are also consumed. They have longer opening hours than the *factorias* and they only sell products in small quantities. For a more varied and even smaller quantities of goods the last shopping option would be the bayamselam post. As a pidgin English term – built on the expression 'to buy and to sell' - bayamselam is used as a synonym of petty trade therefore as an action that implies buying larger quantities of a commodity and turning it in smaller units. However, bayamselam is not used as a synonym for trading in all types of commodities. It stands for grocery products, but not for textile, cosmetics or ironmongery.

Most of the products of the bayamselam section of the marketplace are purchased in the Lebanese and Spanish trading *factorias* (trading firms like Martínez Hermanos, EGTC, LUMECO, Santy). Sacks of rice, boxes of frozen chicken wings or fishes, cans of cooking oil, and packages of salt can only be afforded by a minority of the population. Therefore, the bayamselam section of the marketplaces specialises in the re-packaging or the splitting-into-small-pieces of these factoria products so that they can be made affordable for ordinary Guineans.

At the time I started to live in Equatorial Guinea the factoria system was changing, albeit slowly. In 2006 the firm Martinez- Hermanos opened Malabo's first supermarket. The company, funded by a Spanish family (from Valencia) in the 1940's, is one of the few firms still in business since colonial times. It is now the third generation of the Martinez family having commercial business in Equatorial Guinea. The opening of the first supermarket was followed by the opening of another one by the same firm in Bata 2007. The transformation of the factoria into a supermarket seemed to be a natural development for a country on its way to modernisation: shiny floors, bright illumination, air conditioning and shopping carts to be filled around the lines of full shelves with imported products all suggested a shift towards methods of the distribution of goods considered more modern. Most of these products are imported from Spain, others come from a varied set of origins: Brazil, Lebanon, Morocco. Martinez Hermanos' store looks exactly as any supermarket one can find anywhere if it was not because one can find, for example, the most expensive bottles of Mœt Chandon champagne, that sold out whenever a *grande* has something to celebrate. Or massive buckets of peanut with cocoa paste manufactured in the neighbouring Cameroon (Tartine) that serves to fill the small and poor flour bread in the breakfast of many children. Massive buckets of Tartine serve as investment to some women that sell the small sandwiches for a 100 FCFA (less than 20 euro cents). The dissimilar prices and qualities of the goods sold in the supermarket are just a reflection of the disparity of livelihoods of this oil-wealthy country.

In the two following years the most relevant trading firms opened up their own supermarkets (EGTC, Santy, AFROM). The supermarkets aim to target both individual consumers and petty traders. In spite of the price difference between the supermarket price - normally slightly lower for the same products sold in the market - and the market stall price, this new direct-to-consumer system has not ended the *bayamselam* activity. The *bayanselam* section of the marketplace offers major

flexibility, as one can negotiate prices and can buy even smaller quantities or acquire produces that are close to their expiry date cheaply. The packages of foodstuffs sold in the supermarket are still too big for the household budgets of ordinary Guineans. As I will describe in more detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, most of my interviewees spend around 2000 FCFA on their household daily food expenses⁸⁰.

In addition to the *factoria* products, the *bayamselam* section offers fruit and vegetables acquired in Akombang marketplace (Cameroon-Ebibeyín). In this case, the fresh fruit and vegetables are purchased in larger quantities that fit in a single use basket. The products are sold at the market-place in small bundles that have fixed prices: for example, 50, 100, 200 or 500 FCFA. The prices do not change substantially, but what changes in response to periods of scarcity and inflation, is the quantity and quality of the product that one can find in each priced bundle.

The foodstuffs section of the marketplace is completed with some fresh products that represent the surplus of the small farming system (*fincas*) together with fish and bush-meat from the national waters and forests. The fish can be fresh, salted, dried or smoked for preservation. The frozen fish that can be found in the marketplace belongs to the *factoria* bulk boxes. By the foodstuffs stalls, one finds the section devoted to the traditional medicinal practices (*medicina de país*) with products that have been collected directly in the forest or imported from Cameroon. The stalls of medicine 'de país' together with bush-meat, fresh fish and a near-negligible supply of fruit, vegetables and cassava bread make up the few local products to be found in the marketplace.

2.8 Circulation, roads, and regional connections

The circulation of goods has been very intimately related with the circulation of people. Goods have travelled between island and the continent and its hinterland in small quantities mainly, sometimes limited to the quantity that can be carried on the body. This has been mirrored in developments in infrastructure: until recent improvements, implemented after 2007 as part of the infrastructure planning of the Horizon 2020 state agency (see below), the country's major ports of Bata and Malabo were not able to receive the anchormen of big merchant vessels and commodities had

⁸⁰ The households of my interviewees mostly formed by three or four adults and, two to three children.

to be transferred to smaller boats in order to make it to the shore. During the first decade of the off-shore oil extraction the equipment needed for the oil industry had to be transshipped in the port of Douala in neighbouring Cameroon (Roitman & Roso 2001, 126). Commerce, subsequently has been operated with small boats and canoes (cayucos). The infrastructure for land transportation similarly favoured small units of transport. Although the road system had been fully implemented in the second half of the 1940's, the characteristics of the terrain and the lack of maintenance of the new roads led to their deterioration, making it impossible for big vehicles to use them which meant that only small vehicles were able to ply the muddy and irregular roads.

The improvement of the transportation infrastructure has been one of the main concerns of Obiangs' Horizon 2020 development programme. However, the systems to supply the market-places still follow the more traditional pattern of small amounts of goods transported by many people. Horizon 2020 (horizonte veinte veinte) is a development programme overseen by its own State Agency and was set up after the Second Economic Conference 2007 (Campos- Serrano 2011, Appel 2011, 91). The event brought private companies from many different origins - from oil extracting corporations to construction and service conglomerates – together with State authorities and Ministerial Offices. The main goal of the summit was to create a roadmap for the modernisation of the country and the first 'axis of transformation' decided upon was to be 'the construction of modern and international quality infrastructures in order to improve productivity and speed up economic growth'⁸¹.

The transformation of 'hard' infrastructures (roads, ports, airports), the construction of big housing projects such as Bata and Malabo II, massive monuments, the conference centre of Sipopo and the construction of a brand new city in the middle of the forest in Oyala, are part of the regime's version what Anna Tsing has called the 'economy of appearances': the self-conscious making of a spectacle directed to attract rent or investment (Tsing 2000, 118). The government uses these infrastructures as material evidence of re-investment of oil money and commitment to modernisation. Hannah Appel has stressed how 'infrastructure' has become a

⁸¹ Infrastructure construction is often addressed in the official discourse and in the official media of the evidence of the change and the improvement and development of the country promoted by the Obiang regime. The construction of infrastructures is often used as an argument to counteract the critique and the accusations against the regime. See the discursive rhetoric of the development program in the official website of the regime: <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=6249> (accessed in August 2015)

mantra for the Guinean Government and 'a key site through which oil and gas companies and Equatoguinean actors negotiate entanglement and disentanglement, responsibility and its abdication' (Appel 2012). Despite the State's emphasis on highly-visible infrastructural projects, oil companies use an apparent lack of infrastructure to accommodate the extractive industry to justify the outsourcing of services and personnel. At the same time the social responsibility actions of oil companies have as main goals the construction of the type of infrastructure that should be on the agenda of public investment, concentrating on the pavement of roads and the building of housing and private hospitals such that would be out of reach for the majority of the population. Big walls serve to separate not only the physical spaces of oil compounds from the ordinary reality of Equatorial Guinea, but also socio-political responsibilities. Oil companies abdicate responsibility for what the Guinean Government does with oil revenues, while the Guinean Government builds an 'economy of appearances' to materialise a discourse of the country's modernisation.

Whereas most of the 'white elephants' built by the government - gigantic and impractical construction projects - are applauded by few but have been widely perceived as irresponsible and wasteful (Appel 2012), roads and transportation infrastructures reach another type of consensus: they have, as Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox put it, the capacity to 'enchant', as 'roads manage to hold competing and often quite divergent hopes and expectations together to produce a generalised sense of social good to which the majority of people subscribe' (Harvey & Knox 2012: 522). Indeed, my Guinean interlocutors often reminded me how much better transportation was now that part of the oil-money had been invested in improving the road system.

Big, concrete roads and an increase in traffic and circulation, constitute a visible and experiential reality for most of those Guineans that would not experience wealth derived from oil in other aspects of their lives. However, Anna Tsing has observed that 'roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement' (Tsing 2005: 6). Roads and transport infrastructure, thus, both connect and confine the national territory, they have the capacity to connect but also to exclude. Yet, behind the material change that an improvement of the roads generates, the structural impediments set up in the post-colony persist: military checkpoints

where the local population is subjected to constant violent abuse; arbitrary closure of land borders that makes planning the supply of large quantities of commodities a very risky endeavour; arbitrary cancelling and overbooking domestic and regional flights due to their use by the government elite makes planning difficult; a non-fixed customs policy and arbitrary taxation add unpredictability to possible trade profits. This equation makes it so that transiting and using the new modern infrastructures continues to be challenging and hard work for not well-connected foreigners and non-elite.

The discourse and material change produces a markedly differing reality when it comes to the everyday practice of Equatorial Guineans. The different strata of Guinean society have completely uneven access to the advantages of speed, connectedness and economic growth. The National Economy that was meant to be addressed by the II National Economic Conference and which set up Horizon 2020 is only a fraction of the 'real economy' of Equatorial Guinea, which although deeply influenced by the 'economy of appearance' of the oil, it has its own logics and its own historical developments (see MacGaffey et al. 1991).

The management of economic risk and the management of pertinent networks are crucial for the development of any economic activity and in this respect petty trade turns out to be one of the safer ways of managing and moving commodities around the country. Yet, overseas commodities, regional networks of petty traders that move goods across the space, and people who are constantly moving in between territories, have been the features of the Guinean version of the Atlantic economy and its connections and are integrated into a regional network that links various polities and social entities. The final part of this section will explore the impact of recent political developments and infrastructure projects on actual orientation and circulation through – and beyond – Guineas' regions, starting with the island of Bioko.

Up until 1976 Bioko island was tightly connected with the Nigerian and Cameroonian coast. Canoes from Calabar and Douala circulated all types commodities between the island and the coast⁸². To this connection that was already

⁸² In 1976 the President Macias Nguema ejected the Nigerian workers of the plantations, he had already expelled the vast majority of the Spanish colony in 1969 in his aim of cutting-off the old colonial networks, both ex-metropolitan and regional (Sanz 1983, Martino 2011, Sundiata 1996).

closely-knit during the nineteenth century, the connection between Bioko the Muni estuary, Bata and Annobon became obviously tighter with the deployment of the colonial State that artificially linked together these distant territories. With the construction of the road that links Bata and Ebibeyín, the connection between the ports of Malabo and Bata saw increased traffic flows and the circulation of commodities between Malabo, Bata, Ebibeyín and Kio-Osí, the first town after the border in Cameroon, increased considerably. During the period I conducted my fieldwork this was, still, the route most often traversed by market-women (2010-2012). Most of the fresh products – like fruits and vegetables – that can be found in the marketplaces come from Akombang, the market located in the Cameroonian side of the Ebibeyín border⁸³. As I will show in later sections where I am going to describe the path that market goods and the traders tramp through national and international routes, most of the fruit and vegetables consumed in Bioko travel inside of disposable baskets all the way from Cameroon on the public transport mini-buses – owned by Hausa community members - and then cross the sea on board the National Ship Djibolho or the San Valentín, that have been covering the route Bata-Malabo since the early 1980's.

While the Bata-Ebibeyín road is an old route, the presence of oil money, the development of infrastructure and the 'enchantment', the hopes for wealth and social mobility which such infrastructural development often represents, changed the centre of gravity of the regional entanglements. Bioko recovered its historical centrality of the area of the Bight of Biafra, which it had lost during Macías regime, and Bata has become a pole of attraction of goods and people from the neighbouring countries in addition to the migrants from further away. The traffic of transnational shipping lines has increased and while until the last decades of the twentieth century Malabo and Bata were secondary stopovers for liners, nowadays they have become final destinations. The improvement of port and airport infrastructures has increased the state control of the circulation of goods and people which has hindered the continuation of certain routes. Specific events have been used as a pretext to close particular regional routes. While a failed coup d'etat attempt in 2004 led to the

83 In 1945 the road was being improved and the colonial authorities considered of crucial importance the maintenance of this crucial communication hub. AT Bata, 31 December 1945 'Hoja Informativa 12' AGA c-81/08810 <http://www.opensourceguinea.org/2014/07/at-bata-31-diciembre-hoja-informativa.html> (consulted 3 August 2015)

expulsion of Ghanaian petty traders, the aftermath of the assaults on the banks in Bata in 2007 and the attempt to assault the presidential palace in 2009 led to the expulsion of Nigerians and the definitive prohibition of the circulation of small canoes between Malabo and the Cameroonian and the Nigerian coast. Petty trade is the first victim of this violence: a systemic violence that has changed little since colonial times and that seems to be a recurrent feature of the Guinean state's mechanisms for the (re)creation of a national space.

Roads and travel infrastructures connect and make a more cohesive territory but also confine and frame the circulation of goods and people. Nguemism uses infrastructural violence to manage the entanglement and disentanglement with foreign entities and polities. The control over roads and paths of circulation strengthen the regime both in a direct material way, with the control of circulation of commodities and people, and symbolically by generating an 'economy of appearance' of a prosperous and rich nation full of possibilities.

2.9 Conclusion: interior and exterior circulations and connectedness as value

In this chapter I have dealt with a categorical opposition which becomes crucial to understanding the physical and ideal spaces through which goods circulate in Equatorial Guinea: *el interior* in contrast to the exterior. This opposition, as any social and cultural construct, needs to be understood historically. It has its roots in the Atlantic trade and it has clearly been influenced by colonial rule and discourse. However, what can seem just another colonial opposition – coast/hinterland, civilised territories/untamed jungle - has its particular meanings and local subtleties, especially for the Fang cultural perception and construction of space which is tightly linked their own historicity (see chapter 1). If the outside is the source of foreign goods that can increase *akúm*, *el interior* serves both as a material ground for the display of wealth and power, and as an ideal frame through which to make sense of relationships and networks. Objects and people circulate through this ideally opposed spaces, which evidences the porosity of social categories that are also framed in this interior/exterior cadre: ethnic belonging, village, kin, political affiliation, etc.

I have argued that, historically, dependency on imports and exportation of raw materials has been a feature of the Guinean State in the same way political power and governance has been dependant on the relationship with foreign polities. Its

geographical position in the Bight of Biafra, combined with the diversity of its territories and ethnic affiliations, has drawn its orientation towards regional and overseas entities while performing the role of a site for the naval control of the gulf, a trading *entrepôt*, a smuggling hub, and an informal tax-free trading area. I have shown in the previous chapter how the engagement or disengagement with this extravert State has evolved for the peoples that have been living inside the borders of the Equatorial Guinean State. I also explored the regional dynamics through which goods circulate in and out the country and have traversed these different political entities, materialising connections or dis-connections.

It is precisely at this moment that power and value come into play, where connections and dis-connections are materialised. Through the ethnographic examples given I have illustrated how Guineans spend an enormous amount of creative energy in both the maintenance of the village connection, and the display of commandment of the exterior as opposed to *el interior*. In other words, being connected to different polities and spaces is crucial for Guinean sociality and this will be a recurrent idea throughout the thesis. Connectedness generates value in a wide sense of the concept. Being connected – to the village, to a family, to the ruling party, to Africa, to the world – is valuable in the affective and moral sphere of social life, but at the same time, this connectedness also translates into commensurable economic value. In the next chapter I explore how value and meaning of market objects are dependent upon an imagined geographical origin, and on certain ideas about ‘where and who is good to be connected with’. Both consuming and trading with foreign goods become tools for the creation and reproduction of this ‘valuable connectedness’.



**Figure 16 Official demonstration.
8 March 2010 in Malabo.**



**Figure 18 Detail of the Official 8
March uniform, Malabo 2010**



**Figure 17 Ndowé Women
celebrating 8 March in Bata**



Figure 19 Cloths awaiting in a shop to be purchased for an event



Figure 20 Empty Shopping Mall in Bata. December 2012



Figure 21 Stall run by an Igbo trader in Malabo, March 2011



Figure 22 Retired lady in her village, wearing a presidential cloth in 2011

Part B

***Asamsé* and *elegancia*. Provisioning paths and strategies**

On the morning of 17 January 2010 I took a shared taxi to SEMU, the main marketplace in Malabo where I conducted most of the fieldwork for this thesis. I was living in the colonial old town but the market is located out of the centre, in an area that has seen the construction of many new buildings since the oil boom. The road got busier as the taxi got closer to the marketplace. Cars, wheelbarrows, and pedestrians occupied the road, disturbing the dust and generating clouds in the street. The harmattan had travelled all the way from the Sahara and covered everything that morning with a thin layer of a yellowish dust that made everything in the distance look similar to me.

The taxi stopped in the middle of a narrow street with stalls on both sides, this was the entrance to the marketplace. On the left-hand side sat a row of small stalls constructed from corrugated metal sheets on wooden posts. The stalls were packed full of second-hand clothes (*asamsé*) hanging either from clothes hangers or directly from nails sticking out of the wooden posts. The dust of the harmattan made a blur of all the colours of the market on my first visit, preventing me from fully taking in the market's variety and its high level of organisation. Second-hand clothing is not piled or displayed arbitrarily in these small stalls: every item of clothing is displayed in an orderly way as I would find out on subsequent visits. The seller must have particular skills to make this so. As I will explore below, colour and quality are relevant in this organisation – but this would only be revealed to me after weeks of fieldwork. The colours on the left-hand side of the street were less bright, though, than those of the plastic objects on display on the right-hand side of the road, where a row of small concrete booths housed all sorts of homeware, including kitchen

utensils, brightly coloured plastic containers, small electrical appliances and suitcases. DVDs, as well as new clothing for men, were sold in the last few stalls at the end of the narrow street. The colours of the items of clothing hanging from these last few stalls were slightly brighter than the rest: blues, reds, yellows, and whites from counterfeit Spanish football kits stood out amongst the rest, although they too were covered by the yellow dust.

The busy narrow street led to a big esplanade where cars and taxis made a turn to get back to the main road. A group of women, sitting on raffia baskets under the sun and selling bundles of big snails tied together by their shells, occupied the space left by a big pile of waste accumulating next to a big rubbish container. Around the esplanade, three large metallic roofed structures covered several rows of wooden stalls, sheltering the rest of the products: on the right side was a section for the rest of the *asamsé* and two sections for general *bayamselam* and fruit and vegetables; at the back was a section for frozen products, charcoal and bush-meat; a big central shed housed clothing (both *asamsé* and *elegancia*) and a group of West African tailors that sewed African clothing. Cosmetics and home utensils completed the collection of products, and were situated at both ends of the rows of stalls of the central roofed structure.

I was walking around the marketplace, looking carefully at the textiles section, trying to get a sense of what was on offer, when I stopped in front of a stall that was crammed with shoes. In contrast to the stalls and barrows that sold *asamsé* at the entrance of the marketplace, this one only had a few types of shoes (sandals and ballerinas) of various colours and sizes. In the centre of the stall, between the shoes, was an image of Saint Pancras. The figure of San Pancraccio, considered the saint of the humble and the poor, is commonly used in Spain in small businesses, as it is believed to protect them from misfortune and bankruptcy.

The stall keeper, Lucrecia, who would become one of the participants in my research, asked, 'What do you want? Manoletina? Five thousand, five thousand!'⁸⁴ By *manoletina* she was referring to the very simple colourful ballerinas on display. Her way of referring to that particular type of shoe puzzled me, as did the display of the image of Saint Pancras between the merchandise. I had a sort of a *déjà vu* feeling, one of revisiting images of my childhood in Catalonia. The term *manoletina* has an

⁸⁴ Sp.: ¿Qué quieres? ¿Manoletina? ¡Cinco-mil, cinco-mil!

interesting etymology: it was named after Manolete, a famous Spanish bullfighter during the 1940s and 1950s. The shape and style of a black ballerina shoe is very similar to the shoe that Spanish bullfighters wear as part of their *traje de luces* (the golden coloured traditional outfit).

I had been standing for a while in front of Lucrecia's stall, looking at the *manoletinas* and making connections with my own thoughts and experiences, when Lucrecia shouted again while extending her hand over her merchandise: 'These are *manoletinas* of five thousand, what do you have?' (Sp.: *Estas son manoletinas de cinco mil ¿Qué tú tienes?*).

In subsequent encounters with Lucrecia and other sellers in the marketplace I found out that, even though the labels and brands of the shoes were of Chinese origin – some of the trademarks even had Chinese characters – they had come from Elche, a Spanish town in the province of Alicante that has traditionally been an important centre for the shoe making industry. Nowadays the production of Elche shoes has dropped considerably, but shoe making is still the main economic activity of the region. Some of the historical brands have kept their warehouses in the two main industrial quarters of the area, while others have moved production abroad. New Asian importers also have their own warehouses from which they supply retailers. However, for the Guinean traders and customers the fact that their *manoletinas* came from Elche is significantly more important than the fact they were actually manufactured in Asia, or that the same shoes could be acquired from other wholesalers in other parts of Spain as well as in other countries (see chapter 4). The *zapato de Elche* (shoe from Elche) functions as a trademark in itself. However, I will argue that what makes the shoe 'from Elche' is not the location of its production or a particular production technique, but rather the fact that 'somebody has gone through the trouble to travel to that particular town in Spain to bring it to Guinea' (Lucrecia, Malabo 2010). In this case the sign-value of the good (Bouillard 2012, 228) and its associated place of origin seems undeniable and seems more relevant than other values, for example, its use value and exchange value.

This ethnographic vignette illustrates how through looking at just one of the objects sold in the marketplace, a web of connections and relationships can be revealed. Globalisation, post-colonialism and consumption as a production of meaning are some of the themes that rise from the social biography (Kopytoff 1986) of a *manoletina* and a San Pancraccio. In this section of the thesis I provide some

insights that allow us to 'dust off' the commodities that were covered by the sandy wind the first day I visited SEMU marketplace.



Figure 23 San Pancracio in Semu, among 'shoes from Elche'. March 2011

Chapter 3

Asamsé: Getting a grip on ones' economy

3.1 Introduction: categories of goods

In this chapter I will continue with the 'dusting-off' of the textile commodities whose trajectories I have followed. In doing so I examine them in their particular trajectories, focusing on the relations and connections which they constitute and they are a result of. In the description of these different types of goods, I seek to render their historic global condition, which will reveal how they appear in a particular fetishised form in Equatorial Guinea. In the construction of their meaning and value some of these connections are made visible and strengthened while some others are blurred and forgotten.

I describe thereupon the three main emic categories of clothing goods one can find in the Guinean marketplace: *asamsé*, *elegancia* and *moda africana*. These three categories evoke three paths or systems of provision which are not always fixed, homogeneous and constant. I opted to call them 'categories' instead of 'systems' because sometimes their provision does not respond to a system but rather to anti-systems. As the import of the goods in question involves informal flows, travelling in suitcases, shifting their conditions of discarded goods into commodities and vice-versa, their trajectories would be an uneasy fit with any systematic concept. Moreover, goods can also flip from one category to another regardless on the path of provision they have gone through to arrive on the hands of Guinean consumers. *Asamsé*, *Moda Africana* and *Elegancia* are constructed on the bases of meaningful trajectories, which are the result of a creative process of cutting and stitching social relations, making some aspects of the social biography of the goods relevant while completely erasing others. The questions I seek to answer in this descriptive chapter are: which part of the trajectory becomes relevant for the definition of the different categories of goods? Which are the factors which influence this creative process? To

which collective projects and power relations are dynamics of meaning production embedded?

The answers to all these questions require an exercise of contextualizing the ethnographic data into its unique historical perspective. In my description below I address the history of connections and meaning associations, and as long as it is possible the frictions that production, circulation and consumption generate. I understand the three categories of goods as embedded in power configurations, global capitalism, agency and transformation, and not just a cultural production or a local specificity.

3.2 *Asamsé*

The first category of clothing goods I will explore here is the most important in terms of quantity but also in qualitative terms for this ethnography, as the mechanisms through which it is marketed shape and render systems of provisioning and strategies of consumption of many Guineans. Cast-off garments in the US and Europe are put into circulation in a global commodity chain constituting the main resource of clothing for Guineans, and these flows of garments become the *asamsé*. Concurrently, *asamsé* has transformed and contributed to generate a particular way of sourcing livelihoods. It is used to retain and distribute value, so that precarious households can maintain a more or less constant influx of sufficient resources for their daily life. In chapter 6 I explore how *asamsé* works as a mechanism for the managing of household budgets, and how women use 55 kg bale retailing to make it possible to turn *dinero* (investment money, wealth) into *dinero de comida* (money for food, small quantities to spend in daily household meals). Trading with *asamsé* constitutes the first step in a hierarchy of retailing activities which will be described below. The specific material features of this commodity contribute to the shaping of a market practice which has subsequently been adopted into the sourcing and marketing of other commodities.

3.3 *Asamsé* in the market-place

Asamsé takes up most of the space of the market-places in Equatorial Guinea and constitutes the most affordable way to dress the body, with the obvious exception of the gifted clothes that circulate amongst family and friendship networks. *Asamsé*

is the concept used to refer both to a specific type of traded goods and a particular sort of market. In the *asamsé* section of the marketplace, one can find shoes, trousers, underwear and all sorts of textile garments and homeware such as curtains, towels or linen. Clothing, shoes and household textiles are distributed in the market stalls. Some of the stalls are only made up of a wooden squared structure with nails sticking out of the posts where either the clothes hang directly or where hangers are used to orderly display different pieces of garments. Other stalls are built under the shade of a zinc sheet and they have a central counter surrounded by benches that can be used for sitting or lying or as a surface to display goods.⁸⁵

Asamsé can also be purchased in the market side-streets and children often help out their relatives in the selling. They carry a selection of garments on their heads and back around the market-place and its surroundings. As one of the *asamsé* sellers in the market of Monte Bata expressed, 'when you are not lucky enough to have a stall on the road, kids can reach the people that don't make it to your stall' (Bata, December 2012)⁸⁶. Children usually sell childrens clothes, but they also can carry shorts, t-shirts or trousers, casual clothes rather than smart clothing, shoes or housewares. Often the most affordable types of garments. The most expensive and sophisticated ones remain on display at the stalls. These are organised by types of goods, which commonly coincides with the different categories of bales of second hand clothing imported from overseas. The latter are black or white squared bales of 55 kilograms of mechanically pressed clothes. The content of the sacs is not visible until the plastic clamp is cut to open it. Once opened, the bales cannot be closed again as when the air touches the garments they expand and gain their usual shape and volume so they do not fit in the sac any more unless one uses a clothing press like the ones utilised in the sorting warehouses in Europe and the US. The only information that the retailer has when she purchases the bale is which category of goods she will find and this ranking has been set and negotiated between the European wholesalers, the African importers and the retailers. The market stalls, then, are specialised in one or two of these categories – for example, shoes and trousers, or bras and t-shirts.

⁸⁵ As I have described in the second chapter of this thesis, the materials with which these stalls are build are very modest and not long lasting being it necessary to repair often due to heavy rains and winds.

⁸⁶ Sp. 'cuando una no tiene la suerte de tener su puesto en la carretera, los niños llegan a la gente que no llega a el puesto de una' (Bata, December 2012).

Apart from categorizing according to the type of garment, the stall sellers also organise the clothes according to shape and colour. Rebeca, one of the most successful *asamsé* sellers of SEMU marketplace explained to me how relevant it is to know how to display and how to organise goods in a stall. She pointed out as well how important it is to stick to one type of clothes so that the customers know what to expect when they attend to a particular stall. This last pattern cannot be reproduced by all the sellers, due to the variable prices of the bales and the also fluctuating investment capacity. Most of the sellers in the marketplace would buy the bale type that they can afford in a specific moment, always knowing that there are bales with which one can make more profit than others because of the type of goods they contain and because they are more scarce and the garments can be sold at a higher price.

Rebeca's stall is always full of merchandise. And she attributes the fact that she takes all the merchandise out of the sacks and hangs it up- and takes it down - every day, to her success. According to her there are a lot of sellers that 'do not take the trouble to organise the stall every day because it requires too much of work and effort'. Sometimes this effort does not bring a reward because 'there are many days in which you don't see any sale but you should be hard worker because there is the day when you see more sales and the customers like to see it beautiful'⁸⁷. Retailers begin their day by opening the sacks that the barrow boys bring to the stall from the warehouse that they rent in one of the side streets of the market. They start unfolding clothes and hanging them from the wooden beam one item after the next, starting from predominantly dark-patterned clothes, following by ochres and browns and finally ending with the whites. The vivid colours are strategically placed in the shadow to preserve their patterns whereas white garments hang from the beams that are more exposed to the sunshine. Rebeca, who specialises in home-ware textiles, also tries to colour-match cushions, curtains and tablecloths so that willing customers can buy colour-matched sets. Most of the stalls are completed with a bundle of small-damaged clothes in display on a mat on the floor. The latter is the most affordable merchandise and lies on the floor at the mercy of dust and sunshine and together with a carton banner that indicates a price: 500 FCFA. Rebeca credits her success to her own work and initiative on the stall:

⁸⁷ Sp. 'porque hay muchos días en los que tu no ves venta pero una tiene que trabajar duro para cuando viene el día en que tu sí ves la venta. A las clientas les gusta ver las cosas bonitas' (Rebeca in Semu, April 2010).

'A lot of women are now sellers and this is a win-and-lose business. You need to think well how you do it. There are some [sellers] that change [the type of bale they sale]. Now they sell jeans and in a week, they are selling bras. I started this way, doing what I could do. But when I went into Semu I looked to what the others did and I decided to sell home-ware: curtains, tablecloths, pillows [...] and I display it like so [organised by colours] so that it looks beautiful and people stop to look and buy. [...]' Rebeca in Semu, April 2010.⁸⁸

Asamsé clothes do not always get to be displayed on the hangers of the carefully organised stalls like Rebecas'. There are specific days of the week – Monday for Los Ángeles neighbourhood, Tuesday for Semu market for instance - when the *asamsé* is brought to the market inside the bales in which it arrives from overseas. After opening the bale in the market, the plastic wrap becomes a sort of a counter where the content is scattered and displayed. Customers accumulate around the sacs and rummage in the bundle of clothes to find a good piece. Great bargains and opportunities can be found in this first opening of a sack. In *asamsé de los lunes* (Eng. *asamsé* of the Mondays) everything happens very quickly: one must be fast and have an expert eye to pick the good pieces before the others get to them. Once a piece is chosen, the customer extends his or her hand showing the piece to the seller. Immediately, a price is suggested: 'cinco-mil!' A very short and quick negotiation takes place, and when the seller is content, she extends her hand while pronouncing a *dáme* (Eng. give me). The *asamsé de los lunes* is a coming and going of people, banknotes and clothes. And it is precisely the confusion and the fast negotiation that make it possible for the customers to get bargains, but also for the sellers to get rid of a big portion of the sac. At the end of the day, the pieces that are not sold are stored and they will be organised and displayed at the stalls for the following weeks. The seller selects the best pieces and hangs them carefully along the wooden beams and posts, whereas the pieces that have any damage or have got dust and dirt are sold at a cheap price at the bundles in front of the stalls.

At times the ritual of the opening of the sac takes place at home. The trader opens the bale surrounded by the close family members who can, then, do the first picking.

⁸⁸ Sp. ' Ya muchas mujeres se dedican a la venta y *asamsé* es un negocio de gana-pierde. Hay que pensar mucho como se hace. Hay algunas que cambian. Ahora venden pantalones vaqueros y dentro de una semana ya venden sujetador(es). Yo empecé así, haciendo lo que podía. Pero cuando me entré aquí en Semu miré lo que hacían las otras y decidí vender ropa de casa: cortina(s), mantel(es), cojín(es) [...] y yo lo pongo así [por colores] para que se vea bonito y la gente pare a mirar y a comprar. Yo ya tengo clientas que siempre vienen y saben que yo traigo buenas cosas.' Rebeca in Semu, April 2010.

They rarely pay for the pieces they pick. Sometimes they take them as a return for favours or they incur a debt with the family trader. Whether the bale is opened in the market-place or at home, the clothes that arrive at the stalls have passed through a first filter. Hands of potential new owners have grabbed, held and rummaged around the bundle of clothes that later are re-sorted and hung in an orderly way in the stalls of the market. The etymology of *asamsé* refers to this latter activity which is closely tied to how Guineans perceive and understand it. The word *asamsé* is a pidginisation of the Fang expression *a essam* or a *asamelé* which stands for 'to move, to hold, to agitate or to manipulate things with your hands'⁸⁹. Consuming in *asamsé* requires searching for the 'good piece' by using the hands amongst a bundle of goods of mixed types and qualities. At the same time, as I will expose later in this thesis, trading with *asamsé* provides a means for having a grip and managing (holding, manipulating) the household finances. The act of holding, and sorting out using the hands is, therefore, present in both the processes of consuming and trading of clothes.

In the following sections I will unpack different aspects of *asamsé* in regards to its political economy and its values and meanings. In doing so I will first place *asamsé* in the wider context in which it belongs - the global circulation of second-hand clothing - to then turn to its particular history in Equatorial Guinea. I will argue that its particular history and the country integration into specific regional logics and networks have shaped the manner in which *asamsé* is traded and consumed. What emerges as an epiphenomenon of the second-hand clothing trade in other regions of West-Africa, particularly Nigeria and Cameroon, takes its own form in the interaction with the Guinean political and economic context and gives way to a 'domesticated system' regulated by its own local rules and values.

3.4 Lightening the shadows of the global used-clothing market

Asamsé is part of the global phenomenon of the second-hand clothing trade which links consumers from the global North to consumers of the global South in turning discarded clothes into a profitable commodity. This global commodity chain took its present form in the late 1970's and specially during 1980's, when the need for management of the cast-off garments of the fast-fashion systems in the global North

⁸⁹ This are the observations provided by the Guinean Fang linguist Julián Bibang Oyé in an interview held in Malabo in March 2010.

met the clothing needs of the global South. These were then conditioned by weak and non-competitive local textile industries (Rivoli, 2009; Tramberg-Hansen, 2004; Brooks, 2015). In the last decade, a number of academic works have shed light on this global commodity chain, parts of which still remain largely unseen or 'shadowed' (eg. Guinsburg, 1980; Hawley, 2006; Rivoli, 2009; Tranberg-Hansen, 2000; Brooks, 2015; Fodoup, 2006; Norris, 2010; Abimbola, 2011).

I use the metaphor of the 'shadows' that Andrew Brooks has also used in his recent book to refer to the 'world of used clothing' (Brooks 2015: 72) and that resonates with the discussions of Africa's political economies that have spoken about the ways Africans have developed their relationship with the outside world on a global scale as multiple 'shadows' (see Ferguson, 2006). There is a palpable 'darkness' in the popular knowledge from the Global North about where and how the clothing disposed in charity sacs or containers makes its way towards the global South. This is useful for the businesses that profit from the sale of second hand cast-offs as it is mainly nourished by clothes discarded and donated to charity organisations. These charities also benefit from lacking and confusing information that sometimes advertises their activities as collecting 'clothes for the poor' without making it explicit that what they mean is that they exchange the donated clothes for cash before any of the items actually reaches those in need of them. In the same manner, commercial collectors have taken advantage of this confusion, using the rhetoric of aid and solidarity to get to their raw material for free (Brooks, 2012: 112-119). The links of the second-hand clothing commodity chains and charitable organisations also generates certain ethical discomfort when the profits of the trade with gifted clothes see the light of the media (Hansen 2000: 122-126). These ethical complications of the used clothing trade contribute to its image as a *shady* business.

A shady business which, as Lucy Norris has described, becomes even more shady when we think about the specific characteristics of the specific commodity: clothes that have been formally owned and used by somebody else and, therefore, arguably having had a close relationship with other bodies and their substances. In her ethnography of the textile recycling industry in India, ideas of social hierarchies such as class or cast and perceptions about purity, dirt and decay come into play when it comes to the consumption of 'other people's' former clothes. In this context, the 'shadow imaginery' becomes crucial in order to create an indispensable distance between the former wearer and the new consumer (Norris, 2010). As I will explore in

the following section, the physical and social distance between the person who disposes of the garments and the one who buys them again, is a basic requirement in the process of value transformation which the re-selling of cast-off garments into a commodity requires.

Apart from these 'knowledge shadows', second-hand clothing commodity chains also participate of the so called 'shadow economy', or informal economy, in multiple ways. On the one hand the most obvious is what recent academic works have gathered: a great quantity of the used garments arriving to Africa are smuggled, making it impossible to reckon the actual impact of its trade by official means (Hansen 2000: 122; Abimbola 2011: 55; Brooks 2012:174-178). The system of provision of second-hand clothing in the continent is characterised by the prohibition of its imports in certain countries - like Nigeria - and the rise of *entrepôts* for smuggling of others - Benin, Cameroon and, among others, Equatorial Guinea for a short period of time⁹⁰.

On the other hand, the nature of the trading networks that distribute used garments in the continent and non-institutionalised organisation of the business in the process of redistribution are specific features of second-hand clothing circulation. The Igbo traders, with their wide clientele network based in a complex system of apprenticeship, control the trade between the UK and Nigeria and its satellite *entrepôts* – including Equatorial Guinea (Abimbola 2011); Indian background families have controlled the wholesale in Zambia (Hansen 2000:136-137), Kenya (Rivoli 2009) and in Moçambic (Brooks 2012: 192); marketplace retailers also use to be clustered according to kin ties or regional networks, having their non-institutionalised mutual-aid and financial associations which both blur and protect the different stages of this shady business. Finally, these multiple shadows benefit the management of risk in the second-hand clothing different supply chains. Risk, which I will describe in more detail below, is usually transferred to the poorer retailer that is least connected.

⁹⁰For the case of the smuggling Benin-Nigeria see Abimbola (2012: 50-54). For Cameroon being *entrepôt* for the trade towards Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon, Congo DRC and Equatorial Guinea see Fodoup (2006: 45-47). See the case of Moçambic analysed by Brooks (2012:24-26) or Velia et al. 2006 for the role of South Africa in a wider regional system of provision.

In this complex world of shadows there is a great room for creativity which offers an interesting arena for anthropological enquiry. As Karen Tranberg-Hansen points out in the first academic and ethnographic study of the second-hand clothing circulation and consumption in an African context, the same commodity acquires different denominations which emphasises the aspects of the trade, the history of its introduction in different locales or the quality and the values that every specific society attaches to it (Hansen 2000: 248-249). In Zambia second-hand clothes are referred as Salaula which in Bemba means 'selecting from a pile in a manner of rummaging'. But Hansen also collects other denominations such as 'white dead man's clothes' or 'died in Europe' used in Ghana and in north-western Tanzania respectively or mitumba which in Swahili means 'bale', referring to the particular shape the second-hand clothes take in the export (Hansen 2000: 248; Mangieri 2006: 14-15; see also some other denominations collected in Brooks 2015: 147). In Northern Nigeria the name chosen is *bendover* referring to the position one has to adopt in the process of selecting the desired good amongst a pile on the floor, whereas in South Nigeria the denomination of second-hand clothing makes reference to its historical paths and routes⁹¹. As an abbreviation of 'Okrika wake up!' the consign Abiriban⁹² traders would shout in the streets of the coastal town of Okrika in order to sell the merchandise they used to collect from the vessels of Port-Harcourt in the 1950's (Farrel 1994: 177, Abimbola 2013: 51). In Mozambique *roupas da calamidades* or *calamidades* ['clothing of the calamity'] also signify the particular history of the trade, as it refers to the period when bales of used clothing were freely distributed as part of the foreign aid programs in the period of war and natural disasters (Brooks 2012: 154). Multiple denominations show the diversity of understandings and valuations of the second-hand clothing, the latter representing the most relevant source of garments in the continent. The bales of second-hand clothes sorted and packed in Europe and the United States are opened in the continent and the goods they contain are 'domesticated' according to local ideas and desires, but also histories and political ideas. These multiple names highlight different aspects of the trade that refer to what it is that is valued in a particular context, both spatial and historical.

⁹¹ My interviews in Malabo of the period 2010-2012

⁹² Abiriba is a town in Abia State, South Eastern Nigeria. As I will indicate below, most of the pioneers of the second-hand clothing trade in West Africa belong to this small town and they have spread their trading networks worldwide.

For my collaborators it is clear that *Asamsé* is part of the form that this commerce of used and recycled clothing has taken since the 1970's and the following period of Structural Adjustment. However, the trade of used garments as a source of wealth is not a late twentieth century development. Nor are the importation and the trade of used clothing in African confines (see Rich, 2005; Martin 1994; Prestholdt, 2011). In the European urban centres of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was already a market for discarded clothing which generated profits and gave a source of livelihood to a class of urban dwellers (see eg. Ginsburg 1980; Palmer & Clark 2005). The business was in charge of these so called 'clothes brokers' clustered in specific streets and neighbourhoods, whose work was to dis-attach worn clothes from their owners and to find new wearers. Madelaine Ginsburg described this commerce in the case of London and drew a historical account for the commerce of discarded clothing in the Imperial capital. The potential consumers of used garments were most of the population, in a context where acquiring new clothes was relegated to a small portion of the society and most of the population would re-use and re-customise their vests (Ginsburg 1980).

The main contribution of Ginsburg has been to document the long-standing history of second-hand clothes being the means that the poor have had to gain access to certain goods, and also being the means with which a class of 'brokers' generated a non-dismissible amount of profit. The poor consuming the rich's clothing has often created tensions, that have eventually become explicit and regulated by strict sumptuary laws (see eg. Mihaupt 2005, Lemire 2005 or Brooks 2015: 76). Lucy Norris, offers relevant ethnographic material related to the management of the social tensions that the re-use of worn clothes generates in the global material flows. Her work looks at Indian recycling industries, which convert discarded remnants of old clothing into attractive products for both the home Indian and the international markets. She argues how social hierarchy, cast and related ideas of purity, dirt and decay play a key role in the process of construction and transformation of value embedded in the process of garments recycling.

The process of turning this complex material good into a commodity requires the removal of the traces of biographical information of its former wearer. Therefore, Norris understands the re-cycling of clothing as a 'socially transformative practice' that cuts and stitches relationships in a creative manner (Norris 2010). It seems clear that distance between the person who cast off old clothes and the one who buys them

becomes crucial for the process of re-commodification of used garments and therefore 'the broker' is again the key character in the process of the making of second-hand clothes into a profitable commodity. It is to this process of (re)production that I now turn.

3.5 Producing *asamsé*: the work of turning rags into riches

Despite the general ignorance about the path in which second-hand clothing goes through after it is disposed in specialised containers or given away in 'door-to-door' collection, a burgeoning literature has dealt with different aspects of the global commodity chain of discarded clothing, to which this ethnography may modestly contribute. Economists have explored the advantages and disadvantages of re-claimed clothing in terms of its revenues and environmental efficiency. The first wave of criticism had shed light upon the consequences of the importation of second hand clothes in impoverished countries where weakened textile industries could not compete with the low prices of the second-hand imports (see eg. Hansen 2004b and the response of Norrrys 2004; Velia et al. 2006; Fodoup 2005). These negative effects for the local industries drive governments to regulate the entrance of re-claimed clothes and even its prohibitions as in the case of Nigeria (Abimbola 2011, Forrest 1993: 171). The counter-critique of the economic effects of second-hand has highlighted the advantages of a business that deals with disposable goods and turns them into a profitable commodity, allowing a class of small entrepreneurs to participate in profit-making (eg Rivoli 2009).

Jana M. Hawley (2006) explored the economic and ecological advantages of the used garments industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Recycling garments is an interesting way to avoid pitfalls costs and it has become a sustainable and profitable business that requires specific market knowledge which empowers brokers, intermediaries between the sorting industry that classifies the different types of items and the final destination market. The process of sorting is crucial for the transformation of disposed or gifted items into new commodities. The last ones being of three categories: a) stained or damaged fabrics are categorised as 'rags' and exported mainly to Asian (mostly India and Pakistan) destinations where rags are turned into wipes for industrial usages, are used to or are unwoven to recycle their threads; b) a small amount of highly valued garments that are sold in vintage shops; c) wearable garments that, even though they can have a small defect or damaged, can

be used again and are then exported to Africa and Asia. This last category is the one that fills the *asamsé* bales that arrive to Equatorial Guinea.

Hawley's conceptual framework focuses on the 'rag sorting industry' as the crucial process towards which discarded items are turned into commodities of diverse value. The process of unpicking different categories of clothes requires very little mechanisation and relatively small investment. Most of the sorting warehouses are start-ups run by small entrepreneurs, as it is perceived as a low-cost business and easily accessible form of entrepreneurship (Hawley 2006: 4). In September 2015 I had the opportunity to interview one of these entrepreneurs, the owner of a sorting warehouse in an industrial estate on the outskirts of London (British Used Clothing, Ltd.). Giordano highlighted the high profit he managed but also how dependant on his network of small clients he was. Having the right global network was one of the bases of the success of the business, as these are the only key to open the door to the international market for used clothing. BUC Ltd exports second-hand clothing rags and remnants to Pakistan but the bulk of its exports are wearable second-hand clothes for the African market. In regards to his African clients Giordano stated,

'the business has to take into account the conditions in which these African traders develop their activities. They come from countries with unstable economies with periods of hyperinflation and for issues that are not under the control of the traders sometimes they become defaulting clients. There are some companies which work with only one client, whom send a worker or a family member to the sorting plant to control the grading process. This has a very high risk, as if this client has a problem, the company sinks. In BUC we have our own system. We have thirty clients, they come from different countries but most of them are Nigerians. We have, as well, our own system of payments. The client has to pay a part of the consignment before it is sent' Giordano in London, September 2015

In BUC Ltd the sorting process does not start until the order is placed and the first payment is effective. The biggest investment that the sorting company does is the labour required in the 'grading' and therefore the final price of the merchandise depends on the accuracy of this selection. In this process the bags and bundles of discarded clothes both from charity door-to-door collection and from the collection banks are opened and its items are spread on a sorting deck. Employees separate the different categories of goods for which there is a certain division of labour. Newer employees make the first crude sorts such as picking heavy winter clothes, separating

trousers, blouses or dresses. The older employees classify the garments in different quality or fibre ranges and finally there is specialised personnel that sorts 'diamonds' – using Hawley's expression – or vintage clothes for which the ways they have been worn and used provide them with very high added value. In BUC the grading is relatively simple. There are three grades - A,B,C. Grade C, or 'Pakistan' category, consists of all the highly damaged clothes that cannot be re-used. Grade B is made up of summer clothes that have small damage but can be mended, cleaned and re-worn. Finally, grade A consists of clothes that are in good condition to be worn. The majority of the customers tend to order 'Africa mix', which consists in a mixture of items of grade A and grade B.

The price of the bales is set according to the grade independently of the type of garment. The number of bales of each type of garments is different depending on the number of garments of these particular types arrives in the consignment of unsorted clothing that arrives straight from the collection. As we will see, the variable prices for the different type of bales will be fixed by the local markets once the goods arrive to the African continent. Giordano also recounts how his clients have accounted for another process of grading which takes place and the prices of the items are priced and classified again once they get to the African destination. In these cases the clientèle of the wholesaler is the one who unpicks the different items. Wholesalers open their doors to retailers and they fix different prices according to the order they enter to pick their merchandise. The first customers to arrive pay the price of 'first camara second-hand clothing', the ones that follow 'second camara' and so on. Obviously the first customers 'to pick' are the ones that pay a higher price per kilogram, so they are likely to take the most interesting items and the ones they will be able to sell quicker and at a higher price⁹³.

In Equatorial Guinea the system of 'camaras' does not take place in the confines of the whole sellers, where the bales are sold closed. Once the bales' straps are cut and the clothes spread, the items are sold individually and so the price is set for each piece. The price, then has to do with a number of contingencies relating to the tastes of the customers and the market knowledge of the sellers, the number of fashionable and saleable items that come out of a particular bundle or the availability of

⁹³ This system that Giordano explained has been described for the Kenyan context (Fields 2004), South Africa and Moçambic (Valia et al 2006:30-31), Cameroon (Fodoup 2005: 32), Zambia (Tranberg-Hansen 2004: 169-170) and Nigeria (Abimbola 2011: 169).

merchandise. However, as I will expand upon later on with more detail, some Guinean retailers attend the opening of the sacs in Douala and make their own 'first camara' selection after which they iron and hang orderly the clothes which they sell at a higher price.

The importing system also differs from those described in other academic accounts of the second-hand clothing commodity chain for other African contexts. For instance, Fodoup describes for Cameroon at least five categories of vendors. A small group of wholesalers (grossistes) provides bales to medium-wholesellers (demi-grossistes), who, in turn, sell bales to big-retailers (grand détaillants) who transport the bale to their big townships. Big retailers sell bales to medium retailers (détaillants moyens), who are normally settled in the main marketplaces and that provide merchandise to the last group of retailers (petit détaillants), those who hold a small stall or a boutique in the high-street, and the most numerous (Fodoup 2005: 81-82). I could not document this same number of intermediaries for Equatorial Guinea. Guinean petit détaillant, which are market-vendors or just anybody willing to distribute the content of a bale amongst their family and neighbours, acquire the bales from the wholeseller: the importers themselves. As I will develop below, my observations made clear a relationship between warehouse owner and market vendor which is close and tight and no more requires intermediaries.

To conclude this section, discarded clothes that are not in use and that otherwise would be disposed in rubbish bins are turned into a commodities by means of both work which it is directly and neatly remunerated labour - such as the one in the sorting warehouses -and the work of the retailers and final customers that pass the second-hand clothes through their own sieve. To turn rags to a new commodity it is necessary to separate it from former wearers. However, in the production of value, the creation of new social biographies is relevant. The perception of which origins have more wealthy and experienced fashion consumers becomes relevant at the moment of deciding which bale is going to be more salable. Once again, historical global connections turn out to be meaningful for the process of value creation of these commodities.

3.6 Domesticating a global commodity and participating in regional dynamics

'In this Republic, *asamsé* is an institution and it brings joy to the population in the capital of Equatorial Guinea. When the rich people of the of the 'Zero World' realised that the people of this Third World would end up naked if they did not offer help in hand, they took off their trousers, their skirts, their socks and underwear. They put all this in sacs, they closed those with clams and gave them to businessmen [...]. In *asamsé* everything is sold. In this place we feel grateful to not to have adopted the bad costume of walking too fast. Could you imagine how little one could see or buy if the people here were walking fast as the ones up there? [in Europe]' (Ávila 1994: 15)⁹⁴

This is an extract of the short novel *Rusia se va a Asamsé* by Juan Tomás Ávila-Laurel. The Guinean author wrote this novel in the beginning of the 1990's when the presence of *asamsé* in the Guinean market had been consolidated and before the arrival of the first revenues of the oil extraction were visible. The eruption of *asamsé* took place in the mid 1980's. When the shortage of all types of goods had been ravaging the population for more than a decade, the arrival of second-hand clothes made it possible to consume better quality garments than 'la ropa de estado' (Eng. 'clothes of the State'). At the same time, it provided to a section of the female population a source of livelihood or, at least, way to manage the household finances in a more effective and independent manner.

For Equatorial Guinea, the years of Structural Adjustment were years of expectations and illusions of development. As opposed to what was happening in neighbouring nations, the intervention of the foreign aid agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions in the eighties facilitated the influx of resources that contrasted with the economic débâcle of the Macismo. The conditioned aid assisted the consolidation of the new regime: even though it was constrained by the policy

⁹⁴ Sp. '*asamsé* es toda una institución en esta república y se lleva la alegría de la mitad de la capital de Guinea Ecuatorial. Cuando los ricos del mundo cero se dieron cuenta de que los de este tercer mundo acabarían desnudos si no se les echaba una mano, o dos, se despojaron de sus pantalones, de sus faldas, de sus calcetines y de sus bragas, lo metieron en sacos, lo cerraron con anillos de hierro y lo depositaron en manos de negociantes [...]. En *asamsé* se vende de todo y en este lugar se agradece que los guineanos no hayamos adoptado todavía la mala costumbre de andar deprisa ¿se imaginan lo poco que se podría ver y comprar si los que van allí tuvieran los pasos endiablados de los de arriba?' (Ávila-Laurel 1994: 15)

demands of foreign actors, the injection of resources contributed to its maintenance and legitimacy. This conjunction has been widely described in the literature about post-colonial African States. Whereas, once in power, African States had difficulties to 'keep the gate' (eg. Cooper 2002: 159), Structural Adjustment 'enabled the authorities to shed uncomfortable burdens, enabled quick money to be made by politicians (for example by cashing in on cut-price privatisations)' (Nugent 2004: 334). Apart from the political consequences of the aid, the material legacy of this period cannot be ignored. Although the economic situation of Equatorial Guinea during the decades of the 1980's and most of the 1990's remained catastrophic⁹⁵, my collaborators all note and appreciate important changes in the availability of products and small improvements of certain modes of infrastructure. The perceived improvements of the first two decades of Obiang's regime were, indeed, the result of the opening of the borders to new imports and the proliferation of poorly planned infrastructure built upon foreign funding which was now more readily available (Abaga 1997: 93).

In this context, *asamsé* was perceived as an opportunity and a forward-step towards accessing valuable consuming goods. Actually, as I will explore later on, it is still perceived as a step forward. For some traders, *asamsé* offers the first introduction to the selling business from which they then hope to move into trading first-hand goods which offer higher profit and the possibility to travel abroad . For consumers, *asamsé* represents the opportunity of purchasing better quality garments at affordable prices. The arrival of the oil boom, the abandonment of the aid programmes, and the influx of the extraction revenues have not proportionally changed the consumption capacity of most of the population. Although the changes fuelled by the extractive economy resulted in the improvement of roads and the proliferation of 'white elephants' (see Appel 2012a), the expected 'development' never arrived and 'Equatorial Guinea has not moved forward from *asamsé*' (Lucrecia in SEMU, December 2012). There is a consensus amongst the *asamsé* traders and consumers that I interviewed, that in the 1980's and the 1990's *asamsé* was an effective and positive solution for clothing consumption: 'its prices were affordable and there was some profit to be made out of selling it'.

⁹⁵ See for instance Liniger-Goumaz description of the political-economic situation of the country, considered the eighth poorest country in Africa in 1988 (1988: 169).

Returning to the quote from Ávila-Laurel's novel, the use of irony by the Guinean writer points towards the power relationships embedded in the *asamsé's* system of provision. Although in Equatorial Guinea *asamsé* is a perfectly acceptable commodity that everybody consumes, there is also an awareness of the position of the African market in uneven global economic relationships. *Asamsé* is part of the global commodity chain of the re-claimed garment industry and this is something that the Guinean traders and consumers are well aware of. The details of how discarded clothes from the Global North arrive into the hands of African consumers are not necessarily known to most of the consumers, however most of my interviewees are knowledgeable of part of the journey that second-hand clothes make before arriving with them. Most of the bales consumed in Malabo, for instance, are brought by Nigerian Igbo wholesalers. These wholesalers buy the second-hand clothing bales mainly in England, a country which has become a sort of a trade mark or guarantor of a certain quality in the exchange of garments. The fact that Guineans know perfectly that the clothes in the bales are, basically, discarded garments from the Global North is only surprising to me when most of my European acquaintances with whom I have shared my research with are not aware of how this global business of second-hand clothes trade takes place. Even though in the last decade the production of journalistic reports, documentaries, and general public publications have been produced⁹⁶ most of the European consumers that give away their clothes to charitable organisations do not know where their cast-off clothes end up, and that an extremely profitable industry is fed with their disposed garments.

The evidence of the importation of second-hand clothing items for African trade goes back to the nineteenth century. For Zambia, Karen Tranberg-Hansen has collected historical data that demonstrates that the second-hand clothing trade had existed for decades before she carried out her fieldwork in the early 1990's. Used clothing was the main source of garments in the area in the decades of the 1930's to 1950's and it grew particularly rapidly during World War II (Hansen 2004: 17, 60). Hansen also describes how the second-hand clothing provisioning was embedded in a regional system of local entrepreneurs juggling across colonial states' borders and rules, and grew in parallel to the monetisation and proletarianisation of the Copperbelt (ibid.). Second-hand clothing trade has involved the creation of transnational

⁹⁶ See eg. The two antagonistic analysis about the pros and cons of the second hand clothing global business by Rivoli (2007) and by Brooks (2015).

networks, and it has generated regional dynamics beyond colonial and post-colonial states. As I will expose in the following paragraphs, the Equatorial Guinean case is not an exception within this, as the arrival and circulation of second-hand clothing bales is embedded in regional connections that are historically rooted.

My collaborators in Guinean marketplaces have particular ideas of the historicity of *asamsé* and the second-hand clothing trade in Equatorial Guinea. Oro, the president of the Association of *Asamsé* and *Elegancia* sellers in Bata explained in an interview held in December 2012 that the first *asamsé* in arriving to Bata in bales and for re-sale did it in 1986. Nati, her counterpart in Malabo affirmed to me in many occasions that *asamsé* started to be imported in bales through the port of Malabo in 1984. Despite this, I had the opportunity to talk with different actors involved in the logistics and customs of the port of Malabo, I could not document the exact first arrival of *asamsé* bales in the ports of Malabo and Bata partly because I could not get access to the archive of the customs office. The date that was more often given by my interviewees oscillates between 1984 and 1986, so even though I have not been able to contrast the oral data from my informants with other sources, it is clear that what Guineans identify as *asamsé* is the commodity that arrives in bales and corresponds to the value chain I have previously described, and not just to any second-hand clothes trade. Second-hand clothes consumption in Equatorial Guinea is as old as the Atlantic trade. Nineteenth century European traders, apart from importing cloth to be sown into different designs, they imported second-hand garments from the already burgeoning second-hand clothing metropolitan markets⁹⁷.

Despite that, the import of first-hand items did increase in the twentieth century and, as my collaborators have noted, most of the clothing used during the late colonial period was tailor-made in the various workshops (private or church-owned or sewn in the domestic domain) and second-hand garments never stopped circulating. The path and origin of this second-hand clothing trade was diverse. One of my interlocutors recalled how some Nigerian workers from the cocoa plantations in Bioko would take the boat to Bata at the end of their working contract. They would exchange foodstuffs from their small plantations or their assigned salted fish and rice for all sorts of goods, clothing amongst them, and they would go over the continental

⁹⁷ For references to the consumption of second-hand clothing items in the trade and colonial literature see chapter 1.

region selling goods and accumulating cash to complement their salaries on the way back to Nigeria⁹⁸. In the twentieth century Santa Isabel (Malabo) and Fernando Poo (Bioko) in general, were wealthier and more cosmopolitan, therefore clothing trends would travel from the island to the continent. Items from Bioko were highly valued not only in Rio Muni but also amongst the Nigerian coastal peoples and the Douala with which there was a fluid connection. Hausa traders from Cameroon would also visit the small villages along the main roads of the Rio Muni selling used garments that they had acquired in Cameroon⁹⁹.

After the Second World War, when the global network of second-hand clothes started to become consolidated (Hansen 2004, Brooks 2015), the Spanish colonial authorities tried to hinder the massive importation of used clothing. In one of my interviews with Papá Elias Abaga (1936-2012) who became one of the first and more prominent Fang businessman of Ebibeyín, described how in the mid-fifties the colonial authorities had banned the importation of second-hand clothing bales. Elias Abaga worked for the Spanish trader Enrique Gurierrez-Candeli, who owned trading factorias where he would exchange palm kernels, coffee and cocoa, for shoes and cloth. Elias Abaga explains that Gutierrez went to Tanger to buy bundles of used clothing which he would sell in the small trading posts. These second-hand clothing bales probably came from Britain, as Tanger was a usual destination or entrepôt for this type of clothing.

The other Spanish sellers of the Ebibeyín area reported Candeli to the general governor because the Spanish produced textiles where not selling. According to Abagas' memory in December 2011, in 1957 the Spanish Governor gave Candeli three months to sell all the *asamsé* he had brought from Tanger. The Spanish trader could not sell all the merchandise in the given time and, being without a business and not being able to invest in new legal goods for his trading posts, he sold all the terrains and trading posts. He sold the *factorias* of Bata, Mongomo and Ebibeyín to another Spanish entrepreneur who managed to remain in the country until 2012, surviving the dictatorship of Francisco Macías. This last one though, Román, took a long time to arrive in the country and Elias Abaga was left in charge of the factorias. The last remnants of Candeli's commodities were given to Abaga as a gift in gratitude for the

⁹⁸ Interview to Agustín Ndong, December 2012

⁹⁹ Ibid.

services that he had provided. Being unable to sell the second-hand clothes within the Spanish Colonial State, Elias Abaga sold them in Cameroon. With the revenues of this first *asamsé*, Abaga accumulated the capital to start his own business which would lead him to become a prominent Fang trader of the area¹⁰⁰.

Despite the closeness and the proclaimed autarky of the Macias dictatorship (1968-1979), second-hand clothes continued to seep into the tiny and weakened Guinean market. Hausa traders from Akombang would walk through hidden trails across the continental forest to sell the clothes that they could carry on their shoulders. Those who still had foreign currency could purchase used garments that were of very poor quality due to the extremely low consumption standards of the population at that time. The Guinean population was so eager to consume what was coming from the other side of the border that they were willing to make an enormous effort to spend their last available cash on dusty and damaged garments¹⁰¹.

Akombang marketplace on the Ebibeyín border has been the most important route of entrance of first and second-hand garments. Guinean traders and consumers cross the border in Ebibeyín to buy in le marché de la Friperie (the term that Cameroonians use to refer to the *asamsé* market) (see Fodoup 2005). In Akombang there are a number of wholesalers' warehouses where 45 kilogram bales can be purchased. In the early eighties, this Ebibeyín path was the most common route for the few traders in the Guinean cities to get some bulk merchandise. They would open the bales in their neighbourhoods or homes and they would sell most of the garments before taking the rest to the marketplace. The road from Bata to Ebibeyín was the second road to be improved with the investment of the first oil revenues. However, whereas the section Niefang-Nkué-Mongomo was already paved and improved in 2004, the Bata-Niefang-Nkué-Ebibeyín would not be finished until 2007. The improvement of the road made the connection between Bata and Ebibeyín ostensibly tighter as one could travel between the two cities in no more than four hours instead

¹⁰⁰ Always monitored by the colonial authorities, the latter obligated him to work for another Spanish company – Blasco, a family owned trading firm that had trading posts in the main towns of Equatorial Guinea and that acted as a bank in those areas where there was no other banking system. The relationship between Elias Abaga, who also owned the hotel and the restaurant where white colons and administrators liked to stay and rest in Ebibeyín town, and the colonial authorities became problematic after the independence in 1968. In 1970, when the repression of Macias Nguema regime started to achieve extreme violence, Elias left the country with his family. He only went back to Ebibeyín after Obiang's coup.

¹⁰¹ Various interviews held in Bata and Ebibeyín in November 2011 and November 2012.

of the full day that was previously needed. When I first arrived in Equatorial Guinea in 2007, I still could find many female market traders in Bata that would buy their bales via the Ebibeyín's border.

In February 2011 I had the opportunity to accompany one of the Malabo traders all the way from the capital to Ebibeyín and, from there, to the Akombang market. The trip back and forth took a little bit more than forty-eight hours and the cost of all the displacement of the trader and the merchandise did not exceed 70.000FCFA – 165 EUR approximately, including the several payments in the customs' offices and the established tax of 2.000 FCFA – 4 EUR, for crossing the border to the market. Although the investment for the journey was relatively high, it was still worth taking the Buque Nacional Djibolho from Malabo to Bata, which takes between eight and ten hours, and to then take the small vans that cover the distance of 200 kilometres between the crossroad of Bi-kuí in Bata and Ebibeyín.

This Ebibeyín trail is still the one that most of the fruit and vegetables sellers of both Malabo and Bata marketplaces use to bring their commodities, and it is often used by Guinean consumers to purchase cheaper goods for special occasions or small *negocios* (Eng. Business, see chapter 5). However, it is no longer the favoured route for the *asamsé* traders. Since the improvements of the port infrastructures in Bata and in Malabo, and the arrival of container ships, in both cities the number of warehouses of *asamsé* wholesalers has increased considerably. In 2012 I could identify a dozen of them in each of the two cities. Therefore, the bales are much more easily accessible and the transport needed to bring the merchandise to the marketplace has been reduced. The amount of available *asamsé* in the urban space has also increased, it now being the commodity that occupies the biggest portion of the market space. Stalls of second-hand clothes can also be found in neighbourhoods, in improvised piles in front of houses and alongside walls and sides of busy roads. The *asamsé* urban market-place also gets dis-localised towards rural areas when there is a remnant that is not sold in the urban market, when infrastructure allows easy reach or, simply, when one goes to visit family in the village and has a little bit of cash to invest in a bale.

Whereas the *asamsé* retailers are mainly Fang female traders, the *asamsé* whole-sellers are mostly foreign and male. All my interviewees agreed that it was a Nigerian Igbo trader, I will call him Big Pedro, who had started to import bales of *asamsé* and his warehouse was in Malabo. It was a worker of the Djibolho ship who

first started to purchase bales from Big Pedro and brought them to Bata in 1986, when the first women, family members of the Djibolho worker, started to sell¹⁰². As I will unfold in the following section, Big Pedro is the trader with the best reputation in Malabo and he has been leading the cluster of second-hand clothing wholesalers for three decades. He possesses the most experience in this activity and the widest network of loyal customers. According to Oro, in 1989 Big Pedro sent 'his sons' to Bata to open warehouses there. After this first initiative, other businessmen opened their second-hand clothes businesses. A Lebanese trader who had been commercializing other commodities also tried to start-up an *asamsé* warehouse. Nevertheless, he was soon ousted by other traders from Nigeria, Mali and Cameroon.

In Bata, I could also visit three warehouses owned by women, which were the only bulk female traders that I could reach between the period 2009-2012. One was run by a Cameroonian trader that moved her business from Akombarang to Bata, whereas the other two were owned by Equatorial Guineans who had been living in Spain and had returned in 2009 and 2010. Both imported clothes from the same Spanish sorting firm settled in Alicante province and which, in spite of the economic crisis that has hit the area since 2008, has seen its business increase during the last decade¹⁰³. The bales of second-hand clothes that come from Spain, however, are less appreciated than the ones that are brought over from the United Kingdom or Belgium by Nigerians or other West African traders. A wholesaler installed in the Comandachina neighbourhood in Bata, who had shipped her second container of second-hand clothing from Alicante in 2011, told me that the *asamsé* of Spain was not of high-enough quality and that she had plans to travel to London to try and find better merchandise. When I went back to Bata in November 2012, she was still importing bales from Alicante because she did not have the opportunity to build up the required network in the UK but, nevertheless she had diversified her business by importing first-hand commodities as well.

In Malabo, most of the warehouse owners are Igbo traders who have a patron-client relationship with Big Pedro. There is also a Lebanese trading firm - the same

¹⁰² Interview to Oro, president of the association of *asamsé* retailers in Bata, and Josefa, senior trader in Bi-kuí market, November-December 2012.

¹⁰³ See, for instance the article of the Spanish mainstream newspaper El País http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/06/11/actualidad/1370984471_835501.html [consulted December 2015]

that unsuccessfully opened an *asamsé* warehouse in Bata – which ships second-hand clothing bales to Malabo. This trading firm does not only sell second-hand clothing, also importing foodstuffs and construction materials. The company imports bales at the moments that there is scarcity in the Igbo warehouses. These moments of scarcity have multiple causes but the most frequent I could observe was the blockage of the merchandise by the port authorities. I will try and explain this in the following section.

The arrival of second-hand clothes in the hands of an Igbo trader is not fortuitous, nor casual. Igbo people have been building up a global trading network that connects up people and goods and that is part of what have been widely labelled, the African 'real' economies (eg MacGaffey 1991; Hansen & Vaa 2004; Meagher 2010). I have described how *asamsé* trade is an epiphenomenon of global processes embedded in the second-hand provisioning system. In the following section I will try to shed light to another scalar level of the system in order to discover the regional logics and logistics of the second-hand clothing trade in West Africa.

3.7 Regional entanglements: the Igbo network

The history of second-hand clothing market in Equatorial Guinea is closely tied to the history of this same business in Nigeria, a fact that should not be surprising when one looks closely into the historical relationships between Equatorial Guinea and the Nigerian coast. The infrastructure, transportation routes and their transformation shows how the direction of the goods exchanged between these two countries has been shifting throughout the decades. The traffic of cayucos (small boats) between Bioko and the both Nigerian and Cameroonian coast has been extremely fluid since the beginnings of the Atlantic trade (see Martino 2015). The transshipment of commodities and people which circulated along the Bight of Biafra has grown in parallel to the economic dynamism of the area. Notwithstanding the periods of turmoil and autarchy of the Macias period, cayucos have never ceased circulating. It is important to notice, however, that in the last decade the improvement of other transport connections (ports, roads and regular flights to neighbouring countries) together with the government aims to fully control the maritime access and commodity circulation, has resulted in a considerable drop of the cayuco sails between Bioko and the Cameroonian and Nigerian coast.

As I have described through the testimony of my informants, the arrival of the second-hand clothing trade in Malabo would have coincided with the ban of the import in Nigeria. In 1985 the then Nigerian president Babangida declared a National Economic Emergency which included a number of measures, amongst which was a ban of the imports of certain merchandise (Forrest 1993: 211-212), including Second-Hand Clothing. The general context of these measures were the negative effects that the market liberalisation of the Structural Adjustment had had for the local productive industry. Whereas some of the banned imports would be legalised by the second half of the 1990's, second-hand clothing remains as one of the 'absolutely prohibited importation goods'.¹⁰⁴ Babangida's example was followed by Paul Biya in Cameroon, who decided to ban the second-hand clothing in Cameroon in 1988. However, the Cameroonian context took a different direction and *la friperie* was re-authorised in 1992, and has not been prohibited since.

Tom Forrest recounts how Igbo people had been trading with second-hand clothes since after World War II, buying army surplus clothing and selling it in the surroundings of Port Harcourt (Forrest 1994: 178). According to Forrest and Olumide Abimbola interviewees the first supply for these earlier traders were Jewish brokers from New York. In the 1960, the increase of the demand for second-hand clothes, Igbo people diversified their trading routes and they transported their merchandise throughout Lagos and to Togo, Ghana and Benin (Abimbola 2011: 51). The outbreak of the Biafran War (1967-1970) pushed trade outside of the Nigerian borders as commodities could not be imported through Lagos or Port Harcourt. Subsequently, those apprentices and full Igbo traders operating in Togo, Ghana and Benin started to find new partners and sources for their activities. The ones who had already settled abroad remained in their headquarters after the war, motivated to remain in stasis by multiple prohibition attempts and the final ban of the 1980's.

After the prohibition of 1985, Malabo would most likely have been used as a smuggling entrepôt. In my interviews with Big Pedro and his clients I have not been able to explicitly confirm this information. Igbo traders never talked to me about their smuggling activities, whereas, for my Guinean informants, their participation was obvious. One of the Igbo traders I interviewed in Malabo told me: 'I can tell you about

¹⁰⁴For a list of the other importation bans see the website of the Nigeria Customs Service https://www.customs.gov.ng/ProhibitionList/import_2.php [accessed January 2016]

where I buy the bales, for how much I sell them, who are my clients but there are things I cannot explain. Those things are the secret of the business' ¹⁰⁵. I did not explore further about 'the secret of the business', but the vendors of the main marketplaces in Malabo and Bata repeatedly stated that Igbo traders were smuggling *asamsé* bales to Nigeria from the port of Malabo: 'they take half of the merchandise from the container and, in the same port, they put them into cayucos and the send them to Nigeria'¹⁰⁶ . In spite of these long-standing connections, the fluidity of cayucos between the island and the mainland almost completely ceased following the attempted assault of the presidential palace in Malabo in 2009. According to the official version, a group of Nigerian mercenaries docked with their boats in the port of Malabo the night of the 17th of February, with the intention of an assault on the presidential palace¹⁰⁷. A similar assault had taken place in Bata one year before. That time it was a group of Nigerian mercenaries in a small boat. Their target was the banks that were meant to pay the state workers their monthly allowance. They attacked the banks, took the money and left before the security forces of the Guinean State could prevent it. The rumours and the official version of the attacks blamed Nigerian nationals which resulted in a series of attacks on foreign entrepreneurs and their businesses. Nigerian migrants took shelter in the Nigerian consulate in Bata for weeks, lacking food and drinking water and in miserable conditions.

The two events generated significant diplomatic tensions between the two countries and they served as a pretext for the deployment of a series of security measures that implied major control of the traffic of small boats between Bioko and the mainland. Even though the decline of the smuggling traffic cannot be traced statistically and it is also very difficult to evaluate and research, it was present in the comments of Equatorial Guineans the following months. There was scarcity of fresh fish, as fishermen could not navigate as they used to. People started to complain that there was no cheap way to travel to Douala from Malabo, due to the ban of the small cayucos that used to cover the route for a fraction of what an air-plane ticket used to cost.

¹⁰⁵ Interview to a warehouse owner in Malabo city centre. March 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Sp. 'Sacan la mercancía de los contenedores y, en el mismo puerto de Malabo, cargan los cayucos que van a Nigeria' Seller in Bata, February 2011.

¹⁰⁷ See the official account in the official website of the Government: <http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=467> [accessed January 2016]

The warehouses of the Igbo traders, though, remained full of merchandise and none of traders stopped their activity. They were highly monitored and they had to cope with the abuse of the minor authorities and the port officers that would make their activities more difficult. Sometimes the containers of merchandise would arrive to the port and they had to wait for weeks until they could unload their commodities. This would create tensions with the market vendors that were expecting their merchandise to reload their stalls.

The statistics of the UN Comtrade Database appear to indicate a significant decrease in the importation of UK second-hand clothing right after 2009. Even though, during my fieldwork, I experienced several moments of scarcity in the warehouses due to merchandise being held up in the port, I did not experience any decrease or withdrawal of any of the Igbo traders I had gotten to know. My sense is that there was a stabilisation of the number of traders and that they had been able to diversify their activities. The explanation for the decrease in the statistics and the lack of perception of a real drop of *asamsé* presence in the Guinean markets can only be a matter of 'the secret of the business'.

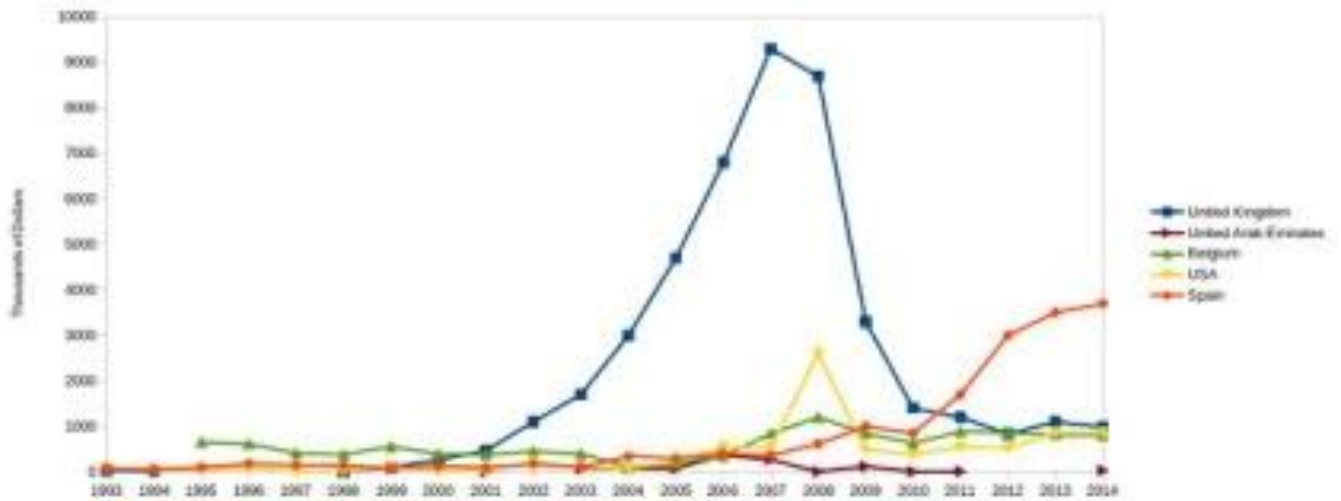


Figure 24 Imports of second-hand clothing. Chart elaborated from the data of the UN Comtrade Database

3.8 Geographies, values and prices

In February 2011 SEMU marketplace in Malabo went through one of its cyclical crises. January is especially hard for ordinary Guineans. They spend an enormous amount of money over the Christmas period and, during January, the rate of consumption is drastically reduced. The holiday period holds up the activity of the state and civil servants, meaning this that the payments to low status state workers such as teachers, nurses, clerks and even doctors, are also on the hold for weeks after the period of Christmas holidays. The sellers of *elegancia*, therefore, tend to travel in January to get their clothes. It is the perfect moment for a trip because they have accumulated cash over Christmas, the shops in Spain start to sell the Spring-Summer collection, the flights are slightly cheaper and they know they will not make a lot of money by standing next to the stock during January. For *asamsé* traders January is 'a month without bales'. Most of my interlocutors start buying the new bales in February. February is then, one of the months (together with June and December) when more of the sellers simultaneously resort to their wholesaler and the market recovers its familiar lively pace. However, in February 2011 this did not happen and the stalls of the SEMU marketplace were almost empty. Only a few dusty garments were lying on the floor under the banners of 100 or 500 FCFA, the lower prices for textile goods.

It was two years after the attempted assault to the Presidential Palace in Malabo of the 17th of February of 2009. Since then, the situation of the Igbo entrepreneurs had changed. The traffic of *cayucos* both between Malabo and the mainland (Douala and Calabar) had ostensibly diminished. A presidential decree had prohibited part of the traffic as a 'security measure', due to the fact that the presumed mercenaries had arrived in a watercraft of the same type of the ones that were used to cover the routes. The final sentence against the arrested in the day of the assault was given by the judge more than a year after, in April 2010¹⁰⁸. The Guinean nationals that had been arrested

¹⁰⁸ See the official website of the government

were absolved whereas the Nigerians were all condemned and considered responsible for the assault. After the trial, a wave of violence against Nigerian nationals residing in Malabo occurred once again. It was not of the same virulence of the one that took place after the attacks but the cyclic hostility and the repression practiced by the police and the army against Nigerians -and other foreigners- never fully ceased.

The Igbo *asamsé* traders had problems in taking their merchandise from the port at this time and their situation was critical. All the clients of Big Pedro had seen how their merchandise was retained in the port of Malabo without an obvious reason. The warehouses had been emptied out during the high season of November and December and some of them did not have a single bale to sell to retailers (see figure XX). None of the market sellers I could interview knew precisely what was the problem but they were angry and frustrated: 'they tell us that the boat is in the port but they don't allow them to take what is theirs and ours, it's a real shame and this is damaging us¹⁰⁹'. There was a hunch amongst *asamsé* retailers that the withholding of the merchandise of the Igbo traders had been arbitrary and was just another indication of the increasing hostility towards Nigerian nationals.

However, not everybody's business was harmed by the withholding of commodities. The owner of a big Lebanese company took the opportunity to sell his own *asamsé* bales. My collaborators repeatedly stated that the Lebanese firm did not have permanent clients. According to them the owner of the company was a friend of the President and an opportunist, who only would pop into the *asamsé* wholesaling when the Nigerian traders had difficulties in importing their commodities¹¹⁰. After weeks of scarcity the sellers did not have any other alternative than to wait for the Lebanese firm to open its warehouse doors in the heart of Malabo. The news that the company had unloaded their commodities from their boat was on everybody's lips and the retailers started to queue in front of the warehouse.

About a hundred women ran into the warehouse once the doors were finally opened one morning. They ran to find the bestselling bales, namely the ones containing jeans or t-shirts. When it was time to pay for the bales, however, conflict

<http://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=471> [accessed January, 2016]

¹⁰⁹ Sp. 'nos dicen que el barco ya ha llegado pero no les dejan coger su mercancía, que también es nuestra mercancía. Ésto es una vergüenza y nos perjudica también a nosotras' Rebeca, Malabo 2011

¹¹⁰ Statements repeated during the fieldwork stay of February-March 2011.

began. The market women were expecting to pay a cheaper price than what they usually paid for the bales that they bought from the Igbo traders but they found that the company had pushed the prices up to the same as their usual providers. Some of the women reluctantly agreed to pay the sum they were asked, whereas most of them started a long argument with the warehouse manager that ended up with the intervention of the police who dispersed the women that did not want to pay the asking price.

The occurrence was a topic of conversation at the market stalls the following days. Maria del Carmen, one of the sellers who had acquired a bale regardless of the increase of the price and who did not want engage with the confrontation with the wholesalers said:

'the clothes that Lebanese bring are not good. Sometimes they bring them from Belgium or Morocco, but sometimes they bring them from Dubai. They don't care about what is inside of the sacs [...] sometimes they bring Muslim clothes. What am I supposed to do with Muslim clothes? Who is going to wear them over here? People want London clothes from the Nigerian guys [...] Nigerian guys are good Christians, they are honest. They can lend you merchandise or if a bale is not good enough they can change it for another one' Mari Carmen, SEMU February 2011. ¹¹¹

The relationship between the market retailers and the Igbo traders is tight and based on long-standing clientelistic negotiations. Buying a bale from a Nigerian trader, therefore, becomes a guarantee of a certain degree of quality. However, what has become the most important trademark for the assessment of the quality of the bales is its origin, the place where second-hand clothes are sorted and packed before they are shipped to Guinea. The most valued, and also the most expensive bales, are the ones under the London label. The bales imported from UK usually have a distinct mark or indication that can be a flag or a label with the word London, even though most of the sorting warehouses in the UK are not in the London metropolitan area but in the Midlands, London is still used as a trademark and as a guarantee for a certain standard of quality. Igbo wholesalers and brokers make specific demands

¹¹¹ Sp. 'las ropas que traen los libaneses no son buenas. Algunas veces las traen en [de] Belgica o Marruecos, pero algunas otras veces las traen en [de] Dubai. A ellos no les importa lo que hay dentro de los sacos [...] algunas veces traen ropas de musulmanes ¿Qué hago yo con ropas de musulmanas? ¿Quen las usa aquí? Las gentes quieren las ropas London de los nigerianos [...] los nigerianos sí son buenos cristianos. Ellos pueden fiarte. Incluso cambiar un saco. Si el saco no está bien te dan otro' Mari Carmen, SEMU February 2011.

upon the sorting companies to mark their clothes with a label that serves as evidence of their origin. The UK companies working for the African market have developed a wide knowledge about the functioning of the market and, obviously, have developed marketing strategies, which include the choosing of intermediaries, introducing new categories of sorting, and sticking the Union Jack flag or the 'London' label prominently on the bales.

If the most valued origin for second-hand clothes is London, the second favourite trademark is the US and, in joint third place, one can find Brussels and Spain. This preference also has to do with how the goods are sorted and packed: the most appreciated are the ones which are more accurately sorted. Most of the bales from Brussels and Spain are of second class quality and labelled as 'rummage', which means that the clothes have not been sorted in great detail. Summer clothes are mixed in the bales. The price of the bale increases according to the accuracy of the sorting. For instance, a bale of mixed female tops is more affordable than a bale of white female short-sleeves blouses. It is obvious that the more work is invested in the sorting, the more expensive the latter is for the wholesaler but, whereas the wholesaler buys the bales at a price per kilogram, the contents are sold in the marketplace by piece. Thus even the prices of accurately-sorted bales vary depending on the contents: bales of female blouses and male jeans are among the most expensive, while bales of socks are the cheapest.

PRICES OF BALES IN BATA (55kg), November 2012

<i>Pantalón</i> [trousers]	160.000FCFA
<i>Camisas hombre</i> [man's shirts]	220.000FCFA
<i>Blusas mujer</i> [woman's shirts]	280.000FCFA
<i>Camisetas de niños</i> [children T-shirts]	150.000FCFA
<i>Chandal</i> [tracksuits]	170.000FCFA
<i>Vestido mujeres</i> [woman dresses]	200.000FCFA
<i>Vestido niñas</i> [girls dresses]	200.000FCFA
<i>Pantaloncillos</i> [shorts]	190.000FCFA
<i>Sujetadores</i> [bras]	250.000FCFA
<i>Calcetines</i> [socks]	90.000FCFA
<i>Pantalones vaqueros</i> [jeans]	280.000FCFA



Figure 25 Asamsé warehouse (partly empty because the sacs are on hold in the customs)



Figure 26 *Asamsé* in Malabo (Lebanese importer)



Figure 27 *Asamsé* stall, Semu

Chapter 4

Elegancia: the value of connections

The second category of goods to be explored here is that of *elegancia*, which term describes imported first-hand prêt-à-porter clothes. The category comprises a wide range of garments of varying price and quality, from the most affordable fast fashion to luxury clothing of expensive brands. The term *elegancia* implies a step up from *asamsé*, both in the sphere of trade and in the sphere of consumption. However, I will show that these spheres are so entangled that sometimes one cannot dissociate them. It has become a pattern in the career development of traders that successful *asamsé* sellers in SEMU marketplace turn their activities to *elegancia* marketing, which proliferated alongside the circulation of oil money, the increase of consumption capacity of certain social segments and the increased fluidity of international mobility.

Elegancia are first-hand clothes which are mainly imported inside the suitcases of those who travel abroad (although, as I will show below, this is not the only supply system), thus, retailing *elegancia*, requires more complex logistics compared to the buying and selling of *asamsé*. While *asamsé* bales are acquired from Igbo retailers at warehouses in Malabo and Bata, *elegancia* is sourced abroad in smaller but more precise quantities, as garments are carefully chosen individually by the retailer. The sourcing requires two types of personal assets: the means and ability to travel – including the possession of the pertinent social network – and the knowledge to discern the suitable products, namely the ones that will be liked by the Guinean buying public. Similar to what I have observed for *asamsé*, the valuation and ranking of *elegancia* draws on an imagined geography which implies a hierarchy of goods as they relate to their place of origin. If, in the case of *asamsé*, British bales are the most valuable, in *elegancia* the most highly valued goods come from (or rather through) the former metropole. The path through which goods arrive into Equatorial Guinea

gives a meaningful layer to the appreciation of the many types of goods contained in this category. My intention here is to describe the sourcing process of *elegancia* as well as to unpack the layers of meaning which both inform and are informed by supply systems, accessibility and circulation of *elegancia* goods.

4.1 *Elegancia and the dynamics of the market: style as distinction*

Compared to *asamsé*, *elegancia* occupies a much smaller section of the marketplace. While the number of *elegancia* sellers has increased substantially with the oil-boom and retailing *elegancia* implies an improvement in the life style of those market women who can take the step up, the volume of sellers and their presence in the market remains much less voluminous than that of the sellers of second-hand textiles. This limited presence in the marketplace is more evident in Bata than in Malabo. This makes sense if we consider that Malabo, as the capital, houses a bigger middle class, although even in Malabo, as I have previously shown, this class is still emerging in relative terms. *Elegancia* market stalls and boutiques mainly sell to this incipient middle class. Although the *elegancia* category contains the most desirable goods, most ordinary Guineans I could speak to agreed that spending a lot of money on this type of item was not an intelligent use of one's savings and they agreed that only certain pieces, to be worn on particular occasions, were worth the effort. Most of my interlocutors admitted that while they had acquired a few first-hand items from market stalls and boutiques, the bulk of their wardrobe was filled with second-hand clothes, which they considered to be of better quality and, therefore, better value for the price they paid. Even the *elegancia* sellers of the marketplace acquire *asamsé* items for themselves and their family members, every now and then. As most of the sellers had previously dealt in second-hand clothes, they claim to have a special knowledge and skill in rummaging, sorting and picking the best quality pieces from the bundles. Rare is the case of an *elegancia* seller buying a piece of clothing from a peer in the marketplace. They usually feel rather uncomfortable with the idea of paying the extra price to a peer intermediary as their direct access to foreign commodities constitutes their main asset.

Elegancia, like *asamsé*, is also displayed in an orderly way in the stalls, organised by types of garments and their origin. To organise the stalls in an aesthetically attractive manner, the colours, patterns, materials and styles of the items are taken into account. *Elegancia* stalls can be found in the central spaces of

the marketplaces where clothes can be better protected from strong sunshine or tropical rain. In Bata, *elegancia* is strategically sited in the concrete and corrugated metal roofed stalls situated at the central galleries of the Mercado Central. As these stalls are further away from the natural light, they tend to be illuminated with blue fluorescent lights which enhance the brightness of the colours of the brand-new clothes. The use of this bright neon lighting constitutes almost a requirement for the selling of new clothes, both in market stalls and in boutiques, provided a connection to the electricity network is available. In SEMU-Malabo, for instance, the stalls placed in the central arena of the marketplace do not have access to the electricity network and, therefore, they rely on the little natural light that filters through the small holes and junctures in and between the corrugated sheets which roof the stalls. The stalls located in the new concrete buildings of the marketplace, however, do have occasional access to electricity and they have incorporated the lighting system.

Maintaining and enhancing the brightness of the colours of *elegancia* is an obsession for its traders. When talking with my interlocutors about the reasons for acquiring expensive first-hand clothes which are not necessarily of a better quality (in terms of durability and strength) than the already used ones, they argued that the new clothes have brighter colours and a certain patina that distinguish them and make them pleasurable to wear. I was surprised that they did not refer to the fact that worn clothes had already been in contact with other bodies. Ideas of pollution and contamination were less relevant than the fact that the people who had previously owned the clothes were considered knowledgeable and tasteful in the realm of consumption. The particular patina and brightness of the new clothes, together with the smell of the starch, the lack of wrinkles and their steadiness, were the remarkable characteristics that made these garments desirable and distinguished. The same logic was applicable to new shoes. The main difference between *asamsé* shoes and the *elegancia* ones is that the last ones are spotlessly clean, free of dust and remarkably shiny.

The style of the garments was invoked as a decisive argument for the acquisition of *elegancia*. Global trends are followed closely by Guinean consumers. However, there is an obvious delay in the arrival of these style trends in the *asamsé* bales. This is precisely when style becomes crucial in distinguishing and framing *elegancia*. As an example of the importance of style I will use an ethnographic vignette about the availability of jeans in the Guinean market during the years 2008 and 2009. Through

this particular example I render the features of the *elegancia* category, as well as what makes it distinguished from other categories I am exploring.

After a few years of 1970s fashion revival at the turn of the twenty-first century, a movement which saw the re-popularisation of wide-leg and boot-cut jeans, skinny jeans came back on the global fashion catwalks. The eruption of skinny jeans into the international fashion scene was so fast and radical that in less than two seasons all fast-fashion and prêt-à-porter shops in the Global North substituted their wide-legged jeans for the new skinny-styled ones. Guineans did not take long to realise the change in jeans style, and the demand for skinny jeans (Sp. *Pitillos*) increased enormously, while boot-cut jeans were relegated to the back of the wardrobes. The *asamsé* bales were full of wide-leg jeans discarded by fashion-conscious consumers in the global North, but they did not suit the tastes of the Guinean consumers who were equally tuned to fashion. Specially the youngsters, amongst whom jeans are a crucial garment in their clothing style. Consequently, the only ones who wore 'à la mode' were those who were able to travel abroad, the ones who were well connected, and those who could afford to pay the extremely high price that was asked for brand-new imported jeans.

Any young urban Guinean, whether male and female, aimed to own at least one pair of *pitillos*. The garment had an interesting double significance: on the one hand, by wearing it, one was showing awareness of the international fashion trends. A sense of 'connectedness' to the world-wide community emanated from the cut and the stitches of the denim. On the other hand, by having them, one positioned him or herself amongst the Guineans with better purchase power and/or better connections. Yet, as I have been arguing, these two conditions are interlinked. By being extremely lucky and finding a pair of *pitillos* in the pile of *asamsé* jeans or by taking a boot-cut pair and customise it so that it appeared to be 'a thin-leg' one could generate an illusion of connectedness. However, only by being able to purchase the brand-new *elegancia* version of them, could one generate the full effect of this knowledge and connectedness. The need to perform this sense of knowledge and connectedness generated the trend of preserving the cloth label, where the size is normally indicated and which is stitched loosely to the back pocket of the jeans in order to be removed for first use. Youngsters in Malabo and Bata would proudly show the labels, as an emblem for distinction, as an evidence of *elegancia*, and carefully washed their trousers so that they could preserve them as long as possible.

On one of my trips to Barcelona I was asked to import *pantalones de pitillo*. The request came from a group of friends I had met during my first long stay in Bata. They were all female and roughly my age – around early and mid-twenties – and they were all Ndowé and studying at the National University of Equatorial Guinea (UNGE). This made them quite disconnected from existing power circles and therefore from access to the oil wealth which was starting to be staggeringly visible. They were, therefore, dependent upon their family income and none of them had any independent economic activity. They were relatively privileged compared to the majority of the young urban population, and they all had families who valued and cared for their education and they had all attended good primary schools (those dependent on religious orders), which led them to University. However, UNGE training is extremely weak and they found it difficult to find a well-paid job without the help of a proper network. For them, the performance of connectedness was crucial, then, precisely to generate such connections. I will explore these processes of 'making appearances' as crucial in the understanding of the logics of consumption later on in this thesis.

Returning now to the request of importing thin-leg trousers: I would make a huge profit, my Guinean friends said, 'If I could travel I would fill my luggage with garments so that the profit would pay-back my flight'. Even though later on I would agree to collaborate with my informants to support their *negocios* (Engl. businesses) in various ways, at the time of this very first request I was unsure about the ethical position I was going to take afterwards, so I refused to speculate with the contents of my luggage (I was not going to make a profit out of the budget their struggling families had allocated for their studying period). My friends' response to my first negative attitude was that, for them, what was ethically challenging was not the fact that I could speculate with the price of the clothing of my suitcase but rather the fact that they did not have access to their desired commodities. By bringing them over to Guinea I would be facilitating their access to commodities. I was, in their opinion, sharing my privilege, therefore democratizing the access to *elegancia* that I, for the simple fact of being from Europe and being able to travel back and forth, had. The compromise I reached with them was that they would give me some cash, I would go and purchase a few dozen pairs of trousers, and they would re-sell the ones they chose, taking the profit themselves.

The type of *pitillos* I was supposed to bring was made clear to me: they should be the ones that most ordinary Spaniards would acquire. I should go and hunt for the

cheapest jeans on offer from the most mainstream and affordable textile brands. My Guinean friends, who had never travelled abroad, were perfectly aware of which kind of shops I had to look for. They were also well informed about the prices I had to hunt for in order to maximise their profit. I was amazed about how much they knew about the market, even though none of them had ever explicitly carried out any trading activity. Later on, I would realise that this level of market knowledge is extremely common amongst Guineans and that almost everyone in the country develops some kind of commercial activity in the course of their life. *Negocio*, as they call it, is part of the life and everyday activities of Guineans and, as I will develop further later on, being able to consume *elegancia* is almost a synonym of being involved in a *negocio* kind of activity. Later on, in chapter 5, I will unfold the multiple aspects of *negocio* and its implications.

In the particular case of the jeans, the style provided the possibility of distinction, which was at times complemented with the keeping of the label. Thin-legged jeans could only be acquired abroad and through proper connections. The same for bright and brand-new shirts, in particular, certain kinds with particular messages, as I will show below. *Elegancia* renders visible the relationships with a particular global geography, which are only possible through particular relationships with power structures.

4.2 Places and Goods for Elegancia in the marketplace

As the previous description has implied, the hierarchies in value of second and first-hand clothes have an expression in the spatial organisation of the market-place. *Asamsé* stalls can be improvised anywhere, and the infrastructure required is limited, because none of the stalls require electricity while some are not even roofed and when it rains the clothes are simply covered with their own plastic sacks. On the contrary, *elegancia* is preserved in roofed areas, concrete stalls and small shops with electric lighting. In SEMU the section which hosts *elegancia* is the central corridor, and is located around the stall of Mamá Natí, the president of the association of *asamsé* and *elegancia* vendors. The president's stall is right in the central area of the market and the closer to the central stall vendors are, the closer their relationship to the association is. Seniority also determines where stalls are placed, with the central and more accessible ones being reserved for the senior traders. The marketplace was organised by the association, therefore, its very spatial organisation reflects the inner

hierarchy of the association in parallel to the hierarchy of value of the products sold.

The type of garments one can find are female footwear and female casual wear, with the exception of two central stalls strategically placed next to the president's post that also sell basic smart clothes and work wear (for example, fitted shirts and suit jackets and bottoms). In some of the stalls the offer is completed with some bijouterie, hair extensions and cosmetics associated with *elegancia* products. The general (non-*elegancia*) versions of cosmetic products are usually sold by West African traders, who distribute African and Asian brands, these being the most affordable ones and, therefore, the most useful for the everyday needs of Guineans. Similarly to what happens in the realm of clothing, at the *elegancia* stalls, one will find the higher-valued cosmetics and hair extensions: 'those that come straight from Spain'. Regarding hair extensions, a key complement for the apparel of Guinean female, the type to be found in *elegancia* is known as Aguacate. Aguacate is a better quality natural hair which costs over 30.000 FCFA every 50 grams. A full head of extensions can cost around 250.000 FCFA. Hair extensions are extremely popular amongst Guinean women. Whereas there are many options and a long tradition of hairdos that women have used to manage their afro hair, adding imported hair has become a symbol of their status, as well as a highly dynamic fashion phenomenon with its own trends and shifts. It is almost a requirement that a middle-aged woman in paid employment or with family responsibilities spends a significant amount of time and economic effort on her hair care. For young women, the investment on pricey hair extensions is regarded as evidence of either her family wealth or the generosity of her partner.

The choices for hairdos are varied. However, the most popular is the use of hair extensions for 'tidy and straight hair'. Although *aguacate* is still the most desired, the recent years have seen the proliferating of other types of extensions, whether synthetic, or natural imported from big exporters from Asia. The mechanisms to tie or fix the hair to the scalp are also diverse: from *pelucas* which stand directly on the skin, to extensions that expand locks, passing through the extensions sown on specific hairdos. Hair extensions, then, are regarded just as another garment that completes one's look and demonstrates one's status.

Puzzled by the popularity of the product, and by the many different types of extensions and tie systems I asked about the differences between the extensions that were sold by West African traders and the *aguacate* ones. To me, the difference was

not so evident, although I could appreciate different textures and lengths both in the packages sold in the stalls and on the heads of my acquaintances. The answer was straight: 'aguacate is natural hair and it comes directly from Spain'. Its very name alludes to its origin: a shop in Avenida de Aguacate, in the industrial estate Poligono Aguacate in Madrid's Carabanchel district. It began to arrive to Equatorial Guinea in the early 2000s, coinciding with the first signs of the oil prosperity the country started to experience. Aguacate, then, signifies an origin which, in its turn, indicates the product quality.

Later on in my fieldwork I learned that despite the clear etymology of the denomination and the straight narrative of my informants, *aguacate* hair does not always arrive to Equatorial Guinea through Avenida de Aguacate in Madrid. In 2012 I could interview the owner of one of the first shops installed in the shopping mall built on the space of the former central market in Bata. The name of the shop was '100% Aguacate'. The owner, a middle aged woman who had spent part of her youth in one of the suburbs of Madrid where most of Guinean expatriates live, realised the potential profit she could make by selling 'natural hair'. Even though she started trading with Spanish Aguacate hair, she realised she could make higher profit if she acquired her merchandise directly from the same sources that Justino Delgado, the Spanish hair company, used. She then traded directly with an Indian wholesaler. The denomination of her merchandise, however, remained, as an indication of quality. She was selling '*aguacate de India*'. The prices in the Guinean market were the same as for the *aguacate* from Spain and the quality and the product were regarded as the same by the loyal customers of 100% Aguacate. However, even though consumers of *aguacate de España* would acknowledge the premium quality of the *aguacate de India*, they regarded the prices too high for a 'non-fully authentic' product.

Similar to *aguacate*, which is a version of a product - hair extensions - which can also be found in other sections of the market (in West-African beauty products stalls), all the other *elegancia* goods have their affordable equivalent in other sections of the market. The *elegancia* version of cosmetics is formed by European popular and affordable brands. Shampoos and body lotions are often Unilever brands marketed in ordinary Spanish supermarkets. The own brands of Spanish supermarkets are also regarded as premium products. Guinean consumers are perfectly aware of the different lines of cosmetics the Spanish supermarkets launch and this knowledge travels across the borders alongside with Guineans, who are eager to become global

consumers, just as their migrated family members or the ordinary people of the global North. *Elegancia* then, comprises all the products related to the body which an ordinary Global North citizen has access to. These ideas about the range of commodities consumed in the Global North travel mainly with the experience of the Guinean diaspora, which has its main presence in the former metropolis. The fluidity of population movements between Spain and Guinea has increased staggeringly after the oil-boom. The first and second generation migrants who either had arrived to Spain with Spanish passport immediately before independence, or sought asylum during the Macias dictatorship, were joined by students and relatives during the nineties. In the wake of oil prosperity, and the beginning of the financial crisis in Europe which hit migrants especially hard, the mobility between ex-colony and ex-metropole, increased. The first generation of university graduates of migrant families returned to take advantage of the opportunities that the extractive economy was offering. Some of them worked part time and lived the rest of the time in Spain. Air traffic increased exponentially during the first decade after the discovery of oil, with more air companies providing more connections with different prices for those wanting to travel between Malabo and Madrid.

4.3 Boutiques, windows for bigmanship

The marketplaces are not the only space where *elegancia* can be purchased. During the years I have regularly visited Equatorial Guinea I have observed the proliferation of boutiques in the city centres of both Malabo and Bata. They have mushroomed on the ground floors of old colonial buildings. Most of these buildings had been commercial *factorias* in the past but had closed during Macías' regime and were dormant during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. The once abandoned and open ground-floor spaces, appeared suddenly hermetically closed with aluminium-framed glass windows, added to which were sign-posts with appealing names (such as 'Big Boss', 'Ebano', 'Fashion Victim', for example) and air conditioning equipment. The interior of the shops, some of them visible from the street, others not due to special mirror-type glass windows, was most of the time without customers and with only a few garments orderly displayed, with their trademark labels, and a usually young, smartly dressed but bored shop keeper, formed a static picture. Nothing could be further from the bustling ambiance of the market-place I have just described. The market women of SEMU had already warned me about the lack of activity in these

shops. They argued that the owners of these shops did not need to actually sell their merchandise, 'because they were too rich anyway and they did not need to cover the expenses of their trips'. The prices of the boutique garments can only be afforded by a very small portion of the population and often, this same population is highly mobile and so is able to travel abroad, directly acquiring this type of good without need of an expensive intermediary. In the view of the SEMU market women, 'the majority of people who own *elegancia* boutiques in Malabo city centre, don't need it'.

I decided to test this view from the market women myself, by paying regular visits to five of the boutiques in Malabo city centre during the two fieldwork stays I could carry out in 2011. During the visits, I could confirm the lack of customers in these shops. I hardly ever encountered buyers or potential buyers looking, comparing and considering acquiring any garment in these shops. The types of merchandise available in these boutiques were diverse but all extremely pricey compared to the average income of ordinary Guineans. The cost of a T-shirt would not be less than 20.000 to 30.000 FCFA and could reach the sum of 80.000 FCFA, almost the equivalent of the salary of a lower rank civil servant and two times what a domestic servant would earn. Most of the boutiques were dedicated to smart clothes for men, with expensive branded suits, luxurious watches and smart and extravagantly expensive shoes (50-100.0000 FCFA). I also could find shops oriented to female lingerie, baby clothing and accessories, as well as shops specialised in the items needed for the celebration of the First Communion. It would not take me long to realise that these shops were mainly targeted at male consumers, yet they were also oriented to the wide shop-window observer. They were showcases of the capacity of the owner to produce and reproduce connections through making and displaying the right choices for their shop.

During my fieldwork, I could talk with all the shop keepers but never encountered the actual owner at the boutique. The ownership of the boutiques reflected meanings and gender relations that draw on power hierarchies in that the shops were owned either by elite members of the regime or by their wives. In some cases (a minority), businesses had been developed by people who were not wealthy but had gained access to, and managed successfully the right networks. This is the case for a Benga woman who could open up several businesses in Bata and a Lebanese businessman (close friend of Obiang), who owned the most luxurious male clothes shop in Malabo. The rest of the owners were already well-off members of the regime.

The daughters of Obiang Nguema owned a few clothing shops in the Malabo city centre, which constituted their main public activity. They would organize parties to present the arrival of new goods where other members of the elite would attend and comment upon. The current ambassador of Equatorial Guinea in the US, also owns a male casual wear boutique, where he is able to show his fashion knowledge and he is able to display the brands and designs that he imports from America.

4.4 Moda africana

'Authentic Imi-Wax', 'Super Real African Print', 'Authentic African Print'. These are slogans printed on the labels of the so called African cotton clothes displayed in the stalls of the Guinean markets. This insistence on the Africanness and the authenticity of the cloths is interesting when one explores the social biography of the African prints and realises that authenticity is a key concept for the African fashion system but that it is constructed and articulated in a very different manner to what scholars of the Western academic system have explored. In the African fashion system the most important constitutive element is the African Print. But as I will show in this section, the tailoring of the dress is also at the basis of its 'Africanity'. African fashion is a result of a long dialogue between multiple and very distant actors and it is constructed through a series of 'authentic imitations'. In regards to *la moda africana* Equatorial Guinea participates in its global dynamics in a distinct manner.

La moda africana in the Guinean marketplace requires two differentiated moments, and two different spaces: the purchase of the fabric in a market stall and the making of the dress in a tailor shop. The cloth can be purchased in one of the stalls or boutiques and it is usually imported in pieces of 6 yards length and 1 yard width. The dress is usually made by one of the foreign tailors, that have been migrating to Equatorial Guinea continuously since the second half of the 1990s.

Identifying *moda africana* in marketplaces and town boutiques is easy as it stands out from its beautifully organised stalls. The colourful patterns have an easily recognizable iconography and they feature the effects, the techniques and the finish of the wax print. The wax printing technique is achieved through a Dutch industrialised version of the Indonesian batik, and involves the impregnation of wax cylinders and tampers which generate a distinct finish. The ink penetrates both sides

of the cotton and the patterns have certain 'imperfections' which make every 6 yards piece unique. Although the word 'wax' appears in almost every label of the cloth pieces sold in the market, in Equatorial Guinea the amount of cloth printed using this technique – or for that matter, the cloth produced in Holland or England – is scarce. The most common African print is the cheaper imitation of this first kind, known as *fancy* or *legós*. In this case the cotton is printed with copper rolls and the patterns are very varied. They can imitate the designs of famous wax prints firms, like the Dutch Vlisco, or reproduce any desired pattern on demand.

During all the years I have been in close contact with Equatorial Guinea (since 2007) the prices of the African Prints have not varied substantially. What has been shifting, though, is the quality of the prints and their origin of production. The price of *fancy* cloth is around 1000 FCFA per meter, whereas the scarcer and better quality cloth has remained around 2500 FCFA a meter. Unlike what happens with *elegancia* and *asamsé*, the prices of these cloths are not usually negotiated. 'There is *popó* of one thousand and *popó* of two thousand or two thousand and five hundred' (Sp. '*hay popó de mil o popó de dos mil, dos mil quinientos*'). The seller can be generous and give an extra meter of cloth for free if somebody organises an event and chooses the pattern of a particular stall for the tailoring of ceremonial dresses. These celebrations that require of a certain 'uniforme' (En. uniform) normally attract a significant amount of people and this generates a big profit for the fortunate seller.

During the preparation of the event – a wedding, a funeral or maybe a communion – the host family goes to the marketplace and agrees on a particular pattern. There has to be enough stock of the pattern to be able to cover the needs of all invited. The seller then sticks a note in front of the pattern with the name of the family and the type of celebration planned. During the weeks before the event there will be a procession of family members who attend the market stall to purchase the *popó de uniforme*. The amount of cloth that each member of the family will purchase varies according of the style of the dress they desire to wear and the amount of money they are prepared to spend on the outfit.

The most affordable option is to tie the piece of cloth – usually two meters – around one's waist. This particular way of wearing the cloth is called *lapá* or *cloté* – from the French *le pagne* and the English *cloth*. The next option is to bring the cloth to a tailor. An affordable solution can be to bring the cloth to a family member or a neighbourhood seamstress, who will probably craft a *kabá ngondo*, in the case of the

female version of the dress. In this case, the length of cloth needed will be around three meters, adding an extra meter in case the desired *kabá* has to be wider. The amount of cloth used for the dress reflects how much the *kabá* has cost, so it becomes a demonstration of power, seniority, or of honour. The simplest piece can add between 2000 and 4000 FCFA. However, the preferred option is to pay a visit to one of the West African tailors of the marketplace. They are considered to have better knowledge of *la moda africana* as they are aware of existing trends and in their tailor shops they display images of models from Ghana, Nigeria, Benin or Ivory Coast. They also usually have magazines and picture albums to inspire their clients with images of fashion from the more popular African centres.

As I have described elsewhere, *Moda Africana* is used in special occasions and it is not the type of garment that most of Guineans use in their everyday life¹¹². Like I have exposed in the previous chapter, the ruling party and the state make use of African prints for their celebrations and as a way to embody the people's support to their projects. The PDGE commissions prints with the emblems of the party (the torch) and with the portrait of the President to Cameroonian and Chinese factories. The event attendees are implicitly obliged to wear the textile prints as a sort of uniform. The bases of their garments are made of the printed cloth while the style is tailored to the needs and the taste of the particular users. The lower ranks of the party, for instance, make shirts and simple accessories with the printed cloth. The higher ranks and the president himself resort to prestigious tailors in order to get sophisticated designs.

Outside of political party's meetings and state ceremonies and celebrations, most Guineans do not usually use African fashion clothes as they prefer to get most of their clothes from *asamsé* which constitutes an affordable option. Buying African print and then paying a tailor to sew a dress is substantially more expensive than just acquiring a second hand full outfit. Moreover, African Fashion is a recent tradition in Equatorial Guinea. While in other areas imported prints were adapted to the uses of local textile traditions, Guineans adopted wester-style clothing back in the beginning of the Atlantic Trade. Only after the independence and following the influence of panafrikanism and retraditionalization, Guineans started to use African

¹¹² I dedicated my master thesis to the study of the sourcing, meaning and uses of African Fashion in Equatorial Guinea (*Vestits a l'Àfrica i l'Àfrica als Vestits. Usos i significats de la Moda Africana a Guinea Equatorial*, Universitat de Barcelona 2008).

prints brought in the country in hands of West African traders and crafted, as well, by West African tailors arrived after the oil boom.

Nowadays, African Fashion is only the preferred type of garment for a particular female sector. Middle aged women who possess a relevant public role have been adopting African styles as they are perceived as a pertinent and 'dignifying' outfit. Both the wife of the president, Constanca Mangué de Obiang and the Mayor of Malabo, Doña Coloma, wear mostly African Fashion from famous West African designers, for instance. The presence of this type of garments in the marketplace is limited and it is reduced to the activity of immigrant traders. As much as looking at its provisioning paths would be a fascinating endeavour, I had to leave it out of this current monograph which focuses on the strategies of Fang market women and the main clothing categories worn in Equatorial Guinea.

4.5 Connectedness as value

Even before I started to think about this research, my own experience as an urban-dweller in Equatorial Guinea, doing my daily shopping in the marketplace, revealed how crucial it was to understand the different categories of goods and the functioning of their pricing in order to conduct any transaction and to be able to supply a household. The perception of quality, its relation to price and how this related to ideas about the origin of commodities and their circulation was not obvious to me originally. Throughout months of fieldwork I learned about the different categories of textile commodities that one can find in the market. These different 'categories' were not defined under hypothetically universal and economic criteria of functionality, quality and a supply/demand-based pricing system, but by a set of specific values and meaningful layers that were contingent upon cultural perceptions as well as on the political and economic context in which Guineans source their livelihood.

The ethnographic vignette about the *manoletinas* from Elche, discussed at the beginning of this section, serves as an illustration of how names and categories of the goods can encapsulate a set of relationships and values. It is clear that the presence in Malabo's main marketplace of *manoletinas* from Elche made in China cannot be explained simply in economic terms. The system of provision concerning foreign goods for the Guinean marketplace does not respond to a logic of profit maximisation in a classical economic sense. As I will explore in the next chapter, the sourcing of

commodities is done in small quantities; goods circulate mainly through long-existing networks and do not necessarily follow 'minimum cost' logistics. *Zapatos de Elche* materialise a set of ideas about prestige and quality that have been historically informed, and that are ideal and not rational or objective. An investment of 'creative energy' (Graeber 2001: 68) contributes to their value and appreciation, because 'somebody has gone through the trouble to get them'. As shown in chapter 1, the possession of foreign goods has, for a long time, been associated with local notions of wealth. As Graeber puts it: 'insofar as wealth is an object of display, it is always in some sense an adornment of the person' (Graeber 1996: 5). Clothing goods, then, have a privileged role in this display as they have the capacity to signify wealth. I argue that this wealth is tightly linked with the fact that 'being connected' of 'showing connectedness' is highly valued within Guinean society.

Friedman (1994), following semantic explanations of consumption (e.g. Barthes 2003; Douglas and Isherwood 1974, Baudrillard 1969, Sahlins 1974), analyses the consumption practices of the Congolese *Sape* and adds the factors of individual and social desire. I am especially interested in the ethnographic case of *la Sape* and the analytical questions that arise from it. For Friedman, 'acts of consumption represent ways of fulfilling desires that are identified with highly valued life styles' and therefore consumption becomes 'a material realisation, or attempted realisation, of the image of the good life' (1994: 120). Both the classification and valuation of goods, then, have to do with these images of what is 'good' and 'not so good', and their incorporation in the creation of a desired life space. Friedman argues that consumption is not only about class distinction (Bourdieu 1984) but also about individual self-identification and fulfilment.

La Sape is a network of ordinary individuals – sometimes unmarried and unemployed – who form hierarchies by building up reputations through clothing consumption in the nightlife and clubs of urban Congo. For the *Sapeurs*, geographical coordinates are crucial for the valuation of foreign clothing goods. The city of Paris is perceived as the Mecca of *Elegance*, and a *Sapeur* is expected to make a pilgrimage to Paris at least once in his lifetime to acquire authentic goods and experience *Elegance*. *Elegance* is both a material feature of certain clothes and an attitude, aptitude almost bordering on an ontology or lifestyle. *Sapeurs* organise goods on a hierarchical scale according to their proximity to Paris. Tailor-made suits with local cloth are at the bottom of the *Sapeurs'* pyramid of value. Imported counterfeit clothes

acquired in the marketplace come next. Tailored suits in *haute couture* style would be the next step, followed by imported non-branded ready-to-wear clothing. At the other end of the scale, directly imported French brands are amongst the most valuable goods that one can find on the Congolese market. However, the most desirable and most highly ranked clothing of all, are the pieces acquired directly in Paris by means of what Congolese *Sapeurs* call *l'aventure* (Ibid: 178). *L'aventure* consists of a trip from Congo to Paris, where the *Sapeur* purchases relevant pieces for his wardrobe and acquires experiences that provide him with power and 'life force'. This life force consists of 'a combination of wealth, health, whiteness and status, all encompassed in an image of beauty' (Ibid: 185). Therefore, for Friedman, the suits the *Sapeurs* wear do not represent power but rather are definitions of power – or life force – in themselves. The *Sapeurs'* ranking and valuation of different clothing choices and options becomes a means of evaluating and ranking people, and vice-versa. Friedman argues that the *Sapeurs'* high valuation of whiteness and metropolitan goods exemplifies not so much a post-colonial sense of subjugation to a Western economic and cultural hegemony, but rather a long-standing understanding of power hierarchies and accumulation through life force consumption that could be traced back to pre-colonial times.

The categories used to classify and rank textile goods in the Guinean marketplace work in a similar manner to what Friedman has described for the *Sape*. They draw on particular imagined geographies and belong to the realm of what I have already described (in chapter 2) as the 'imagined exterior'. These geographies contain a particular understanding of global power relationships and Guineans' position within them, while forming hierarchies of value: a Chinese T-Shirt acquired on the Cameroon border is less valued than a Zara top brought from Madrid, the capital of the former metropolis, for example.

Here, history and power enter inevitably into the picture and invite us to look beyond Baudrillard's sign-value (1969) and Friedman's social and individual desire (1999) in thinking about how goods are valued and classified. In this sense I follow Narotsky in considering:

'the process of construction of signifying codes as part of social reproduction, where distributive politics are both the result and the continuation of production relations and emerge in historical (both material and cultural) contexts. In other words, political domination cannot be reduced (or abstracted) to the

production and control of a code of signs' (Narotsky 1997-107).

Thus, 'signifying codes' and social values such as wealth, taste or class distinction are not the only scales which serve to rank goods and people. Money and price, closely embedded in distribution politics, constitute a relevant factor in the social valuation of goods and people, and even more so for imported goods in this case. For the peoples of Equatorial Africa, money has a crucial function in both secular and ritual life (see e.g. Fernandez 1984, Guyer 1993 and Geschiere 2000). Pricing, ranking, and haggling over money are activities that transcend the marketplace and penetrate the most intimate spheres of everyday life. Money is perceived as an 'active agent' with transformative powers that push people to a variety of activities related to spending and consuming. Money is inevitably and ostentatiously used for the enhancement of personal prestige. It is not only a standard of value, a means of exchange, or an active agent that mercantilises everything (if we take the Marxian definition and the Geschiere analysis of money in rituals in Cameroon). In West African pidgin English money can be consumed (*chopped*, eaten). To '*chop the money*' means to 'make it disappear', or in other words: to spend it. Having a lot of money to *chop* or allowing people to *chop* one's money indicates one's personal prestige. Thus, being able to pay the *higher price* for a particular good becomes a proof of 'bigmanship' (Geschiere 2000: 67-68). But how are the prices set and what do they reflect? How is price embedded in politics of redistribution? Assuming that prices are useful to assess the quality/value of the goods, which *quality* is assessed and by what parameters is quality eventually evaluated? In the following sections I will show how this understanding of money wealth is reflected in the pricing and the categorizing of goods.

4.6 Elegancia = New clothes?

In 2014 the first lady, Constanica Mangué, opened a Mango fashion shop in Malabo. Rumours that the first lady had been flirting with Inditex, so that she could open her own Zara shop in Malabo ended up with her opening of a Mango franchise. Local gossip (*congósá*), had it that the Spanish multinational Inditex was not ready to give in to the idea of letting the first lady manage a shop as it was considered economically infeasible. Inditex operates as a conventional multinational that manages all its retailing activities. Congósá in the marketplace concluded: 'Constancia was not able to buy Amancio Ortega'. This assumed fact was rendered as

evidence for the weakness of the regime in the international neoliberal order. Notwithstanding, the second option, not as popular as Zara amongst Guinean women, but as a franchise, could be placed in the mall which the First Lady owns on the road to the airport of Malabo.

Similar to the case of *asamsé*, *elegancia* does not stand for all 'new clothes' that one can find in the marketplace. In the marketplace one can find all sorts of products. Nigerian counterfeit products are first-hand commodities, some of them specifically produced for the Guinean market. In 2010, when my acquaintances and friends seemed to agree that 'camisetas de letras' (shirts with letters) were the most fashionable item to wear, one could find in the stalls of the market-place a t-shirt with a message that both amused and struck me: 'bubuta sexy'. This was a product that was clearly produced for the Guinean market *bubuta* or *bubuto* is a pidgin from Fang and refers to somebody who has flesh on his or her bones. This corresponds to a shared (at least in most African societies) discourse of beauty according to which being corpulent, even overweight, is considered very attractive, even more so than being slim or fit. Where were these t-shirts produced if the idiom was, indeed, local? As far as I knew there was not a single textile or printing factory in Equatorial Guinea and its market is limited to its small population. The enigma was immediately revealed: this *elegancia* was produced in the Aba district in Nigeria, where Igbo traders have connections to a cluster of producers and importers of counterfeit goods and, therefore, have the capacity to adapt very quickly to the changes in Guinean tastes. Once again, a connection to the transnational Igbo networks had visibly materialised.

This goes to show how accurate the Nigerian producers are and that their production capacity makes it possible to design and produce goods that are specifically targeted at the relatively small Equato-Guinean market. Another example of such Nigerian produce is the image that I show below. This is a counterfeit of a Zara t-shirt. Amongst the ordinary Guineans and, specifically amongst the youth, the most sought-after *elegancia* is the one that comes from the most popular prêt-à-porter in Spain. Brands like Zara, Mango and Bershka are the most desired amongst the young consumers of the marketplace. In this case the very talented Nigerian traders and cool-hunters had spotted the style and the 'letters' that a fashionable T-shirt for the Guinean Market should have and they had created a new product: a 'Zara letters T-shirt' (Sp. *camiseta de letras de Zara*). The T-shirt is designed for men. The

existence of Nigerian counterfeit clothing is a recurrent topic of complaint in the marketplace. In a meeting of three *elegancia* traders at Nati's stall in a morning in March 2011, a point of agreement was reached: 'these Nigerians...we bring something all the way from Spain, they look at what you've got in the stall and the week after you find that they have already copied it and they have it in their little stalls'. 'These Nigerians' bring their counterfeited clothing from Aba (Kate Meagher 2010). However, although the rhetoric of the market women complained about counterfeit products from Nigeria, most of my interviewees agreed that the Nigerian products were not directly competing with Spanish *elegancia*, because most Guineans could easily discriminate an Aba garment from an *elegancia* one.

Usually Guineans stated they preferred to acquire a good quality *asamsé* piece rather than an Aba counterfeit. However, sometimes the Aba shirts and T-Shirts came in a popular style, that mainly urban youngsters (mainly male) were happy to wear. Indeed, whilst most of the clothing stalls in the marketplace are run by Guinean women which mainly sell women's clothes, Nigerian sellers are mainly dedicated to male casual clothing. Jeans, trainers and informal shirts and T-Shirts conform the merchandise on display in these stalls. Waged labour is still not the reality for most Guineans. However, if an increase of the oil-rent and the proliferation of jobs related to the oil industry and to the state has affected one sector of the population, it is men. During my fieldwork, I spend a few hours during two weeks in two market stalls of Nigerian masculine clothing. To my surprise, a significant number of the customers that stopped by the stalls and bought clothes were young women, clothed in high-school uniforms. A very different customer than that found in the boutiques in the centre of Malabo.

Big bosses decide the trends, the prices and what is extreme *elegancia*. But without it, they cannot perform their own value and worth. They work to create an illusion of connectedness and authenticity, as they become the ones with better access to the sources of luxury and global fashion trends. *Elegancia* provides bosses both the tools to perform and acquire value.

4.7 On quality and Authenticity

Jane Guyer, in her case study of the Nigerian economy, shows how during colonial times price and quality were institutionally controlled by large merchant companies or by the State. However, when it came to quality assessment following

colonial times, she identifies a set of historical circumstances that required Nigerians to develop a more complex system of assessment. After Nigeria's independence in 1960 and up until the mid-1980s affordability and international quality standards coincided, as it became possible for middle-class Nigerians to access similar types of goods as those consumed in the Europe. This situation changed dramatically with the inflation and the collapse of the Nigerian economy in the second half of the 1980s. The Nigerians' loss of purchasing power was accompanied by the importation of many relatively cheap products from many different origins. Guyer argues that the combination of inflation and lack of regulation of the quality of imported goods provoked a shift in the process of product definition and quality assessment. The introduction of second, third and fourth-hand commodities generated a set of new categories to refer to something that was new, used abroad or used in Nigeria. This situation could easily be extrapolated to other latitudes, where in the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s the arrival of variable quality goods from all over the globe was also experienced. In a standardised economy, the quality of goods is assessed outside the market, by institutions and experts that establish certain standards. For non-centralised economies such as many African ones, there are other scales, and criteria are created and validated outside formal institutions (Guyer 2004 (Perpiñá Grau, 1945): 84).

For Equatorial Guinea, the arrival of low-quality products was not linked to a lack of regulation and control but to an attempt by the State to control everything. The expulsion of foreign merchants and trading companies during the regime of Macias Nguema (1968-1979) and the nationalisation of commerce entailed the introduction of new suppliers and new types of commodities. *Estatal* (of the State) became synonymous with 'bad quality' merchandise. The former trading stations, after nationalisation, were re-baptised as warehouses 'of the State' (*Sp.: almacenes de Estatal*). Apart from being a synonym for low-quality goods, 'of the State' became the opposite of imported commodities (see chapter 1), even though none of the 'of the State' commodities were produced inside the borders of the State. *Estatal* mainly included products from the USSR and China, countries that had become partners of the Macias Nguema regime. During this period one type of Chinese whisky was available, the fish that one could get in the market were mainly rotten *chicharro*, and the clothing options were also limited: white shirts and blue trousers for males and white blouses and blue skirts for women, combined with blue shoes.

The end of the Macias Nguema dictatorship and the openness of the first decade of the Obiang Nguema regime facilitated the arrival of a wide variety of goods. There was more diversity of the available commodities than before, and most of the products arrived to Equatorial Guinea over the borders with Cameroon and Gabon. As my collaborators recall, the problem after Obiang's coup was no longer the availability of commodities but rather access to the cash needed to actually buy them. The purchasing power of Guineans during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s was extremely limited, and the quality of the goods that were available in the market was variable. As I will explore in the next section, the second-hand clothing trade was an important addition to the consumption options of Guineans. The restoration and expansion of Lebanese and Spanish foodstuffs trading companies was equally transformative in regard to a multiplying of available choices. For each type of good, there were many quality options. As they had done before, Guineans gave local names to the foreign commodities. This time these names referred either to a specific feature of the good, to its origin, or to the trajectory of its arrival into Equatorial Guinea. Some of the names also referred to complex sets of values and ideas that were placed onto single objects. Jane Guyer describes similar processes of naming goods amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria and, borrowing d'Andrade's concept, she refers to this process as 'chunking'. The names of goods combine in one word an ensemble of judgements and meanings that have to do with contingent and local experiences and perceptions (Guyer 2004: 88).

A graphic example of these 'chunk' naming of goods are the categories used to refer to different types of footwear. Amongst the most popular footwear among the Guinean population since the 1950s and the 1960s have been jelly shoes: sandals made from PVC plastic with a lateral buckle. They are produced in Spain (nowadays they are also produced in Asia) and they arrive in two different colours: 'natural' or light brown and trans-lucent white. They are used as part of the school uniform of children, as part of the equipment used to practice sports, as part of the everyday wear for farming and market activities, and as part of the uniform of the *Ntonobe* choirs (Catholic Church choirs in Fang language). The uniform of the *Ntonobe* choirs was meant to have an 'indigenous' style, so since colonial times it has consisted of an African-styled gown (a long, wide tunic in two colours: white and a different one for the collar) and a white version of the jelly shoes, which are considered now a sort of a 'local' footwear. For the Catholic choirs that sing in Spanish the uniform consists

of a western-styled white shirt and a black skirt or trousers with *manoletinas* or ordinary black leather shoes. The jelly shoes, called *cangrejas* in Spain, are known in Equatorial Guinea as *trevincas* or *bicai*. Trevinca is the name of the manufacturer in Spain, based in Pontevedra (Galicia) that used to export them to the colony during the 1950s and the 1960s. Bicai (sing. *ecai*) is the name that Fang people from the continent gave them to differentiate them from the *mongob* (sing. *ngob*), the general name for leather shoes. According to the Guinean writer Donato Ndong in a personal communication, *ecai* is the word that Fang people use for skai, the once brand name that became a generic name for faux leather and that was incorporated into the pidgin English spoken in Santa Isabel (colonial Malabo). The literal translation of bicai, then, would be 'fake leathers', and they were one of the goods that the Fang *braceros* that were recruited to work on the plantations of Fernando Po would bring back to their village. Bicai are considered to be 'strong and durable', and after Obiang's coup they were imported again by Spanish and Guinean traders. They are also affordable, with a pair costing 3,000 XAF (approximately 5 EUR) in 2012.

In the colonial period bicai were the most affordable footwear, and, together with *paredes* (trainers that took their manufacturer's name in Elche, a name that is still used to refer to any type of trainer) and *kitos* (comfortable leather sandals), they were the shoes that most Guineans would wear for their daily activities. For important occasions, such as a Sunday church service, those Guineans who could afford it would wear a pair of closed leather shoes that they referred to with the generic name for shoes (Sp.: *zapatos*, Fg.: *Mongob*).

There is a general sense that the quality of footwear has declined since independence. The most valuable shoes are the ones that have kept their name from colonial times: *trevincas*, *paredes*, *kitos*, and *manoletinas* are all Spanish names that refer to shoes that were originally produced in Spain. Nowadays it is rare to find a pair of trainers that was actually made in a Paredes factory in Spain, but Guineans still refer to good-quality trainers that they can buy from Chinese producers as *paredes*. The old Spanish name is used to invoke a particular range of quality that it is associated with the goods consumed during the 1960s, during the *autonomia* period and just before independence.

None of the previous types of affordable footwear were available during Macias Nguema's dictatorship. The shoes that one could find in *estatal* were only of one type: blue Chinese-style canvas shoes. However, rationing and the permanent commodity

shortage forced most Guineans to use locally-made recycled shoes. These were made with straps of the inner tubes of old tyres and they were called *motofut*. *Motofut* is also the pidgin English name for bicycle and, at the same time, the name of a neighbourhood in Malabo. The latter emerged largely undocumented during colonial times around the Igbo and the Hausa mechanics' workshops that would provide second- (and third- and fourth-) hand spare parts and cheap vehicle repairs. The use of *motofut* shoes has become a strong metaphor for the misery and suffering that Macias Nguema's regime brought to Guineans who could not migrate in the seventies. The other name for these recycled shoes was '*octubre no me importa*' (Eng.: October, I don't care). This name could not be spoken in front of any civil servant or member of the Macias militia, but it spread nonetheless and nowadays is constantly mentioned in conversations about the period. As one of my closest Guinean friends told me while I was writing these lines: 'Calling the *motofut* as '*octubre no me importa*' is like saying 'I can wear whatever, even on the 12th of October because, in the end, it has only brought misery'. The 12th of October has been a date for celebration in both the Colonial and Post-Colonial State. Being the Spanish National Day, on October 12, special religious services and a military march with civilian participation were held in the streets of the main urban centres of the country. Paradoxically, the Spanish authorities agreed to ratify the independence of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on this date and so the tradition of a military and civilian parade has continued up until today. The dress code for this celebration is very strict. Uniforms have to be worn by both civilians and the military alike. Starting several days before the event, the radio constantly broadcasts a set of dress rules. The most important point is that: participants to the Nationalist event have to wear 'proper shoes'. Marching with flip-flops is prohibited. Only 'shoes' or 'fake leathers' can be worn on this special occasion.

This exhortation is needed, because the most widely used footwear in modern Equatorial Guinea is a particular type of plastic flip-flop popularised in the 1990s: the *sansconfians*. Their name, from the French *sans confiance* (Eng.: without trust), makes direct allusion to the lack of faith Guineans have in the performance of these flip-flops. Silvia, the woman who introduced me to the Bata marketplace, said that 'we call these shoes *sansconfians* because they break when you least expect it (...) and when they break, they break! You cannot walk in them anymore. You can try and fix them but they will break again and again'.

Although all *sansconfians* are unreliable shoes, even this category of *sansconfians* includes two quality ranges. Silvia explained to me: 'there are *sansconfians* of five hundred and *sansconfians* of one thousand. To me, both types of flip-flops looked the same but, according to my friend, the plastic material of the 'thousands' was more durable than that of the 'five hundreds'. Actually, as we walked through the street Silvia would categorise the shoes people were wearing according to their prices: 'this woman is wearing *sansconfians* of one thousand, this man wears *kitos* of five thousand, or this other guy has *sansconfians* of five-hundred. The way names of different types of commodities with their respective prices were pronounced made them sound like long single words: '*sansconfiansdequinientos, kitosdecincomil*', for example. Soon I realised that all the commodities in the marketplace were ranked according to a fixed price. There is, for example: 'a tomato of one hundred'; 'a pineapple of five hundred' or 'a pineapple of a thousand' as well as 't-shirts of five thousand' but also 't-shirts of ten thousand'.

It is striking that in an economic context like that of Equatorial Guinea, where the fluctuation of supply and demand is so variable, there exists a scheme of fixed prices that ranks commodities. Waged workers' payments, especially those who depend on the State, can be delayed several days or even weeks. As most members of the population do not possess a bank account the payment has to be made in cash. It is common to see long lines of people standing around the walls of local banks chasing the shade during the first and last days of the month. The banknotes to pay the salaries normally arrive late or in several waves, which explains the queues of people waiting to get their salaries as soon as possible. This waiting also creates a period of time in which hardly any currency circulates, and the supply of goods on the market is therefore greater than the purchase capacity of the population. At the same time, the closing of the borders on a whim generates moments of scarcity and shortage, where even the wealthiest and most well connected can find it difficult to acquire daily necessities. Guineans use the military expression '*no hay en plaza*' (Eng.: there is nothing at the post) to indicate the impossibility of acquiring a particular product in such moments of shortage.

The prices that Guineans pay for imported goods vary according to these fluctuations and, obviously, they vary more for foodstuffs and daily necessities – like gas or kerosene – than for clothing and apparel. During episodes of shortage, the *tomate de cien* (Eng.: tomato of one hundred) can cost a hundred and fifty or two

hundred francs, and the chili-pepper of one hundred (Sp.: *picante de cien*) can cost two hundred. When in January 2011 there was a period of shortage of second-hand clothes the 't-shirts of five hundred' could cost almost two thousand CFA Francs. Whereas Guineans seemed to be used to the fluctuation of prices for foodstuffs or gas and kerosene, the increase in clothing prices was considered abnormal and an extreme symptom of the poor functioning of the system: '*Aquí nos dejan sufriendo, mal. Una camiseta de quinientos en asamsé ya va costando un dos mil*' (Eng.: 'Here they leave us, suffering. A t-shirt of five hundred in *asamsé* is already costing 'a two thousand').

'A two thousand, a thousand, a five thousand...' Price, in this case, is understood and referred to as an unbreakable unit. Often these units correspond to the values of the different banknotes that circulate in the country (*un quinientos, un mil, un dosmil*). Given the above, we could say that in the system I am describing goods have two types of prices: a piece-category price, which is ideal and quite permanent ('a t-shirt of five hundred'), and the price set in the marketplace, which is more contingent on fluctuations of supply and demand, and which is tangible and material as it refers to the price cited in the actual physical transaction ('that is already costing a two thousand'). The materiality of the money (banknotes, money bundles) is, then, very present both in the transactions – all of them made in cash – and in the way of referring to the ideal price and ranking of goods.

This price set in the physical space of the marketplace is not only set according to market laws but is also negotiated according to moral dispositions. This negotiation is contingent on many factors, including: the availability of merchandise, the particular consumer (age, gender, ethnicity, status, income), the relationship between the latter and the seller (kinship, patronage, friendship, status) and the reason for the exchange (profit, hardship, celebrations) (Roitman 2005: 80). The negotiated price has to be 'just', or fair, but this sense of economic justice differs radically from the sense of 'just price' the colonial state had. The negotiated just price is set in each transaction, and can vary greatly. It has to be 'just' for the two parties in negotiation, thus, if the customer is in a better life situation than the trader, the customer is expected to be more generous and pay 'one thousand for an onion of five hundred'.

These moral considerations filter and expand throughout other ambits of social life, such as when establishing and paying rents and taxes. The market women I have

worked with decide how and when to pay the taxes for their stall. In this sense, taxes are perceived as prices that can be negotiated and must be 'just'. It is to the price negotiations and the moral underpinnings of market work and transactions that I will dedicate the next section of the dissertation.



Figure 28 Doing shopping in Cobocalleja (Madrid, Spain). January 2013.



Figure 29 Aba produced Male T-Shirt in SEMU



Figure 30 Banner of the 'Aguacate' Industrial Estate in Fuenlabrada, Madrid; Aguacate hair extensions and shoes from Elche in SEMU

Part C. The marketplace. Pricing systems, debts and political co-optation

In Equatorial Guinea commodities appear to be categorised according to fixed prices, for example: 'there is *tomato of one hundred, pineapple of five hundred and pineapple of one thousand, t-shirts of five thousand, but also t-shirts of ten thousand*'. These fixed prices serve as scales to assess quality in a broad and complex sense (Guyer 2004). However, the price Guineans actually pay for different imported goods varies and is set anew in each transaction. It is contingent on many factors, including: the availability of merchandise; the particular consumer (age, gender, ethnicity, status, income); the relationship between the latter and the seller (kinship, patronage, friendship, status); and the reason for the exchange (profit, hardship, celebrations) (Roitman 2005: 80). The negotiation for a just price not only takes place between sellers and buyers in the context of a market transaction. In fact, the moral principles that underlay these exchanges are also present in other spheres that include other actors like state institutions, for instance the payment of rent for the market stalls. In Chapter 5, I show how the notion of a *just price* becomes an important device in which understandings of power relationships and political claims are expressed through the market.

Chapter 6, following the framework of the moral underpinnings of market work, explores the sense of *entitlement* that market women have in regard to their trading activities. I will analyse how Guineans understand the practice of 'doing business' (*negocio*) and their sense of entitlement within it, and, subsequently, what it means when they consider that this practice is in crisis or when they accuse particular groups of economic wrongdoing. I will focus throughout on the hierarchies, the moral discourses and the political co-optation under which market women are subsumed.

Chapter 5

Embedded prices: moral economies of the market

5.1 Introduction

In January 2011 Lucrecia, a second-hand clothing seller in SEMU complained to me about the precariousness of her everyday life and that of those like her: ‘Things are going really bad for us. A tomato of 100 is already costing 200! They have completely abandoned us!’¹¹³ Complaining about how SEGESA¹¹⁴ was leaving entire neighbourhoods in the dark, or about how *malabeñas* suffered from mud in their streets during the rainy season, even jokes sarcastically mocking the unaccomplished slogans of the State development plan *Horizonte Veinte-Veinte*, were fully integrated into everyday conversations in the marketplace. However, Lucrecia’s comment sounded somehow stronger than the other, more common, complaints. First, how can a tomato of 100 cost 200? I had shopped in the market before, so I knew that ‘*tomate de cien*’ (tomato of 100) refers to a particular small can with concentrated tomato paste that is, indeed, normally sold at the price of 100 FCFA¹¹⁵. I had also seen that the prices for foodstuffs were more or less stable: onions, for example, were sold in bundles of 50 FCFA or 100 FCFA independently of the fluctuations of supply and demand. What did, however, fluctuate according to the availability of merchandise was the quality and the amount of onions in the bundles. At times when there was less availability of onions, the prices remained the same, while the quality of the bundle was reduced holding fewer or smaller onions in poorer condition.¹¹⁶ The same

¹¹³ ‘Las cosas están muy mal para nosotras. Un tomate de cien ya va costando un doscientos ¡Nos han abandonado! Lucrecia, in Malabo January 2011.

¹¹⁴ SEGESA- Sociedad Eléctrica de Guinea Ecuatorial, S.A. is the national electricity company.

¹¹⁶ I later learned that this had been described in the literature already, for instance by Clark (1994) and by Roitman (2005).

system described for onions also applied to potatoes, tomatoes, limes, peppers, and aubergines, as well as to rice and stock cubes. When prices that are supposed to be fixed are said to fluctuate, something must be going on.

Second, it was clear that the complaint included a specific accusation and was directed from a particular group ('us') to a particular group ('them'). There was no doubt that, in the statement, the governing elite was accused of 'abandoning' ordinary people. The multiple grievances ordinary Guineans¹¹⁷ formulated on a daily basis would hardly ever include an 'us' and a 'them' as people tended to be afraid of directing their protest to the elite in the claustrophobic dictatorial environment where an accusation of being against the political establishment could invite severe repressive measures. In the following pages I will show how conversations about *price* allowed for the articulation of the existence of social groupings and the directing of protests to the repressive elite without fear of reprisal.

The moral edge in Lucrecia's complaint seemed to invoke the existence of an *appropriate price* for a 'tomate de cién' and to interpret the increase of it as an indication of wrongdoing by the elite, an indication of their 'abandonment' of the population. Abandonment to what though? Does the very presence of the idea of price indicate that the alleged neglect refers to the abandonment to the market economy that makes prices fluctuate according to supply and demand? Or maybe to the abandonment of the least privileged to profit-seeking intermediaries? These questions come about partly because they resonate with a long established intellectual debate about how to preserve justice within a system of market exchange (see Luetchford 2012). The first articulations that would later nourish Western political economists' theorisations about value and price, were those of Thomas Aquinas who, in the 13th century, recovered Aristotle's ideas about exchange. For both Aristotle and Aquinas, profit-oriented exchange was unnatural and destructive of bonds between households. 'Prices should therefore be set so as to exclude profit; the ruling principle of exchange should be one of equality and mutual benefit', and should be oriented to preserve self-sufficiency in a household centred economy (Parry 1989, 84). Aquinas' formula of the *just price* takes production and labour as its central components. Prices, in order to be *just* had to guarantee the social reproduction of those producing the goods for exchange (Bloch&Parry 1989).

Marxist theories of value inherited Aquinas' understandings of the *just price* as the fair remuneration of labour. For the liberal theorists the free market price would be the fair synthesis of labour value, exchange value and supply and demand (Ibid.). Historical work like E. P. Thompson's classic reflection on 18th-century England's food riots contributed to the formulation of such moralizing theories about exchange in a critical perspective. Thompson showed how particular moral underpinnings played out during the transition to modern Capitalism in the tensions between an extractive elite and a precarious population in Europe. *Fair prices* were a crucial component of the 'moral economy of the poor', and their transgression was at the centre of the complaints that triggered social conflict.

[R]iots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractices among dealers, or by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, banking, etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view on social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor'. (Thompson 1991,188)

In the protests that Thompson describes, the 'fixing of the price' of flour was central. Protesters stopped farmers on the way to the mills and took measures to force them to sell their grain at lower prices. Protestors prevented grain from being stored, thus forcing farmers to bring it to the market thus preventing speculation: 'There is a deeply-felt conviction that prices *ought*, in times of dearth, to be regulated, and that the profiteer put himself outside of the society' (Thompson 1991, 229). This demand for fixed prices was in complete opposition to what, according to J. C. Scott, South-East Asian peasants claimed at the beginning of the 20th century. In the work that would consolidate the methods and approach of the *moral economy* canon within anthropology, Scott did not look at the claims and demands of poor consumers, but rather studied the claims of peasants from which the emergent colonial state tried to charge fixed rents and taxes: 'a fixed charge which does not vary with the peasant's capacity to pay in any given year, [...] is likely to be viewed as more exploitative than a fiscal burden which varies with his income' (Scott 1976, 7).

Both theoretical and empirical work on the *just price* demonstrates its non-universal and contingent character. The material circumstances of the producers and

the consumers, the precariousness and the fluctuation of their income, their relationship with power structures, the perception of social hierarchies and classes and their reciprocity norms and expectations, allow for particular definitions of what is *just* in the exchange. For Scott the threshold that makes a situation of exploitation sustainable or not is the 'right to subsistence'. For Scott's peasants, the *just price* for rents and taxes is not calculated according to a rationale of 'how much is taken?' but rather 'what is left?', so the price is only *just* if 'what is left' is sufficient to subsist (Scott 1976). However, what 'subsistence' means also depends on the combination of norms, meanings and practices that make up a particular moral economy. These are, ironically, the same values and moral dispositions that make social inequalities and particular forms of capital accumulation possible (Narotzky 2015).

In this chapter I describe how prices are set and negotiated in the marketplace. Here, notions of the *fair price* and the *just price* are crucial in understanding this process. In Equatorial Guinea commodities appear to be categorised according to fixed prices: 'there is a tomato *of one hundred*, pineapple of one thousand, t-shirts of five thousand but also t-shirts of ten thousand', for example. These fixed prices serve as scales to assess quality in a broad and complex sense. However, the price Guineans actually pay for the different imported goods varies and it is set anew in each transaction (or rather the quantity and quality of the bundles for particular price is adjusted as I described in the case of onions). It is contingent on many factors, including: the availability of merchandise, the reason for the exchange (profit, hardship, celebration), the particular buyer (age, gender, ethnicity) and the relationship between buyer and seller (kinship, patronage, friendship, status, income) (see also Roitman 2005, 80). The final price agreed in the marketplace is decided and perceived to be *fair* only after taking into consideration the social background and the particular situation of the transactors.

However, prices are not only negotiated in this way in the context of marketplace transactions. In the following pages, I show how prices of rents and taxes are negotiated according to similar moral principles, and how the logics of a *fair price* transcend the marketplace and provide legitimacy to political claims that people cannot make in other contexts or conversations. I will explore the question of *how* and *why* price opens up the possibility of making political claims in a context of dictatorship and apparent lack of political debate. The response to this question is twofold. On the one hand, I will place my material in dialogue with the existing

anthropological reflections on the embeddedness of money in most aspects of the societies of Equatorial Africa to show how pricing and ranking are practices that pervade sociality and that are not exclusive of the marketplace. Pricing, ranking and haggling over money are activities in which every person is entitled, and also is obliged, to participate in order to provide for his or her household, but also to be able to be part of the many other crucial rituals of everyday social life. On the other hand, following Janet Roitman, I contend that ‘the pricing system itself is a political institution insofar as price, as practice, is a way of discussing a social relation’ (Roitman 2005, 83). If *price negotiations* are a crucial aspect of sociality and a powerful tool to assess and discuss social relationships, their articulation in Lucrecia’s complaints is no longer so puzzling.

This chapter will start with a reflection on some of the existing literature on money and price in Equatorial Africa more broadly to provide a basis for the specific discussion of negotiations over the ‘just price’ in Equatorial Guinea that follows. The specific extravert economic and political context of Equatorial Guinea is discussed next, leading to a discussion of distribution channels and the organisation of the market. The nature of negotiations, relationships and price-setting in the market and beyond is then discussed, whereby the examples of *Adut Elang* (occupation of land) and *Naná-Mangue* (first lady-led association) are introduced to show the political nature of price setting. The relationship to the actions – or inactions – of the state are analysed next. The conclusion reflects on the weight of price negotiations in the arrangement and re-arrangement of the moral economy.

5.2 Money and price in Equatorial Africa

As elsewhere in West and Equatorial Africa, the history of prices in Equatorial Guinea is closely tied to the establishment of the colonial state. In a context where land and labour were not paid or calculated, prices of commodities were totally arbitrary. This was especially the case for foodstuffs, which in early colonial times were not produced for the market nor through market relations, at least not initially (see Guyer 1987 and Roitman 2005 for colonial Cameroon). In Equatorial Guinea, both the prices of extractive commodities and of imported goods were fixed by the Spanish *Junta Reguladora de Importación y Exportación*, a colonial organ that claimed to have absolute control over prices (Perpiñá-Grau 1945, 283,403). Establishing prices involved 'problematizing value beyond the question of supply and

demand, since habits of valuation were also to be governed' (Roitman 2005, 56). Fixing prices was yet another tool that the colonial state used to consolidate its domination. The colonial sense of economic justice considered negotiating, discussing, rounding and adapting prices to be problematic (Ibid. 72). 'Just prices', justified by means of a calculation of components that were mostly 'fictitious' for the African population, made it possible for colonial exchanges and taxation to function. Obviously, the extent to which state regulation mediated all transactions is difficult to assess, but it seems clear that there existed various different systems of price-setting due to the relevance of smuggling and bargaining; the fictitious adjustment between prices, wages and taxes constantly failed and generated other *compositions* embedded in relationships beyond the state and the market (Guyer 2009).

Seminal texts have shown how Western and Central African economies have been historically shaped by unequal relationships with foreign monies, goods and equivalences and local transactional conventions, generating particular arrangements or compositions that have, as Jane Guyer put it, 'bewildered' scholars, forcing them to question interpretations derived from classic western Economics. The result of such bewilderment has been the production of a corpus of theory and ethnography that proved crucial for the development of economic anthropology (see for example: Maurer 2006 and Guyer 2004).

Paul Bohannan (1955) introduced the influential concept of 'spheres of exchange', and documented the existence of multiple 'special-purpose currencies' among the Tiv in pre-colonial Nigeria and how the subsequent introduction of colonial all-purpose money generated a crisis in the moral arrangements within specific spheres of exchange. Following Chris Gregory's (1982) critique of the Maussian classification of gift and commodity exchange, Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch contested the general assumption that 'monetisation generates an atrophy of moral economy arrangements'. They argued that 'money itself did not transform relationships' as it 'contains and transmits qualities of those who transact it' (Bloch and Parry 1989, 8). The study of the imposition and domestication of colonial and postcolonial currencies in African marriage payments, for instance, has provided rich evidence for how the story is not as straight forward as is portrayed within classic European economic theory: the possession of all-purpose money does not directly imply 'complete personal freedom' from social obligations (Simmel 2004,

311) nor does its introduction imply that everything (commodity or not) can be purchased and valued against it (Marx 1975, 161).

Rich ethnography and historical work has evidenced how colonial and, supposedly, all-purpose monies were incorporated to multiple-currency repertoires and how commodities and money constantly traverse different 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986): special-purpose currencies were produced and encouraged by European traders in the nineteenth century (Law 1995); commodities were used as money in both ritual and secular exchanges (Heap 2009); and cattle represented value and was used as 'commodity money' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990). Thus, different monies and commodities were pegged to each other in contingent performances rather than in symmetrical conversions (Guyer 2004).

Africans, as a result of these historical trajectories, are used to multiple currencies ('hard and soft' eg. Guyer 2004 for Nigeria), they are familiar with negotiating and 'exchanging goods and services that are explicitly not the match of each other while still measuring on a monetary scale' (ibid. 47), while calculations are constantly made and equivalences re-arranged to accommodate the uncertainties of economies with weak state regulation (Berry 1995). Calculations, ranks and conversions are eminently political as far as they are the result of a continuous assessment of the social and the material conditions of the transactors and multiple currency repertoires constitute a basic tool to face the precariousness and uncertainty often present in most African livelihoods. Jane Guyer in her seminal description of African economic rationalities argued that they function with the visualisation of a horizon rather than on a calculation of gains in each and every transaction (Guyer 2004). She contends that for individual African actors the minutiae of micro-level calculations are less important than this overall horizon. While I concur with this viewpoint, this does not mean that close-by or micro-scalar conversations and agreements about prices do not have effects. In this chapter I show how conversations about price are crucial for the production of the moral economy through small transactions. The moral economy determines what possible outcomes of such close-by transactions that are being negotiated. Hegemony is thus co-produced through many such transactions, and their very performance thereby speaks to politics – especially so because these transactions occur everywhere.

For the peoples of Equatorial Africa, money has a crucial function not only in day-to-day economic transactions but also in ritual life. Pricing, ranking, and

haggling over money are activities that transcend the marketplace, dominating public space but also penetrating the most intimate spheres of ordinary people's lives. Folkloric Fang dance groups, for instance, evaluate their costs and fix the prices for their performances: every member of the group receives a fee depending on their role in the performance, the different stages of the dance are considered distinct and are charged with a specific fee, taking photographs or video adds another fee, and so on and so forth (Fernandez 1984, 126-128). Knowledge can also be monetised. Folklore dance apprentices, religious initiates (baptism and communion in the Catholic Church but also initiation into syncretic religious movements such as Bwiti (see Fernandez *ibid.*) pay for the training and knowledge that allow them to be part of the community. The oral information concerning a particular museum object also deserves a fee to be paid to the museum owner and curator (Valenciano-Mañé and Picornell 2009). Social misbehavior triggers a wide range of financial penalties. Being late to a family meeting is a misdemeanor charged with fixed fines. Attending a rotating credit association meeting without the agreed and correct wax-print uniform can cost the offender a particular amount, agreed beforehand and payment of the fine is, thereafter, unavoidable. Money comes first, then the apology or the justification for the mistake.

In marriage arrangements, the relatives of the bride are exhaustively listed in a notebook. Next to each name the family discusses which items each member should receive as part of the last section of the bride price (*nsoá* in Fang). Not only the item's category is listed, each type of good is ranked according to a price. A hypothetical example would be: 'Oyono Mba wants a mattress of 50,000, Ndong Mba wants a shirt of 20,000, Maria Mayé Ndong wants a cooking pot of 10,000...'. In this manner, kin proximity and rank are commensurate to certain categories of goods and particular prices. The price is at the center of the wedding ritual where a fierce discussion about the goods and money the groom's family offers often pivots around the prices and qualities of the items to be given. Peter Geschiere described how confrontations over money, counting banknotes and fierce haggling constitute the climax of funeral and wedding rituals amongst the Maka of southeast Cameroon. When a funeral participant asked a priest for a toll at the entrance of the village of the deceased, Geschiere's assistant observed 'they are making the market everywhere' (Geschiere 2000, 63).

One way to perform power and control over money, instead of storing it or turned it into investment capital, is to deliberately spend it, not only consuming conspicuously, but also ostentatiously giving it to others. Spending one's salary inviting all the attendants in the bar of the neighborhood, 'spraying' or *faroter* banknotes on a dancer's body in a night club, on a folkloric performance or to the newly wedded in a marriage party, flashing piles of banknotes from the pockets and handing them to a lover so that she can purchase new expensive clothes, are just some examples of common expressions of bigmanship. Here, prices are crucial in ranking goods and people: being able to have natural hair extensions 'of 200,000' is an indication of being well networked, to cite an example. In the same vein, paying a higher price in the many contexts where purchase, fees or toll payments are required becomes a demonstration of wealth and power. As I will discuss below, having the ability to pay a higher price but trying to bargain – asking for a reduction while being able to afford expensive goods – is often considered morally challenging. Negotiation over prices, in the case I describe below, inevitably implies the assessment and the ranking not only of goods but also of people. The valuation of goods and the evaluation of people configure scales that can be pegged to each other, and price constitutes a numeric expression of these scales. At the same time, the price negotiation is staged and performed, the performance itself being a mechanism for deploying ones' abilities and, therefore, of performing self-worth and prestige (Guyer, 1994).

5.3 Oil economy: extraversion, inflation and regulation

As already described in previous chapters, at the time I conducted fieldwork, Equatorial Guinea was experiencing the height of its oil-boom, which affected almost every aspect of ordinary Guineans' lives even though they did not benefit directly from the oil wealth, as the Guinean oil industry has developed *offshore* from the first oil well discovered in the early nineties (Roitman and Roso 2001, 132). Although the first years of the oil boom produced little material evidence on-shore, it had important socio-political consequences (see Appel 2012; 2017). The influx of oil wealth has guaranteed the continuity of the Nguemist regime: the Nguema family took power after the country's independence from Spain in 1968 and has remained in power, leading two successive dictatorships (Macias Nguema, 1968-1979, Obiang Nguema, 1979-today). By the late-1980s, Nguema's regime was challenged, as

Equatorial Guinea was compelled to accept foreign aid and its associated conditions. Soon, however, oil wealth allowed for independence from the Bretton Woods institutions and therefore the avoidance of the economic and political reforms they required. Through a structure which has at least the outside appearance of a parliamentary democracy, president Obiang-Nguema has been leading the country for almost forty years. His regime has attracted frequent denunciations from international organisations for the corrupt practices of the elite and the violation of human rights. A failed coup d'état in 2005 and the attacks by allegedly Nigerian mercenaries in Bata (2007) and on the Presidential Palace in Malabo (2009) increased the paranoia of the rulers, which has resulted in discourses which condemn both foreigners and political criticism, as well as the strengthening of the police state.

In a small country with a population that does not exceed a million inhabitants, the regime controls every corner by means of a tight bureaucratic structure of the ruling party, the membership of which has become almost mandatory to be able to move upwards socially, as it is an implicit requirement to access certain jobs, but also to be allowed to set up a small enterprise. The system favours loyalty and at the same time it tightens the control of divergent voices, which can be immediately shut up, or relegated to the 'outside' of the system (re. permanent unemployment or exile). Critical positioning against the regime from inside the country is only sustainable with the material support of foreign institutions. Only workers of foreign aid organisations, independent professionals that are contracted by foreign companies, or returnees hired as expats with an overseas passport can really be sure of the material conditions that allow them to be active in oppositional politics. Obviously, these conditions only apply to a very limited section of the population; most Guineans are compelled to regard themselves as apolitical (Okenve, 2009). However, the absence of 'big P' political debates gives way to various 'small p' political strategies, of which, I argue, the conversations about prices analysed in this chapter are part.

One reason why the oil boom produced so little material evidence on-shore, is that the oil industry's needs have been completely externally sourced, from foreign labour and electricity generators, to groceries and toilet paper for oil rigs and gated compounds. Investment in the construction of general infrastructure such as electricity plants, drinking water distribution, and education, has been extremely slow, leaving the living conditions of ordinary people in a precarious state. More than two decades after the discovery of oil, inequalities have increased dramatically.

Luxury cars commute between glamorous hotels and the tall glass-fronted office buildings that mushroom alongside the insalubrious slums and shanty towns that have grown with various waves of migrants attracted by the possibility of making a living and accessing the revenues of the oil economy. The dependency on foreign imports has increased, as the migration towards the urban centres leads to the abandonment of self-sufficient farming. This dependency and the influx of oil money resulted in a particularly rapid inflation during the first years of oil exploitation (Frynas, 2004; Campos-Serrano, 2013). Inflation stabilised around 5 percent after 1996 and dropped to 1.6 percent in 2015 according to the World Bank database¹¹⁸. My experience in the six years (2007-2013) that I intermittently lived in Equatorial Guinea was that the prices of basic foodstuffs such as bread, cassava, beer and canned tomatoes remained relatively stable. Major inflation has been experienced in those sectors oriented to the newly rich elite and to the foreign companies offering services to the regime¹¹⁹. House rentals and leisure activities targeted to the new wealthy elites have seen exponential price increases while the budget for an ordinary household has grown much less.

The reasons for this disparity in the pricing system are diverse. On the one hand, Equatorial Guinea has been part of the Franc CFA zone and the customs union of Central Africa (CEMAC) since 1983, which has relatively slowed down the devaluation of the currency and avoided episodes of hyperinflation experienced in other oil producing African countries like Angola or Nigeria. The CEMAC guarantees the convertibility of the Franc CFA to the Euro at a fixed rate, which means that the margins of maneuver for the currency policy of the Central African States are limited. Different types of goods, however, attract differential customs charges. Most of the goods consumed by ordinary Guineans are taxed a small amount when they enter across the borders of the CEMAC and have free-circulation within it. Additionally, certain basic foodstuffs produced within the CEMAC area, such as rice, corn,

118 World Bank Database:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?locations=GQ> (accessed 31 August 2017).

119 Hotel rooms, night clubs, spa services, private car rentals, have extremely high prices. Some of these services did not even exist in the early 2000s and it is only later that luxury hotels, but also medium range branches opened in the main cities of the country. For example, a meal in a well-established and reputed old restaurant in Bata frequented by locals costs around 5,000 FCFA while an hotel room in the medium range hotel (ie. 3 star Ibis branch) costs a minimum of 90,000 FCFA. Besides, the standard salary of a local low ranked civil servant such as a nurse or a teacher does not exceed 200,000 FCFA.

sorghum, beans, cassava, palm oil, cocoa and coffee, have a special status and can circulate freely around the member states. Other goods, including canned and frozen foodstuffs are taxed at higher rates and, finally, luxury goods attract the highest customs charges and are relatively more expensive.

5.4 Provisioning and pricing: supermarkets and marketplace socios

Customs procedures and regulations, however, do not fully explain the disparity in the price system. This is especially the case because the application of tax is variable and often dependent on further informal relationships between importers and customs officers. Smuggling small quantities of goods for sale is also a common practice amongst those who can arrange a trip abroad and can fill their suitcases with merchandise. The latter is so common that sometimes smuggled goods make up the majority of the merchandise in a market stall. Alongside official custom regulations there is a set of implicit rules that protects small-scale traders and allows them to circulate their merchandise without extra cost. The avoidance of customs, however, does not necessarily have a direct impact on the final price paid for these goods by the time they reach the consumer, as the final payment is the result of the assessment of particular relationships at the very moment of the transaction (*vid infra*).

A further explanation for the price disparities is the existence of different channels of distribution. For the basic foodstuffs, there are at least three channels through which imported goods arrive in the hands of Guinean consumers. Most of the foreign companies established in the country that employ expatriate personnel import their own groceries directly, either through their own channels (filling containers from their countries of origin) or through the catering companies that have set up business after the oil-boom to offer full provisioning to expat compounds. A second channel of distribution is that of the big importers that own supermarkets in the main urban centers and import groceries mainly from Spain. Retailing is only one of many activities for these companies, who are also into construction, logistics, transport and wholesale. This sector of the market is dominated by three companies: Santy, Martinez-Hermanos, and EGTC. The last channel of distribution of foodstuffs is the marketplace, which is the space where ordinary Guineans source most of their foodstuffs. The marketplace retail is controlled by women who source the goods they sell in their stalls either from the wholesale commercial *factorias* (the second distribution channel) for items such as rice and stock cubes, or directly from the

market in Akombang in Cameroon for fruits and vegetables. They turn bulk commodities into small affordable portions that fit the everyday budget of ordinary households.

In the provisioning of an ordinary Guinean household, the marketplace channel is the most attended, while recourse is taken to the supermarket channel for specific products such as drinks, cans, and powdered milk. The elite and the expat newcomers, on the other hand, resource their household mainly, if not completely, in the supermarket. This could explain the price disparity, which mirrors the rent/wealth inequalities the oil economy has brought about whereby, for example, the salaries of the workers in the new economy are at least ten times those of the salaries of long-standing local civil servants such as school teachers (Campos-Serrano 2013).

In the same manner that we account for the existence of the different channels of distribution, we can talk about the existence of parallel pricing systems. Provisioning in the supermarket means acquiring goods at pre-fixed prices, which are indicated on the labels of the products on the self-service shelving system. Few to no words are exchanged with the cashier, who is usually a foreigner (generally from India or Lebanon): the exchange takes place (cash for goods) and the transaction is finished without much communication. Two of the main companies that operate supermarkets in Equatorial Guinea (Santy and Martinez-Hermanos) date back to the colonial period and, therefore, have a long history in the importation and distribution of basic necessities. Their customers are familiar with the quality range and the high prices of their merchandise, they do not negotiate prices, nor ask to buy on credit.

Provisioning in the marketplace produces an extremely different experience. The relationship established between the market women and their customers is tighter and the transaction does not end with the exchange of a particular good for a particular amount of cash. Both seller and customer refer to each other as *socias* (lit. business partners) and their relationship extends beyond the marketplaces and involves much more than just goods and cash. The mutual denomination of *socias* emphasises the reciprocal nature of their relationship, which is established amongst equals for the purpose of household provisioning. In the same way that buyers attend the marketplace to acquire what they need for themselves and their relatives, market women attend to the marketplace in order to be able to provide for their households. In the marketplace and among *socias*, all sorts of exchanges and bonds are produced:

market women exchange goods and cash amongst each other, they take part in rotating credit associations which they can share with their non-trader *socias*, they run small sickness and accident funds, they arrange Church services for the deceased and the blessing of the marketplace, they organise care for their children and distribute the tasks required for the purchase, transport and storage of the merchandise and they share costs of shipping if needed. In the marketplace, alongside material provisioning, services can also be provided with or without the involvement of cash. At the same time, prices are negotiated among *socias*, so the outcome must fit the interests of both parties as the negotiation is carried out on the moral grounds of an assumed equality. The particular situation of each *socia* is taken into account at the time of the exchange. For instance, when a clothing trader has had a bad day of trading and only made a small amount of cash from the sale of her goods, her *socia* at the foodstuffs side of the marketplace, knowing the situation of her partner, will downwardly adjust the price of foodstuffs. Conversely, at the end of a profitable market day the price paid to the *socia* for foodstuffs will be more generous.

5.5 Prices in SEMU

As described in the introduction, SEMU is one of the newly grown neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Malabo, named after the first electric power plant established on that site after independence (SEMU = Servicio Eléctrico Municipal). The neighbourhood is occupied by a mix of wealthier and poorer people, and borders one of the poorest shanty towns of the capital. The construction of a large marketplace here was the solution found by the Malabo city hall to relocate and control the increasing number of market vendors who had come to Malabo, clustering around the old market hall and public squares of the historical centre. The relocation would facilitate the implementation of rent payments and taxes for the holding of a market-stall, a strategy that has been noticed and analysed in other urban African contexts (Tranberg-Hansen 2004; Lindel and Ihalainen 2014). As already indicated, most of the sellers are Fang women who came to Malabo from the Rio Muni area in successive waves of migration after Independence. These Fang women specialise in the selling of foodstuffs (*bayamselam*), second-hand clothes (*asamsé*) and prêt-a-porter first-hand clothing (*elegancia*), each product having a dedicated section in the market, and its own organisational institutions, namely sellers' associations. Their customers are ordinary Malabo dwellers, servants who shop almost on a daily basis, and other

market sellers. It is rare to find an expatriate worker from an oil-related company doing his or her shopping in the marketplace, and it is also very rare to see a member of the Guinean elite sourcing her household in SEMU. Wealthy households employ domestic servants that are in charge of the sourcing of foodstuffs and, thus, of going to the marketplace.

The range of merchandise one can find in SEMU is diverse and rigorously classified by locally-established categories described in Chapters 3 and 4. These different categories indicate different origins and qualities. At the same time, the categories are ranked through the expression of a particular *price*. This *price-category* serves as a mode of classification but, as I have already described, and different from that what takes place in the supermarket, the actual amount of money involved in the transaction will be agreed at the time of transaction by the *socias*. In this agreement there are many factors involved, but in the end a sense of ‘fairness’ expressed through price underpins transactions. *Market prices* are contingent and variable, and are relatively unrelated to costs of production or labour. The mentioned *price category* is taken into account in the valuation of goods. However, the rules and dispositions of the moral economy provide the framework for the generation of the final price and the terms of the exchange. Being in the marketplace trading with foreign goods and negotiating prices, and thereby creating ties and generating debts, has become part of the set of tools that ordinary Guineans have to discuss and contest the political hegemony¹²⁰. The two ethnographic examples that follow will illustrate this political side of market price negotiation.

5.6 Adut Elang: when the negotiation takes action

The moral considerations that underpin transactions filter and expand through other spheres of social life, such as when establishing and paying rents and taxes. Market women are asked to pay rent for the use of their stall. In exchange for the rent, they can occupy a stall and have access to a section of one of the warehouses that surround the marketplace to keep their merchandise. They are also obliged to pay a

¹²⁰ Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta have recently provided an interesting reflection on the method and approach of *moral economy* and its usefulness to approach the processes of hegemony creation. I find their take on *moral economy* especially useful for my reflection on how price negotiations are an important field where hegemony is produced and contested (Palomera and Vetta 2016).

tax to the city hall that is collected in cash in the marketplace by agents that circulate almost every day. Taxes and rents are perceived as prices that can be negotiated and must be 'just' for each party. Market women feel entitled to decide when and how they should pay and which quantities are just or unjust, not only in economic relations with one another, but also vis-à-vis authorities, and opposing ideas as to what constitutes a 'just price' can be the source of conflict. This conflict often requires arbitration through the higher echelons of the State. The arbitration of the contentions between market vendors and Malabo Town Hall rent and tax collectors is often carried out by the First Lady, Constancia Mangué de Obiang. Constancia, often referred to as *Nana Mangué*, mediates most of the disputes and often claims to be impartial and *just* to everybody. Since the beginning of the eighties *Nana Mangué* has also provided a regular supply of micro-credit to market women, thereby becoming the most powerful *socia* market women have.

Every day, agents from the Town Hall walk through SEMU market to collect the taxes. Every woman should pay between 200 and 500 FCFA on top of the rent that she has to pay to keep the stall in place. In practice, every day a negotiation takes place over the amount demanded by the tax-collector and the amount which market women are prepared to pay. Market women do not completely resist paying taxes but they only pay them when they consider that their right to a livelihood is guaranteed. This resonates with the moral economy and the 'right to subsistence' Scott has described for South East Asian peasants (Scott, 1976). The same types of conversations and rhetoric are repeated every day: the tax officer goes around the stalls asking for the payment. When a market woman sees them, her face takes on a serious expression and, without making eye contact with the tax collector, she says something like this: 'My sister, don't you see I'm suffering here? I have not sold anything today, not even a 500. I have to give food to my children'¹²¹. In some cases, the officer eventually leaves empty-handed with an angry expression. At other times, the officer insists on payment, arguing that the seller has not paid for days. Then the seller takes a couple of coins from under a cloth that covers the stall and gives them to the officer while sucking her teeth. Afterwards, the tax officer dispatches a receipt and leaves. The discussion can lead to violent arguments into which other market

¹²¹ Sp.: 'Aaa mi hermana; ¿No ves que estoy aquí sufriendo? No he vendido aunque un quinientos. Tengo que dar de comer a mis hijos'.

women intervene. In these cases, the officer always loses the argument and has to leave the marketplace.

Taxes and prices are, thus, perceived and used as political devices there where there is little space for other articulations of political action. This is more clearly revealed when observing the structure and history of the SEMU marketplace itself. As I have already mentioned, in 2004 the City Hall of Malabo decided to relocate the marketplace to the outskirts of the city. The main reason for this re-location of the marketplace was so that the Town Hall could manage and tax the increasing number of traders that had come to the city after the end of Macias dictatorship¹²². The move included the construction of a new building, which was supposed to have improved hygienic conditions, running water, and electricity for the refrigeration of foodstuffs. According to my interlocutors it was clear from the start that the new building would be too small for the number of traders that were to be evicted from the city centre markets. Only the association of clothing sellers had already reached 2,500 affiliates. Lucrecia said that the 'conflict was ineluctable'. The distribution of the stalls was a difficult endeavour effectuated through intermediaries: powerful women, including the Mayor of Malabo amongst other civil servants, acquired the licences for the majority of the new market stalls and they expected to rent them out afterwards to better-positioned market sellers. The market traders considered the distribution of the stalls in the new market to be unfair and the rents demanded for the new stalls extortionate. They decided collectively – and with the consent of the market-sellers association – to occupy a section of the market and build their own stalls, for which they have refused to pay anything but a 'just price'. This section of the marketplace is known as *Adut Elang*, which means 'taken by force' in Fang (see also Melibea *unpublished*). The new marketplace remained empty for almost four years until a consensus was reached in 2013 and a few women occupied the stalls. *Adut Elang*, however, did not disappear and it continued to host the majority of the sellers in SEMU market. When I spent time in SEMU, my interlocutors often narrated the story of the land occupation when talking about market women's organisational strategies. As Maite, a first-hand clothing seller in SEMU explained:

¹²² The same tendency –relocation in order to be able to tax and control – has been observed across West-Central Africa. Ethnographic work such as Gracia Clark (1994) or Ilda Lindell's has provided insights of the implications of these movements and the strategies for resistance that traders have engaged with.

‘we [market women] know that we need to contribute. Every market woman wants to pay her rent and to make her contributions. We all clean the marketplace, we repair our stalls. We are always ready when the First Lady asks us to collaborate. Whatever she asks, we do [...]. But the big ones, they know how to abuse. We don’t want to be abused and this is why we did *Adut Elang*. We are not savage...we are persons’ Maite in Malabo, December, 2012¹²³

In what turned out to be a successful attempt to control the organisational capacity of market women, the government, through the First Lady, created an association named after her *Naná Mangué* (Mother Mangué). This association extends micro credit to the sellers in the marketplace through subsidiary associations. The functioning of these loans mirrors the logics I have been unfolding. The beneficiaries of these credits are compelled to return them to the association, so that other market women can benefit from them. The reality is that market women hardly ever repay the full amount of credit and the association runs out of cash until the First Lady decides to make more credit available. What is interesting here is that not returning the full loan to *nana mangué* is not considered seriously fraudulent. There is a general consensus that the woman who does not repay the full amount is exempt from blame. At the last instance the person who is giving the credit is *mother Constanca*. The same allusion that Constanca makes to kinship relationships in order to confirm her authority over the market women is used by the market women, when their livelihoods are under threat, to demand justice and attention from the State, or from *la primera dama* for that matter. My interlocutors often call Constanca Mangué *nuestra socia* (our business partner).

5.7 Embedded prices: moral economy and extraversion

Bearing all of this in mind, and returning to the complaint of Lucrecia with which I started this chapter, the notion of ‘abandonment’ and its relationship to ‘price’ starts to make sense. I have argued that price constitutes a key device from and with which

¹²³ ‘nosotras [las mujeres del mercado] sabemos que tenemos que contribuir. Cada mujer quiere pagar el alquiler de su puesto y también quiere dar contribución. Limpiamos el mercado, reparamos los puestos. Siempre acudimos a la Primera Dama cuando nos llama a colaborar. Cualquier cosa que pide, nosotras hacemos [...] Pero los grandes saben cómo abusar. No queremos que nos abusen y por eso hacemos *adut elang*. No somos salvajes...somos personas’ Maite in Malabo, December 2012.

moral economies are put in practice. Price is a result of the assessment of particular relationships. It assesses goods or services that are being exchanged, but it reflects much more the ongoing relationships between people, which will continue beyond the conclusion of the single transaction. Price is thereby crucial for understanding status, prestige and power relationships, as well as entitlements and possibilities for contestation. Following Guyer and Roitman I see price as an institution and, as such, subject to contestation.

But what is it that is assessed in negotiations over ‘just price’? It is not labour as was suggested by Thomas Aquinas. It is also not only the ‘right to sustainability’ as E. P. Thompson and J. C. Scott suggested, looking at consumers and peasant producers respectively. It is more than this. Negotiating the just price reflects contingency, precedence, and also the politics of distribution. It reflects as well as solidifies class and rank of things and people. It is also a channel through which people contest their entitlement to speak back. But to speak back is not to riot. E. P. Thompson in his discussion of Eighteenth-Century food riots points towards a ‘legitimizing notion’ present in the justification of the crowd’s claims: ‘men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights of customs and, in general that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community’ (Thompson, 1971: 78). This sense of ‘consensus’ is at the base of the moral economy notion that Thompson formulated. However, this consensus can contain a hidden danger. While Thompson, Scott and many others have focused on the potential of the moral economy to underpin protest against exploitative states and private capitalists, the moral economy, as is seen in close-by ‘just price’ negotiations in Equatorial Guinea, can also serve to strengthen hegemonic power.

There is another way in which understandings of moral economy in Equatorial Guinea offer an interesting counterpoint from that described by Thompson, Scott, and others: where most literature on moral economy reflects on tensions between either producers and consumers, or between peasant producers and an extractive state, in Equatorial Guinea the debates are limited to consumers and distributors (which are in many instances the same people), and between these groups and the State. In other words: between an extractive privileged elite and a mass of ordinary Guineans that must mobilise a great deal of resources to be able to consume. This reflects the nature of the State of extraversion, where everything is imported, and (apart from oil, which is extracted off-shore by international business) nothing is

produced locally. Price setting here is thus not about subsistence, nor about the value of labour, but about participation and inclusion into a common project.

Chapter 6

Crisis in the abundance: The ambivalences of *negocio* and of economic wrongdoing

6.1 Introduction

En Guinea Ecuatorial hay crisis como en Europa y América ¡Ahora ya todos hacen negocio! (Lucrecia in Malabo in January 2011)

More than a year before the first dramatic drop of the oil prices since the discovery of off-shore oil wells in Equatorial Guinea, a second-hand clothing trader of Malabo, Lucrecia, told me that the country was experiencing a ‘crisis just like the one Europeans and Americans were suffering’. This assertion was bewildering to me as I was perfectly aware of the positive macroeconomic indicators of the country and the influx of oil wealth that was starting to materialise in the construction of roads and enormous new building’s compounds impossible to ignore. Her subsequent explanatory sentence was even more puzzling to me: ‘by now everybody does business’. By investigating this apparent contradiction, this chapter explores petty traders’ particular understandings of their own economic activity and their relationship with power and capital accumulation. It will show that the ‘crisis’ Lucrecia was referring to was not an ‘economic crisis’ out of a decrease of population’s consumption capacity resulting in a lack of demand for their wares, but rather out of an unprecedented increase of access to commodities by the elite, which by-passed petty traders. The latter accused the privileged of economic wrongdoing, but their argument differed from those found in other contexts of crisis (cf. Carrier 2014, Narotzky 2016, Sabaté forthcoming). The wrongdoing they identified was not about corruption or profiteering, nor did they argue that ‘good money could only be the

result of work', as Nigerians had argued during their earlier oil boom (Barber 1982). What was considered morally challenging in the Guinean case, rather, was the take-over of certain activities by an elite that had access to plenty of other strategies of rent seeking. I argue that this economic crisis was thus a moral crisis resulting from the overtaking of livelihood strategies by an elite that refused to 'play fair' and comply with the and reciprocal obligations of patronage that were expected from them.

This chapter aims to interweave the notions of crisis and of economic wrongdoing with the concept and approach of the moral economy following its recent re-formulations since its coinage in the 1970's (Thompson, 1971; Scott, 1976). I join those who argue that the moral economy, far from being an opposition to political economy, is a useful anthropological tool to approach the functioning of power and configurations of capital accumulation (Palomera & Vetta, 2016). Of the many strands the concept of moral economy has prompted in scholarly debate, I understand it as the dynamic combination of norms, meanings and practices that underpin the structural inequalities generated by particular forms of capital accumulation (Narotzky, 2015; Hann, 2010; Wiegratz, 2016). My particular way to access this 'combination of norms, meanings and practices' is to explore ethnographically market women's everyday practices and the narratives they construct around them. In the pages that follow, I will shed light on how Guineans understand the practice of 'doing business' (*negocio*) and their sense of entitlement to it, in order to understand their criteria of understanding, such which would mean that this practice is in crisis or that particular groups can be accused of economic wrongdoing. The notions of crisis and economic wrongdoing or economic deviance have been the focus of recent anthropological theorisation engaging with debates around the discourses and experiences emerging from the world financial crisis (Narotzky & Besnier, 2014; Roitman, 2014; Carrier, 2014). In the last section of this chapter I will address some of these studies, setting them in dialogue with my ethnographic material.

The chapter is organised as follows: I will introduce Rebeca and Guadalupe's cases to render how they organise their trading activity; I will then focus on their formulations of the *negocio* (business) activity; I will describe the role of the parastatal institution that controls the trading activities; I then turn to the description of the tensions between the elite and the traders. It is amongst these tensions that I will look for the set of rules and moral dispositions that help sustain the current

regime and within which I will discover social groupings and oppositions. In a preliminary conclusion I will suggest the conceptual interrelation between the notions of crisis, wrongdoing and the framework of moral economy.

6.2 Creating ties and creating market: Guadalupe and her *socias*

Guadalupe, as most of the female traders in the marketplace, was born in Rio Muni, she is not married and she has two sons and two nieces living with her in Malabo. She is part of the youngest generation of clothing vendors in SEMU, as she arrived at the marketplace with its re-location in 2006, right at the height of the oil-boom. She invested the first cash she collected from her family on the purchase of an *asamsé* bale, but her goal was to sell first-hand clothing from Spain. With the help of her sister, who was living in Spain with her unemployed husband, she managed to collect enough cash for her first shopping expedition. After a failed attempt to establish a base in Madrid she decided to build up her livelihood between the Spanish capital and Malabo. She left the older son living with her sister's family in Madrid so that he can attend high school. In November 2012, she was travelling once every other month to Madrid. When I interviewed her, she had just returned from one of these trips and her stall was crammed with the new merchandise which she was organizing. Amongst the products Guadalupe was collecting were cosmetics from popular Spanish supermarkets' own brands, simple sandals, ballerinas and a collection of casual wear from the most popular fast-fashion brands. Her main customers were young students who had access to cash through their social network.

Guadalupe buys her own clothes, cosmetics and also medicines, small electro domestics and other technological devices directly in Spain. These goods can be purchased there for less than her own customers pay. She herself considers the products she sells too expensive and outside of her tight budget. Imported first-hand clothes are indeed a luxury which few Guineans can afford. Market women would recognise immediately that they are *asamsé* consumers and their only way to first-hand garments is through their trade, which allows them to travel and access commodities that are actually in their budget. As I will explore in the following section, the margins of revenue these women have are extremely thin in terms of re-investment or accumulative capital. In most of their expeditions they do not regain their investment, having to rely on new income either from their network or from their rotating credit association (ROSCA), locally referred to as *djangué*. Their

trading activity is not feasible without an extensive network of 'business partners' (*socias*) who reduce risk and guarantee its continuity despite the financial vicissitudes.

Guadalupe's sister was her closest business partner (sp. *socia*), as she would not only host her and her son, but also help her to carry on her shopping expeditions:

'she helps me to carry the packages and to go around. When I go to Spain I stay at her place and if I need something to complete the price of the flight, she sends it to me [...] she takes care of my son and thanks to the *negocio* my boy can study in Spain' (Guadalupe in SEMU, November 2012).

Guadalupe, like most of the sellers of the marketplace, cannot rely on the regular income of a salaried job. Most of the market women are either widows, unmarried or divorced. They depend on a very small income from their family relatives who possess a salaried income and often they have children to look after. They describe their marketplace activity as their particular tool for managing the income they receive. Their income is not regular, does not have a clear periodicity and is not secure. Marketplace activity provides sequences and cycles, and thus the possibility of framing temporality and managing extremely tight household finances. It allows for precarious lives to take hold of their resources and networking capacity. *Negocio* (business) simultaneously depends on and generates ties, and it is to this generative power of *negocio* that I now turn.

6.3 *Negocio vsus. Trabajo and the generative power of consumption*

Rebeca is a single mother in charge of her own two children as well as two younger siblings. She moved to Malabo from Niefang, Rio Muni, in 2006 and when I spoke to her in November 2012 she had not yet turned thirty-five. She rises with the sun every morning and prepares the smallest of the children for school. She receives the assistance of a younger sister who has finished her primary school and takes care of the general maintenance of the house, a half-completed concrete house Rebeca is slowly building with the savings of one of her ROSCA. Every morning her younger sister heats the water to prepare the powder milk the children will drink together with some white bread from the neighbourhood's industrial bakery. While the others enjoy their breakfast, and get ready for their duties, Rebeca cooks a meal so that there is food in the pots when the children come back from school. Sometimes the food of

Rebeca's pot is shared also with her current boyfriend, who visits her often but who cannot commit to a formal relationship because he is unemployed and, therefore, cannot fulfil the material obligations of a male partner, let alone formalise a marriage, for which he would need to assume bride price (which has recently experienced a substantial inflation) and the maintenance of the household. He sometimes helps out in a joinery workshop or drives a taxi from a relative and he manages to access some cash at irregular intervals. He often relies on Rebeca's pot for his own sustenance and only when he can, he gives Rebeca some *dinero de comida* (Sp. 'money for food'), a quantity that fluctuates between 2.000 and 5.000 FCFA and which Rebeca immediately re-invests in essential groceries. Rebeca indicated several times that she could not rely on her boyfriend's help to run the household and that sometimes she had to help him financially. This last issue reverses old rooted gender roles according to which men provide rents and foreign goods to the household, while women's responsibilities include the care for the family and subsistence agriculture.

While Rebeca shares the care of her family with her siblings, she is also responsible for the house and thus deals with rents and foreign goods. After the children leave the house in the morning, Rebeca and her sister tidy up and go to SEMU, which is a half an hour walk from their home. By the time they arrive at the market it is already 9:00am and they ask a wheel-barrow boy to take their *asamsé* bales from one of the warehouses they share with several other second-hand clothing sellers. The barrow-boy leaves a few sacks at the stall she rents and the activity begins: Rebeca and her sister start unpacking textiles (curtains, cushions, tablecloths and towels) from the sacks and distribute the pieces throughout the stall, hanging them from several nails that stick out from the wooden beams which hold the corrugated roof that protects the merchandise from the weather. At the end of the day they will have to undo the morning work, collecting the unsold merchandise and neatly packing it back into the sacks. On a good market day, Rebeca sells a few items by early afternoon. With this income she pays the daily market tax (300 FCFA) and crosses the market towards the foodstuffs section. There, she visits her business partners (*socias*): the stall holders she usually purchases her foodstuffs from, and with whom she has established long-term relationships. The quantity and quality of foodstuffs Rebeca acquires varies depending on how much 'money for food' (*dinero de comida*) she has been able to collect during her market day. When she manages to collect

beyond her 'money for food' (when she makes 10.000 FCFA or more), she keeps it to fulfil her contribution to one of the several ROSCA she takes part in.

Rebeca finishes her work in the marketplace around 6pm and arrives home just before the sunset. She eats her portion of food from the pot, washes herself and relaxes, chatting with the family or the neighbours before going to bed. She repeats this pattern every day with exception of Sundays and Tuesdays. On Sunday, she skips the selling to attend the Catholic service in the Claretian Sanctuary in Malabo's historic centre. Tuesday is an official market free day when the municipal cleaning services, together with market women, make sure that the accumulated waste from a week of market activity is cleared away.

With this brief description of Rebeca's day, I want to highlight how her life- as well as the lives of the other market women - is organised around the rhythms of the marketplace. The selling of *asamsé* structures her day, but also frames other temporalities through the participation to ROSCAs which take place in varied frequencies: once a week, once a month, or once every other month. The market activity allows for turning the cash (*dinero*) that market women are able to access through their networks – in the case of Rebeca this is the rents she receives irregularly from her relatives or the father of her sons – into daily cash for food (*dinero de comida*). Through the participation in different ROSCAs market women are able to use their savings and the investment money collected, for their children's school fees, for construction materials for their homes, or for the investment in another *asamsé* sack. The margins within which these women organise their livelihoods are extremely tight and yet the risk is high: the second-hand clothing bale is closed and the quality of the merchandise will only be revealed once it is opened in the market. If the items in the sack are of inadequate quality or are not fit for sale it is difficult for them to have a regular income of 'money for food' and it becomes almost impossible to meet their commitments. It is at this point that they must, once again, resort to their social networks for investment money.

In spite of the precariousness of the market economic activity, and the thin margin of monetary gains – if existing – Rebeca's trading activity involved an enormous amount of effort and work and I referred to it as 'her job' (Sp. *su trabajo*). Her reaction was sudden and straight forward: I don't work, I make business¹²⁴.

¹²⁴ Yo no trabajo, yo hago negocio, Rebeca in Malabo, January 2011.

Indeed, market women repeatedly asserted that their activity was not a job. Rebeca explained:

it is with *trabajo* (work) that one is able to make money and *negocio* is the only way one has to move, to leave the house and to not stay still (...) one needs to move! (...) *asamsé* is a gain and loss business. Today you sell, tomorrow you don't. With *asamsé* you don't make money, you only move yourself ¹²⁵

This opposition between *trabajo* (work) and *negocio* (business) is crucial to understand grassroots views of economic practices in Equatorial Guinea. At this point it is, then, vital to come to terms with language. Although I took Fang language classes for more than a year, my Fang language skills were not sufficiently developed to conduct all my interviews entirely in the language. Moreover, most of the women in SEMU would shift language when speaking to me. In Spanish, there is not a distinct word to refer either to work or labour. *Trabajo* is used in a broad sense to refer both to commodified and non-commodified work. It is in this sense that it is used in Guinea as well. However in the Fang language there is a distinction between salaried work, *ayeñ*, and a broader term, *esseñ*, which refers to 'transformative work' and is used to denote the work on the land, and the artisanal work that transforms primary materials into manufactured items. In contrast, *esseñ* implies the construction or the generation of something whereas *ayeñ* refers to an activity that provides money or commodities in exchange.

For the market women, their activity is not *esseñ* nor *ayeñ*, but *negocio*, a Spanish word (lit. business) for which there is no translation in Fang. It is clear, however, that their understanding of 'hacer negocio' is different from the definition of the Spanish language dictionary: 'to obtain earnings or profit' (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*). According to market women it is with *ayeñ* that one obtains monetary profit and what the political elite and the workers of the oil industry do is regarded by them as *ayeñ*. Cash gains are made through *esseñ*, the work that generates value through the material transformation of raw materials. The value

¹²⁵ 'es con trabajo con lo que una hace dinero. Negocio es la única manera que una tiene para moverse, salir de casa y no quedarse parada (...) iuna necesita moverse!. (...) *asamsé* es negocio de 'ganapierde'. Hoy hay venta, mañana no. Con *asamsé* no se hace el dinero, sólo se mueve una', Rebeca in Malabo, 2011.

generated through *esseeñ* can hardly ever be turned into capital however. The type of *negocio* that market women carry out is a mechanism through which imported commodities circulate, but this circulation does not generate rent for the petty traders. Obviously, foodstuffs wholesalers, Igbo second-hand clothing importers and the big prêt-à-porter firms that provide the trading commodities to market women do produce monetary profit through rent differentials. For market women, though, the speculative margins are limited as their provisioning channels and logistical costs are high, and most of the time their *socias* are amongst the same precarious common people, limiting the final prices to that what ordinary Guineans can afford and to what their obligations allow them to charge.

The lack of monetary gain involved in *negocio*, or even the potential of monetary loss, does not prevent it from generating value: *negocio* helps to cope with uncertainty by turning rents into a regular source of ‘money for food’, it maintains and establishes networks through a system of *socios* and *socias* (business partners), it allows – and mediates - access to the consumption of goods that are used to perform self-worth and membership. Doing *negocio* in SEMU requires, therefore, the membership of different associations which, in turn, generates hierarchies. It also implies the contraction of multiple debts with business partners. Is to these hierarchies, power structures and productive debts that I now turn.

6.4 Vertical control and productive debts: la asociación naná mangue

In 1992 a presidential decree required all market women to enrol in a market-sellers’ association. Market women of the main markets of the country organised in associations which represented the different categories of products they sold: snails, fresh fish, fruits and vegetables, and *asamsé* and first hand clothes. This last association has the largest number of affiliates in SEMU market (around 350). At the same time when the product-based associations were set up, another GONGO, Asociación Naná Mangué, was founded. This latter organisation is led personally by the First Lady, Constanca Mangué de Obiang and has become both a tool for State control and an umbrella for the protection of market women. The very name of the association ‘mother Mangué’, which recalls the famous West African traders, the Nana Benz, indicates the type of relationship that the First Lady aims to establish with market women: she offers them maternal care and protection, and expects them to pay her respect and support her politically. The market women return this

appellation to kinship to the first lady and expect protection and favourable treatment in return.

With the reorganisation of the marketplace in 2004, Malabo town council attempted to use the affiliation registers of the product associations as basis for a tax on market activity. Market women have resisted the several attempts to increase taxes for their activities and often have turned to the first lady to denounce the abuses of the tax collectors. Conflicts between tax agents and market women are frequent and can lead to violent encounters, which are not mediated by law enforcement bodies of the state. There is a small police station in the Northern corner of the marketplace, but I have been repeatedly told that agents rarely leave their post to enter the marketplace due to their fear of market women. Whether this is indeed the case, or it is an exaggerated version of the situation that market women use to project their organisational power, the outcome is that there is no visible police presence in the marketplace. Naná Mangué, however, is virtually present as often a white Mercedes Benz van with dark windows parks in the central street of the marketplace. At both sides of the vehicle one can read Naná Mangué. The interior of the van is not visible but the symbolic power of the vehicle is strengthened through its number plate which reads: Wele-Nzás (the province of birth of the president and most of the powerful elite).

Naná Mangué mediates conflicts among market sellers and also between market sellers and the 'big ones' (los grandes) - the tax officers, the Malabo City Mayor, the Minister of Commerce or the Customs Officers. This arbitrational role of the First Lady is often staged and made public and the resulting conflict-resolution meetings are broadcasted on public television. The representatives of the product-based associations have, thus, a certain visibility and an explicit and direct personal relationship with the First Lady who, then, also adopts the role of the most powerful business partner (socia) which the market women have.

Aside from the arbitrational role, the main function of Naná Mangué is that of providing regular non-returnable microcredits. Every few years since the late nineties the First Lady donates cash to the product-based associations. The credit is then used to fund market women's trips to Spain, China or Dubai, and to acquire merchandise. Credit is allocated by the leaders (presidentas) of the associations. Amongst the applicants to micro-credits, those sellers who have accumulated travelling experience and merit in working for the sake of the organisation enjoy priority. Closeness to the

higher levels of the hierarchy of their product-based association is a crucial asset that women intending to access credit have to develop. The recipients agree to return the credit to their respective product-based association so that the next group of market sellers can take advantage. As I have described above, the profit margins of the trading activity are so thin that market women often cannot return the full credit. The result is that, after a few expeditions, the product-based associations run out of credit until Naná Mangué allocates new cash. This replenishment of funds never happens as frequently as market women would desire.

Market women contract a permanent debt with Naná Mangué, but this is not the only debt that they contract. Doing *negocio* implies contracting multiple debts with a network of business partners. Similar to what Janet Roitman noted for the market functioning in northern Cameroon, the relationships of dependency and patronage amongst Guinean market women are ‘factored into price determinations, so debt is almost inevitably at the heart of the exchange’ (Roitman, 2005:81). In every transaction market woman and customers refer to each other as *socias* (business partners) and they negotiate the price of the items according to their assessment of their relationship – generation, kin, status, friendship – and the reason for the exchange – profit, hardship, marriage, funeral (see Roitman, 2005: 80). The transaction does not end with the payment of the product at the negotiated price but it remains open and ongoing. If the market seller is experiencing a cash shortage, she can charge her *socia* a higher price for the same product that she can give for almost nothing when the buyer is in a situation of hardship. There is the expectation that business partners (*socias*) will negotiate deals that will be ‘just’ for both parties and that they will, at least, ensure that each party has access to sufficient money for food (*dinero de comida*) to feed their families.

Debt, in the particular context of the *negocio* practice, produces solidarity, new links amongst women whose kin network cannot provide for their livelihood, and social cohesion, as it allows market women to participate as a group in certain public debates. But debt is also economically and politically productive¹²⁶. On the one hand, it provides the possibility of circulating rents, keeping them moving across different categories or regimes of value (*dinero/dinero de comida*, ROSCA/Mangué credit

¹²⁶ Based on the Maussian reflection on the gift and for recent approaches to the productivity of debt see eg, Roitman, 2005; Graeber, 2011; Guérin, 2014.

returns) and thus generating ‘marginal gains’ (Guyer, 2004). On the other hand, it produces and strengthens obligations, it ties loyalties and ensures the maintenance of certain positions through political hierarchies (First Lady/market women, association leaders/ordinary associates).

Negocio implies the circulation of goods and people, relationships of productive debt, and often forms the only mechanism for the poor to access rents and certain power. At the same time, it also entails the reproduction of hierarchy, exploitation and domination. The association Naná Mangué co-opts the organisational capacity of market women and hinders their ability to articulate strong and oppositional political discourses as they are bound in obligations which curtail the possibility of dissent. Maintaining the practice of *negocio* perpetuates the extreme precariousness of market women’s livelihoods and contributes to the reproduction of a political and economic hegemony based on rent-seeking and extraversion (Bayart, 2000).

6.5 The moral economy of ‘negocio’: the ambivalences of ‘economic wrongdoing’

2011, when Lucrecia talked to me about the existence of a crisis amongst market women, was when the rumour was circulating that the First Lady was in conversation with Inditex to open branches of their Zara fashion business in Equatorial Guinea. This had prompted distress amongst market retailers. This was especially the case for those like Lucrecia and Guadalupe, who specialised in selling prêt-à-porter items sourced in Spain from the same popular shops. For them the idea that ordinary Guineans could just take a taxi to shop for the same goods that they had sourced in Spain following the mobilisation of their extended network of *socias* and a transcontinental flight, spelled the eventual end of their *negocio* activity. As mentioned in chapter 4, instead of setting up Zara shops, in 2013 the First Lady opened a branch of another popular Spanish fast fashion company (Mango) in her shopping mall on the outskirts of Malabo. This opening further increased the distress of market women, who considered that the First Lady was taking away their legitimate right to *negocio* by allowing ‘unfair’ competition. Rumours about Naná Mangué betraying her own market women by contracting women selling tomatoes for her own profit were often heard and also broadcast in social media news feeds of the political opposition. During my fieldwork I did not encounter any of these

allegedly salaried sellers, and market women did not confirm nor deny that this happened. In spite of such rumours and the fact that Naná Mangué had not released micro-credit for more than four years, market women remained loyal to the association, voicing their distress and resisting the attempts to increase taxation while complying with the outcomes of the negotiations mediated by Naná Mangué.

Accusations of illicit economic behaviour were not only directed towards the First Lady. The market sellers' main complaint was that, after more than a decade of oil-related income, they had lost their monopoly of the *negocio* practice. As Rebeca repeated to me several times:

When oil arrived, we sold a lot of stuff. I arrived in the marketplace and in a week I could see the money I had put in my *asamsé* sac. I had no problem to find dinero de comida, the market was packed every day. Now it is different. Everybody travels and everybody wants to do *negocio*. Nobody needs a market woman to go and get the stuff for them [...] They don't care about us. They have abandoned us. They don't care that we only have *negocio*, nothing else. (Rebeca in SEMU, November 2012)

In my conversations with market women about the economic practice of the elite, my interlocutors never brought up the corrupt practices of government members, the patronage and clientelist character of power relationships, and the extreme profit that the Nguema family and their close associates were making out of the illicit appropriation of oil rents. If this topic was not completely avoided – as happened most of the times – the conclusion was that ‘the big ones do what the big ones do’. Thus, the ‘wrong economic practice’ that the market women felt legitimate or entitled to voice was that of Guineans who were doing *negocio* while having other sources of rent management. Whether these sources of rent management were legal or illegal, formal or informal, out of rent-seeking activities or salaried work, kinship or patronage relationships, was not considered in the assessment. This does not mean that market women considered all the corrupt practices of the elite morally acceptable. Those practices, however, were just not part of that particular conversation. E. P. Thompson in his discussion of the Eighteenth-century England food riots points towards a ‘legitimizing notion’ present in the justification of the crowd’s claims: ‘men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights of customs and, in general that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community’ (Thompson, 1971: 78). This sense of

'consensus' is at the basis of the moral economy notion that Thompson formulated and I argue that it is also at the centre of the complaints voiced by market women.

6.6 Conclusion: Crisis in the abundance?

What is contained in the notion of 'crisis' that invites petty traders to use it to narrate their situation? 'Crisis', either understood as an experienced reality or as a folk or expert conceptual category, has intensively circulated worldwide since the 2008 financial breakdown. Guineans, who in the years following 2008 were still experiencing a staggering influx of oil-money – materialised in the construction of roads and white elephants (Appel, 2012) and the consumptive extravaganza of the elite (Silverstein, 2014) – have been continuously exposed to the narrative of crisis, as broadcasted in international media and experienced by relatives living abroad, especially those living in Spain who suffered from the high unemployment rates there and had to come up with alternatives to waged labour to make ends meet. Some of them went back to Equatorial Guinea, others lived in-between the two countries engaging in multiple activities to get-by.

Guinean market traders clearly were not referring to crisis in the sense used by experts but rather in a more experiential meaning. Since 2008, several academic works have dealt with ordinary people's experience of crisis in their livelihoods in places other than Europe and North America, thereby providing a rich empirical and theoretical basis to rethink economic relationships. As Narotzky and Besnier put it 'crisis signals a breakdown in social reproduction, a mismatch between configurations of cooperation that used to "work" by producing particular expectations and obligations, and a different configuration of opportunities and resources' (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014: 57). The collapse of what 'used to work' generates uncertainty and the need to adapt livelihood strategies, often by juggling between different activities (legal/illegal) and regimes of value (market/reciprocity, commodity/gift), often re-embedding the material provisioning of their livelihood with the maintenance and production of old and new social ties (de L'Estoile, 2014).

Guinean market women's livelihoods were already filled with material and political uncertainty before they identified their experience as one of crisis. They had had cause to develop their *getting-by* strategies for more than three decades. What, then, made them appeal to the framework of 'crisis' and why does the term appear at this specific moment? Roitman stresses that the ones who assume the narrative of

crisis claim to have access to a historical truth ‘that gives them the authority to speak’ (Roitman, 2014). For Guinean market women, the authority to speak comes from their sense of entitlement to the practice of *negocio*. Market women’s ‘historical truth’ contains the perception that during the first dictatorship and the first decade of the second, they performed the role of gate keepers, controlling foreign goods and enjoying the status of being connected either with state institutions or with an international network. This perception seems to be supported by the fact that since 1992, Nana Mangué had (infrequently) supported this *negocio* through micro-credits. Nowadays, market women perceive that they are back at the bottom of the consumer/trader hierarchy. Nana Mangué’s micro-credits have not been disbursed since 2007, and instead the organisation’s leader and figure head, the First Lady, is seen to have engaged in exactly those economic activities that market women perceive to be undermining their ability to sustain their livelihoods. Having first supported their *negocio* through Nana Mangué’s micro-credits, and relying on market women for political support, it is thus no surprise that this is the stage on which economic wrongdoing is discussed.

Conclusion

Making connections: *Negocio*, brokers and extraversion or another *how* of Capitalism in Equatorial Guinea

In the following paragraphs I summarise the main conclusions of the research. However, they will be presented here as a point of departure as opposed to an arrival I will pose the main findings of this dissertation in the form of questions that can serve as a point of departure for future ethnographic and historical research in Equatorial Guinea and beyond.

The general aims of this research have been two-fold. First, I wanted to produce a monograph about Equatorial Guinea from a new angle that engages critically with the current hispano-centric and 'oil-boom centric' literature. It is crucial to connect Equatorial Guinea to a wider geography, to contribute to the incipient ethnographic data produced about the small country, and to provide new insights to understand its socio-economic and political organisation from the bottom up. The second aim was, by proposing an ethnography of clothing provisioning, to contribute to the critical literature that claims the need to re-think material and economic relationships.

After decades of academic and media silence, interest in Equatorial Guinea has increased in the last fifteen years¹²⁷. Current references in the media all address the same topics: the small country being the third largest oil producer in Africa, the corruption cases being investigated against its President Obiang Nguema, or the

¹²⁷ The Spanish ex-colony was considered *materia reservada* (confidential theme) right after its independence in 1968. Then the filo-Maoist Macias dictatorship that isolated the country in a regime of self-sufficiency, ruined the previous extractive economy (cacao, coffee and timber) and it resulted the ending of old connections with European and West African partners.

extravagant and conspicuous consumption of the president's son, Teodorín. Although academic attention has increased in line with international interest in this newly oil-rich state, resulting in field-changing research works that I reference and get inspiration from. On the whole, however, social science and especially historical approaches to the country remain limited, monolithic and mostly hispano-centric. Most attempts to re-write Guinean history exert enormous effort on de-colonizing historical and social imaginaries of the country (see Aranzadi 2014, Nerín 2007), something that happened decades earlier for other formerly colonised regions that have more established and more critical academic traditions. In Guinea, however, colonial categories such as ethnic differentiations and identities are still taken for granted, and serve as a starting point for any socio-economic description. Existing studies also tend to regard the fact that Guinea is the only nation state in Africa in which Spanish is the official language as a defining and essentializing condition. The scholar Benita Sampedro pointed out the need to re-think spatial categories as most of the literature on and from the country is produced from a single, fixed geographical and conceptual cartography (Sampedro 2009). In the past decade anthropologists like Hannah Appel and Enrique Martino have started to challenge the academic tradition, opening new spatial and epistemological angles on Guineanist research.

The geographical and disciplinary isolation of the scholarly literature is, obviously, far from that what Guineans enact and experience in their everyday life. Equatorial Guinea has been historically connected to global geographies and networks of differing natures (eg. Sundiata 1990, Lynn 1984, Martino 2012 and also Chapter 1). As many other scholars have explored in the cases of diverse historical periods and locations in Africa, the consumption of imported goods has been one of the ways through which Africans (and not only Africans) make sense of, give meanings to, and appropriate the world they are living in (eg. Prestholdt 2008, Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, van den Bersselaar 2007). One of the ways in which Guineans have historically 'domesticated the world' is through appropriation of imported commodities and by giving them local uses and meanings, which has often strengthened already existing organisational structures. In looking into this I have engaged with the wide literature that explores consumption as a central scope for anthropological discussion (eg. Appadurai 1988, Friedman 2004, Howes 1996). However, I have touched upon the limitations of the approach that focuses on the 'meanings' attached to commodities along their social biography. In this regard, my work has linked with the critical

literature that considers that the ‘way people organise the provisioning systems for their livelihood and the way they juggle with diverse regimes of value and worth illuminates how they are organised in the other spheres of their political and social life’ (Narotsky & Besnier 2014).

In my research I have moved from a focus primarily concerned with ‘meanings’ which I had already explored during my Master’s dissertation, towards a discussion around *valuation* and *values*, while exploring the usefulness of the concept and approach of *the moral economy*¹²⁸. This shift redirected my research towards issues related to the social relationships involved in the provisioning of textile goods: the global commodity/value chains in which market women participate with their trade (mainly the second-hand clothing production and the so-called fast fashion), their own perception of the work they do (the opposition between notions productive/transformational work and *negocio*), their perceptions of their entitlements (the right to trade as a source of livelihood and ideas about wrongdoing by the elite), the power dynamics which exist among themselves and their relationship with a structural power that carves pathways for political participation, on the one hand, and blocks access to other possibilities on the other. For instance, market women engage with the first lady in seeking a public voice but this engagement confirms hierarchy and limits their political influence at the same time by channeling and curtailing their political expression.

An interesting and fruitful further step in this direction would be to connect the ethnographic material with the anthropological debates around *value*, as they have focused on the particular ways in which goods and people are organised in hierarchies, and establish comparisons and equivalences. If we take David Graeber’s definition of what is *valuable* as that to which people dedicate the biggest amount of creative energy or social action (Graeber 2001), then we could state that the protagonists of my ethnography situate *mobility* and *connectedness* at the centre of their activities. The valuation and ranking of both goods and people is done according

¹²⁸ As I have argued in Chapters 5 and 6 in relation to *the moral economy*, the theorisation on *value* and *valuation*, has occupied a relevant deal of scholars in the recent years. Especially relevant for the discipline but also for my reflection have been Chris Gregory (1997) and David Graeber (2001). Graeber The work of younger scholars like Matti Erasaari (2013) and Rachel Smith (2016), has also been inspiring.

to a perception of connectedness to an 'exterior' that is, at the same time, ranked according to their closeness to what are considered centres of power.

As Rebeca told me in one of the quotes that I have collected in the thesis: 'we do *negocio* to not to stay still, to be able to move'. This movement, towards which market women dedicate their creative energy is what allows them to get closer to these 'valuable connections'. As I have shown throughout the thesis, market work does not produce wealth through the production of surplus value but rather through the management of these 'right connections'.

This does not mean that market women do not seek material or capital accumulation. Following Jane Guyer's reflections on Atlantic African economic rationalities, I have argued that even though market women do not calculate profits in the short-term time span of their everyday transactions, they do work towards the achievement of clearly defined goals and values. These values are, precisely, the achievement of material wealth and social mobility. In more concrete terms, the horizon could be, for instance, the provision of good education for their children and the construction of their own house in the city and, after that, in their village of origin. The achievement of these personal goals requires the management of the connections and participation in many different institutions and instances beyond what has traditionally considered strictly economic relationships.

As has been noted, these connections are highly mediated. I started the dissertation with the ethnographic vignettes of a baggage belt and a clothing bale that on the one hand epitomise connectedness with the material world of afar but at the same time they contend the uncertainty of the limited control that one can have of those connections. This is crucial to understand how power and accumulation work in an extravert system such as Equatorial Guinea. The control of the 'outside' remains in the hands of very few 'gate keepers' and those people control the state and its institutions.

In this sense, brokerage and mediation have crucial roles in structuring power and framing the possibilities for accumulation and exploitation. Useful here are the insights of the Algerian economist Henni about the current rentist fase of Capitalism. Henni argues that rentism generates new visions of the world, a new 'spirit of time', but also new social 'reclassements' (re-class-ification) that generate new antagonisms, which are no longer those of the factory floor. Henni talks about 'patriciens' and 'plébéiens'. The 'patriciens' use sovereignty instead of the

mobilisation of resources for material production. The group of 'patriciens', different to what happened in modern times, are not directly involved in the antagonisms of the material production. Current rent capitalism captures from its exterior with the mechanisms of sovereignty, and redistributes within its interior by means of sovereignty as well (public debt, currency creation) (Henni 2012, 100). However, what Henni observes for the 'current phase of Capitalism', is what Capitalism has been for Equatorial Guinea since the system was introduced to its population. In Equatorial Guinea there never was a shop floor, and power has been structured according to access to the state institutions, regardless of whether it was the colonial or the post-colonial state.

Whether we call them brokers or patricians, *los grandes* have been controlling access to the state apparatus and to the sources of wealth from the exterior. Especially in Chapter 6 I have noted how the staggering inequalities derived from the oil boom have strengthened antagonism as well as those social categories connected with access to rents rather than with the control of the means of production. However, I have also shown that the emergence of *classes* is not a development uniquely connected to the oil-boom, rather the process is essentially rooted within earlier Guinean social configurations.

Oil as a historical landmark?

Kleptocracy, dictatorship, a criminal state ... these are the descriptions of Equatorial Guinea in international reports and the media. It is noted that its GDP is higher than that of European countries, but that the quality of life, and life expectation itself, are low for the vast majority of the population. Since the 1990s, oil extraction has generated enormous wealth for the few, but there is a clear lack of wealth redistribution. The oil industry, it has been noted, provides resources for the maintenance of the Nguema regime and has allowed the regime to avoid having to make political concessions such as the development of a meaningful democratic political system. Equatorial Guinea is synonymous with oil and with the resource curse but to what extent was the oil-boom a landmark in Equatorial Guinea's historical trajectory and for what and whom? Hannah Appel in her ethnography of off-shore work and modularity explains how the oil industry dedicates vast amounts of effort to the production of the illusion of disentanglement from the social and political context in which the resource is extracted. She describes how profit is

generated precisely through the framing and the crafting of modularity within the industry and through the invention of a disembodied national economy from the side of the Guinean state (see Appel 2017). It is precisely the effort to 'disentangle' relationships that produces possibilities for profit making while the particularities of the context of extraction are crucial for the generation of such gains: if Equatorial Guinea was not considered to have insufficient infrastructure, a corrupt government and public system and a lack of educated potential personnel, the US based oil-based industry could not generate profit out of the evasion of responsibility and the making of modularity.

The question remains: is this 'how of capitalism' the same for ordinary Guineans? Does 'disentanglement' generate profit for Guineans? Does this mean that they are excluded from capitalism or completely subsumed within it? With my ethnography I hope to have elucidated how Guineans are not passive victims of the production of dependencies. I have shown how in the market, value and meaning is produced and reproduced in the context of a moral economy that, just as it offers the possibility of a moderate critique of the Guinean regime, also ties Guineans into their position within the hegemonic structure. I also described how, in this everyday extraversion of ordinary Guineans, the exterior is imagined and experienced, and serves as a trademark or quality.

Equatorial Guinea has many of the features of a postcolonial state as described by Mbembe and Bayart. Prestige is acquired through access to and conspicuous consumption of foreign resources, which undermines productivity. In fact, hardly anything is produced in the country itself. As we have seen, the closure of the border with Cameroon for whatever reason, leads to immediate shortages in the main markets in Bata and Malabo. Not only does this mean that the management of wealth in goods and people is in the hands of 'gate keepers', the term here referring only to a limited elite, it also implies that many of these ideas are shared by the ordinary population, and that any success (political, financial, social), is based on connections to that elite or to the exterior.

This thesis has also located the shortcomings of a short historical memory. Focusing on the effects of the oil-boom obscures the State of Equatorial Guinea's long history of economic and political extraversion. As in other West African societies, globalisation and capitalism have been part of Equatorial Guinean life for as long as they have in Europe, and longer than the United States, and some Africans have been

part of it since the very beginning. Not as mere recipients or objects, but as actively engaged actors. This history of extraversion has left material legacies and draws on particular geographies and connections of which Guineans have made their own sense.

Ordinary Equatorial Guineans experience extraversion in many aspects of their life, including, prominently, the material. Clothing practices and trade have been mechanisms to make sense and represent relationships with wealth and materiality that come from faraway places and institutions. The colonial past has a crucial role in this story. It is clear that the latter has shaped Guinean subjects and this is reflected on how they imagine and envision relationships with ‘abroad’ and its materiality. Interesting geographies that are not legible without reference to this past have appeared in the ethnography: Igbo second-hand clothing wholesalers that connect Bioko with London and beyond; market women that buy Chinese-made shoes in Elche; the fluidity between Bioko and the peripheral neighbourhoods of Madrid, where Chinese traders have established their wholesale warehouses.

Extraversion strategies

One of the main objectives of the thesis has been that of connecting what happens in SEMU marketplace to wider processes of accumulation and power configurations. In other words: I have tried to connect the strategies that market women deploy in order to create meaningful livelihoods, to those of the power that make situations of exploitation and dispossession possible. The concept that I have chosen to define the type of power and material relationships Guineans experience in their everyday life is that of *extraversion*. Borrowing from Bayarts’ political economic analysis of the African post-colonial states, I have argued for its relevance in the description of processes of ‘active dependency’ in which Guineans are involved.

An attempt to synthesise the three main strategies of everyday extraversion I have encountered among market women could have the following headings:

- *Movement and the managing of the exterior.*
- *Making socias, contracting debts.*
- *Vertical associationism and the linking up with power.*

Another How of capitalism?

As has been argued throughout this thesis, Guineans have intimately experienced the relationships with the global in a manner particular to them. Meaning and value has been given to the material world inherited from, and dependent upon, these relationships. Utilizing particular ways of understanding power relationships and the political in general, this ethnography of clothing trade and consumption has offered a meta-description of what happens at different scales and chronologies throughout processes of accumulation of the making and re-making of power relations.

The process of value creation cannot be understood without looking at the political economy. Is the notion of *negocio* and the moral economic system attached to it a another *how* of Capitalism that works together with the one Hannah Apple described for the oil economy? This thesis has shown that one means of knowing HOW a system like Equatorial Guinea works (and any other, really) is to generate ethnographic material capable of illuminating the subtleties of the everyday work that allows for the reproduction of the system over time.

Epilogue

***El popó nacional* and Malabo International Fashion week: versions of a failed consumer nationhood¹²⁹**

Introduction

In January 1993, a group of Guinean women dressed in a uniform, amongst them the First Lady, Constanca Mange de Obiang, delivered some toys to sick children in the General Hospital of Malabo. Their uniform included a tight-fitting tunic made from printed cotton, the pattern of which made symbolic allusions to national folklore. It was the first time (and, it would turn out, one of the few times) that the National Dress of Equatorial Guinea was used in an official event inside the country. The use of the National Dress remained extremely limited and was soon substituted by propaganda clothing distributed by the political party in power (PDGE). Recently, events to promote 'Equatoguinean fashion' organised by institutions associated with the Obiang regime have flourished. The *Malabo International Fashion Week* has become a popular and widely publicised annual highlight of the cultural life of the country. In this epilogue I will describe some of the attempts in the last three decades to produce a unified national discourse through the invention of a *national dress*, from the first attempts in the early nineties to the more recent fashion events.

The ethnographic material regarding dress allows me to reflect on the identity performances and nationalistic discourses that have been produced in permanent tension between colonialism, ethnicity, nationalism and internationalism. In the process of the creation of a national dress, folklorism (ie. Martí, 1996) became a tool for reifying ethnicities that were constructed during the colonial period and came to

¹²⁹ The ethnographic material of this chapter has been published in Spanish in *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* (2012, vol. LXVII, num. 1. pp.267-296)

represent a language that is only understood by a limited section of the Guinean population. Thereby, as the elite work to create unity through the production of a unified national discourse, they simultaneously produce the potential for contestation between, and the exclusion of, groups within Guinean society.

One dress for one national identity?

As elsewhere, the negotiations for a national identity in Equatorial Guinea must address the existence of a diversity of languages, and of different cultural and political traditions which have had unequal relationships with the State (Smith 1986; Apter, 2005, Geschiere 2009). I have already described some of the main historical, cultural, economic and political differences between parts of the country in the main body of the thesis. In the first chapter I introduced Bioko island as a hub of migration since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Europeans (Portuguese, British and Spanish) as well as Africans (Sierra Leonians, people from the Congo area, and (former) slaves with diverse origins) joined the Bubi population of the area of Clarence City or Santa Isabel, modern Malabo (Sundiata 1998, Garcia-Cantus 2008). A history of several waves of migration, culminating in the most recent one attracted by the oil boom, have resulted in a multicultural city. However, the management of this long-established multiculturalism also resulted in the establishment of social hierarchies and discrimination (Aixelà 2010). On the mainland, in the Continental Region, a Fang majority from the hinterland has lived alongside coastal Bisió and Ndowé groups for centuries. Subsequent waves of migration introduced new elements of culture to an already diverse population. For example, the Hausa community in Bata was established during the first decades of the twentieth century. Following the relatively recent process of urbanisation, the area experienced migration from neighbouring countries such as Cameroon and Gabon, and also from Benin, Gabón, Mali and Burkina Faso. The arrival to Equatoguinean cities of rural dwellers as well as foreigners from other African and non-African countries has been motivated by the expectation of opportunities for social mobility after the discovery of oil. However, as we have seen, most of the population remains in precarious conditions. The construction of new dwellings is inadequate and poorly organised. The urban space has grown informally and, as elsewhere, it has been organised according to ethnic and kinship networks that are closely tied to the origin of the inhabitants of neighbourhoods and housing compounds (cf. Anthony 2002;

Whitehouse 2012). Ethnic identities thus constitute an immediate and 'useful' tool in a hostile urban milieu.

The two consecutive *Nguemist* regimes and the clientelism and nepotism that underpin the Guinean State have resulted in a general and inevitable understanding that regards the State, the party (PDGE), and the Nguema family as one inextricable composite. Moreover, the predominance of the Fang in positions of power has been a constant feature of the Guinean State since its independence in 1968. Nepotism and clientelism are the criteria under which State workers are recruited, from the lower to the upper ranks. At the same time, the capacity to exercise power over others has little to do with the nature of the political or administrative position that one occupies but all the more with the relationship with *el jefe* (Eng. The Boss) and his family (Liniger-Goumaz; Okenve 2009)¹³⁰. The symbolic violence embedded in the control over power by a single ethnic-cultural group is accompanied by the physical repression that minority groups have suffered, the Bubi in particular (Shaxson 2008: 123-124). During the last fifty years, the vast majority of the administrative, political and managerial positions have been occupied by Fang individuals. Individuals from other ethnic groups cannot achieve powerful positions, unless they belong to *el jefe's* network. The PDGE (*Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial*) has become a tool to mobilise the population behind the political regime while at the same time being a mechanism for the management of loyalties and threats. It is well known that one requires the PDGE membership card to access wage labour, even with most of the private companies that operate in the country.

There are many possible versions of an Equatoguinean National identity, however, and there remain spaces where other identities (such as ethnicity or kin) prevail and where *Guineanity* is debated, contested and constantly produced. The extroverted character of the Guinean State, the limits of wealth re-distribution of the *nguemist* system, combined with the historic multiculturalism I have described, make for a complex arena for nation-building negotiations. Most of such discussions about *Guineanity* are not made completely public and explicit. The invention of the

¹³⁰ For Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, the political and economic system of Equatorial Guinea responds to the model of a kleptocracy (2007: 138-140). According to the latter, the political elite of Equatorial Guinea (Esangui clan) is not interested in recreating or empowering the nation-state. The main goals of the elite are non-ideological, consisting in a mere fight for the loot (157)

Guinean national dress constitutes an exception to this practice and it differs from some other attempts to create a folkloric national dress, the existence of which became accepted by the majority of the national population (ie. Trevor-Roper 1983 on the Scottish kilt). The national dress of Equatorial Guinea was not consolidated and it was very quickly substituted by the clothing of the PDGE. Nevertheless, the process of its creation, the narrative produced by its promoters and the story of its failure explain one approach to national culture, relevant to a generation of Guineans who had projected a number of expectations on the 'new' post-Macias Guinea.

The invention of tradition has been of particular importance in every moment of crisis in the political organisation of Guinean peoples. This has been described by Vansina for an early period regarding the adaptation of central African populations to the impact of the Atlantic Trade during the early nineteenth century (Vansina 1962). The transformation of Fang political and religious traditions during the colonial period has been described by Fernandez and Okenve (Fernandez 1989; Okenve 2007). Although Guinean nationalism as an idea was actively promoted by anti-colonial politicians during the process of decolonisation, the operationalisation of the concept and its diverse and changing meanings during the postcolonial period are not well studied. It is clear that the idea of *Guineanity* and its projection into the future were only shared by a limited section of Guineans, who shared certain life experiences, memories and status.

Values, heritage and folklore: the process of invention of Vestido Nacional as narrated by its protagonists

It was only after I had been living in Equatorial Guinea for more than a year that I first heard an allusion to the existence of a Guinean national dress. It came out of the mouth of Anacleto Oló Mibuy, who later would become the Presidential Councillor for Culture and the President of the Guinean national research council, the CICTE (*Consejo de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas*). Chatting about my research project that was still in an embryonic stage at the time, he mentioned that, not much more than a decade before, the CICTE had launched a research project intended to lead towards a 'genuinely Guinean dress'. I had been living and doing research in Equatorial Guinea but I had never been aware of the existence of such a *vestido nacional*. On the one hand, there was a specific clothing for each folkloric festivity, all closely tied to older or more recent ethnic traditions. On the other hand,

in celebrations like weddings, baptisms or catholic communions a sort of a 'uniform' was used. The latter, being tailored in African prints (wax or popó), are not considered 'traditional' or folkloric'. The members of a family wear clothing made from cloth with the same pattern, but the design of the clothes is individualised according to personal tastes and the influence of fashion.

In the celebrations of the State (such as Independence day, the celebration of Obiang's coup d'etat, extraordinary parliamentary sessions, etcetera) and the celebrations of the party, the same type of 'uniform' is used. On such occasions, the pattern of the tailored designs has motifs of the party: the portrait of the president, the party emblem (the torch) and the national flag. The entanglement of State, Party and Obiang here becomes visible in 'dress', with the implicit obligation to wear it on specific occasions to perform attachment to the regime. It was puzzling to me, therefore, that the CICTE, an institution that depends directly on the government, had pursued the creation of a *vestido nacional* with the goal of using it both on the popular and on the official level, in order to represent a unity between all citizens and cultural groups of Equatorial Guinea.

Crispin Obama, the Deputy-President of the CICTE at the time I carried out the interview (April 2010), was one of the people - together with the former Minister of Culture and writer Juan Balboa Boneke – who had been directly involved in the process of creation of the national dress. The Council's participation in the process involved the carrying out of a study about 'the evolution of fashion in Equatorial Guinea', which included descriptions of the specific garments that had been in continuous use in the country¹³¹. A single dress was designed on the basis of this study of the evolution, continuities and shared ornamentation of clothing between the different ethnic and cultural groups of Equatorial Guinea. The process of designing this unique dress was lead by the dress maker Agustina Alimama, who had also done most of the research. The drawings for the first models were produced by Esteban Bualo Nokamba. To design and make the first prototypes, Bualo Bokamba worked together with dressmakers such as Lucía Mbá Maye, who was then a teacher in the

¹³¹ Unfortunately, I was not able to access to the materials produced from this research. The information I have about its contents hails from the interviews I could carry on. The interviewees agree in considering the study as 'thorough and exhaustive'.

*Escuela-Hogar de la Sección Femenina*¹³² (the institution nowadays known as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women Promotion).

Agustina Alimama, who had led the project, had been exiled during the Macias dictatorship and had returned from exile after Obiang's coup d'état. At the beginning of the 1990s, when the national dress was designed, she held the role of regional delegate of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women Promotion. She later reflected on the experiences that led to the national dress project:

It gave to me the possibility to travel around the world as a representative of the Ministry. In the international meetings of CEMAC [Comunité Economique et Monétaire d'Afrique Centrale] I realised that we needed a national dress of Equatorial Guinea. The representatives of other African countries had their own typical dresses, everyone with its own characteristics [...] Guinean women would have to wear *kabá ngondo*. (Interview, Barcelona, May 2010)

The need for the invention of a national dress, therefore, emerged from the need to project *Guineanity* towards the exterior. After Obiang's coup d'état, the regime made a big effort to project the nation internationally. The autarkic system of the *macismo* had resulted in an impoverished State for which Obiang's solution was to accept Structural Adjustment Plans and take advantage of official international aid. Therefore 'cleaning' the exterior image of the country was a crucial element in the political agenda until the discovery of oil (Abaga 1997).

While the project received institutional support from CICTE and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women Promotion, the funding of the research and the production of the first consignment of dresses came from private sources. The dress was produced and distributed by a cooperative of female entrepreneurs, COOPCREME (Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito de Mujeres Empresarias), which had been created at the beginning of the 1990s with the financial backing of (predominantly North American) NGOs. The founders, a group of women living in Malabo, well connected to power and some of them with relevant political roles, came from diverse cultural

¹³² Note that the Francoist organisation (La Sección Femenina de la falanje) found its continuity in Equatorial Guinea. Macias kept the name and the function of the organisation. After the coup, Obiang substituted *La Sección Femenina* for the *Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales y Promoción de la Mujer*. Having changed the legal status of the institution, the access of its members, the activities and the main goals were the same as its precedent. Again it is clear that the main feature of the Guinean State is the blurred boundary between the organisational structure of PDGE and the State.

groups (Fang, Ndowé, Fernandinians) and had life histories with a number of common elements. The majority of them had been born in Santa Isabel (colonial Malabo), had been raised and received education in the *Hogar de niñas* that the *Sección Femenina de la Falange* had in the city. Most of them subsequently studied in Spain, where they remained during the Macias Nguema dictatorship. After Obiang's coup, they returned and become part of the emergent elite of the new regime. For instance, the President of COOPCREME, Trinidad Morgades, later became the Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Equatorial Guinea (2005-2010).

COOPCREME was meant to operate as a bank of micro-credit for the small projects of its associates, and also as cultural association and a charity. As one of the founders (Jovita Jones) told me: 'we used to do basic stuff like painting zebra crossings near schools or giving away toys in hospitals... we also used to run a nursery school'. The assistance activities organised by the cooperative were always aimed at children and women, and the morals often echoed the moral values promoted by *La Sección Femenina*, in which all of the members of the cooperative had participated at some stage. The members of COOPCREME considered Doña Pilar Primo de Rivera, the wife of the first dictator of Spain, an icon and a model for women's associationalism. They also regarded the educational model of the Falangist organisation to be appropriate for the post-colonial Guinean context. According to Trinidad Morgades:

'Spain colonised us but also brought many good things that we shouldn't forget, like good values and education that nowadays we perceive as good but that, unfortunately, we're losing [...] Both in Spain and in Guinea, we should institute the military service. The school teaches how to read and to write, but we should show values to our children, if we want to finish with the current disarray in which these two countries are submerged.'

In an interview she gave to the Spanish newspaper *El País* during one of her visits to Madrid, Morgades claimed the need to have boarding schools like the Missionary schools of the colonial period. She considered that there was a need for an education in 'values'. In her own words 'we do not need to invent anything new in order to educate our children, we only need to observe experiences that worked out [...] we still believe the values that Spain gave us, therefore we cannot neglect (*El País* 2007)'. To my astonishment, Trinidad Morgades is not the only Guinean intellectual

who re-claims the Hispanic heritage of Equatorial Guinea and advocates for the defense of the values of national-catholicism or the *Hispanidad*. In fact, all the intellectuals involved in the project of creation the national dress position themselves as pro-Spanish. The literary production of Juan Balboa Boneke, Esteban Bualo Bokamba and Anacleto Oló Mibuy, shares a nostalgic vision of colonial Equatorial Guinea and a re-vindication of a post-colonial connectedness¹³³. The version of the *Guineanidad* that the promoters of the project share, has its roots in the historical heritage of a *Hispanidad* and a *Bantuidad*. This Bantu identity brings together all the ethnic groups of the country, whereas the condition of being a Spanish post-colony becomes a tool for the differentiate from the neighbouring countries, that also have a Nbantú heritage but are Francophone post-colonies.

The national dress was publicly and collectively exhibited at an official event in Malabo in January 1993 on the occasion of the annual donation of toys, organised by the government and COOPCREME amongst the children of the *Hospital General* of Malabo¹³⁴. All the promoters of the project participated in this charitable activity, together with Constanca Mangué de Obiang who, as part of the group, also wore the dress. After this first presentation the distribution of the dress and especially the cloth was quite intensive. The CICTE printed some posters with the picture of the design of the print and the drawings by Bualo Bokamba. The Hispano-Guinean Cultural Centre of Malabo (co-funded by the Guinean State and the Spanish foreign affairs ministry) organised a series of fashion shows where the different modalities of dress were shown along with with prêt-à-porter dresses tailored from the printed cloth that formed the base of the dress.

The *vestido nacional* was one of the folkloric elements selected to represent the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in the Universal Exhibition of Sevilla in 1992. The many associations of Guinean migrants in Spain organised presentations and shows in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Bilbao. The presentation of the dress in Barcelona was organised jointly with the association of Ndowé migrants in Catalunya (Rhombé) and the association of Fang migrants (Bia Fang). The exhibition consisted of a fashion

¹³³ Read in with this lense, for instance, the poems of these authors in Ndongo-Bydiogo and Ngong (2000), together with the multiple articles of Trinidad Morgades in *La Gaceta de Guinea Ecuatorial*.

¹³⁴ Some of the participants of the donation have used the dress afterwards and used the cloth to tailor everyday use clothing. However, the dress has not been used in an official event after this first presentation to the Guinean public.

show with a representation of the evolution of clothing and adornment in Equatorial Guinea. The final synthesis of this evolution, *the national dress*, was shown to be formed by diverse elements and, on top of a tailored printed-cotton tunic, there was a set of raffia ornaments.

Seis etnias, un popó. The iconography of a traditional dress

Agustina Alimama, Lucía Mbá Mayé and Trinidad Morgades differentiate two fundamental elements in the *vestido nacional*: the tailored tunic, confectioned with an 'African' print or special-print *popó*, and the raffia ornaments. In this section I describe the iconography of the dress following the explanations of its inventors. In this the considerations of Agustina Alimama are relevant, as she was the dress maker that completed the project.

The cotton-printed tunic seeks to represent the clothing tradition of the Fernandinos. According to the CICTE, the Fernandinos were the first in Equatorial Guinea to use Western clothing and textiles in their attire. The cut of the dress, both male (safari jacket and trousers) and female, is of western style with some variations, such as the fact that the masculine shirt does not have cuffs or collar and is not fitted to the body but is wide just as if it were a shorter tunic. For the female dress the fitted tunic certainly recalls the dresses used by female Europeans and Guineans at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, what is different in this case is the length of the dress, which is shorter than the one used at the beginning of the century.

One of the most important features of the national dress was the cloth it was cut from. In fact, it was this cloth that gave the dress its name: *popó guineano*. *Popó* (also known as *fancy*) is the term used in Equatorial Guinea for the six yards length pieces of printed cotton cloth with ornate patterns, printed using an industrialised wax-printing technique. These patterned cloths are one of the elements that define *la moda africana*. Indeed, the *popó guineano* can be used to make all sorts of fashionable garments like uniforms, ceremonial dresses or everyday work clothes.

It was very important for us that the *national dress* was an *African dress* [...] but we could not make it with just any other African fabric, just like the uniforms we use in weddings or the rest of ceremonies, we had to create a *popó guineano* that all Guineans identify with (Agustina Alimama, Barcelona May 2010)

Agustina Alimama collected the proposals of the other members of the project and she designed an inclusive pattern. The special prints used in Equatorial Guinea are printed in neighbouring Cameroon, and they are ordered from CICAM-CAMAIR, a producer of *fancy* based in Yaounde.

Similarly to the one used for the celebration of International Women's Day, the pattern was printed in the four colours of the national flag and consisted of a medallion with different icons. The first ring (counting from the exterior of the medallion towards the centre) shows once again the national flag. The second ring represents the 'national wealth' with the old currency: *bipkuele* for the Fang; *lokó* for the Bubi and *mabanja* for the Ndowé¹³⁵. The six stars located along the second circumference, refer to the six officially recognised ethnic groups in the country: Fang, Ndowé, Bubi, Bisió, Annobonés and Fernandino. The same cultural groups are represented with musical instruments placed in the centre of the medallion. They represent the 'national folklore' and they were chosen as metaphors for cultural diversity. Finally, the centre of the circumference represents the crown of the ceiba tree, considered the national symbol (it is also present in the emblem and the flag of the country).

The second element that Alimama highlighted are the raffia ornaments. According to her, raffia ornaments are common to all the cultural groups of Equatorial Guinea, and they all use elements of raffia in their folkloric manifestations. The skirt (*obóm* in Fang) is a common garment in all the so called 'traditional performances' that are still being enacted by all the ethnic groups. Although this type of skirt is used by both men and women in traditional dances and performances, in the case of the *popó nacional*, it only decorates the female dress. To the female dress is also added a raffia band that crosses the chest. This represent the legacy of the clothing used in the Ndowe folkloric dance *ivanga*. Finally, around the sleeves of the dress raffia ornaments recall other folkloric ornaments, in this case the ones that Fang and Bubi folkloric dancers use.

¹³⁵ These currencies were gradually substituted by every-use currency by the end of the twentieth century in the insular region and by the mid-twentieth century in the continental hinterland. For the Ndowé and the Fang populations *mabandja* nad *bipkueles* were iron objects used specifically for ritual transactions between families. For Bioko island, eroded seashells used as beads functioned as the equivalent. As I have described in chapter 1 these currencies were of special importance in marriage transactions and were gradually substituted by consumer goods and every-use currency.

The masculine dress has fewer raffia ornaments. Alimama pointed out that the cloth tied around the waist referred to the use of the *lapá* or *cloté*, which was the first use that Guineans made of imported clothes: 'a piece of cloth tied around the waist as a substitutive of the traditional bark cloth *obom*'.

From a popó Guineano towards a popó del partido: the incorporation of a failed discourse

Alimama, who has constructed a particular version of the history and evolution of Central African clothing, calls the process of invention of the national dress a 're-construction' of what she considers was cloth, throughout the path of Bantu migrations. According to her, by the time the peoples from the North arrived towards the Central African tropical forest they stopped using textiles and replaced them with bark cloth and non-woven fibres. The component that Alimama incorporated into the national dress as a synthesis of this particular vision is the embroidered collar that both male and female versions of the *popó nacional* have. This embroidered collar is meant to represent the Northern African textile traditions that have supposedly been lost on the way south to the forest. Again, the appreciation and re-construction of the sense of *Bantuidad* is at the forefront of this discourse of identity as a crucial element in the ethnic cohesion and the construction of a *Guineanidad*¹³⁶.

Both Agustina Alimama and Trinidad Morgades, as well as the rest of my interviewees have explained the process of creation of the national dress as an apolitical process. They attributed the failure of its use and distribution to a supposed lack of political references and to its conciliatory character, willing to include cultural diversity. Quoting Alimama: 'In Equatorial Guinea all what is not politics doesn't interest politicians, even it was the first lady who wore the dress in two occasions, the first lady!'

It is evident that political will behind the invention of a national dress responds to the identity needs of a particular group of Guineans. This group received their

¹³⁶ The official history of the migration of the peoples of Equatorial Guinea is filled with clear references to the biblical exodus, hamitic colonial theories, oral narratives mixed with the theories of Black Egypt of Cheik Anta Diop, etcetera. Often Fang and Ndowé intellectuals have drawn a historical tie with pharaonic Egypt. According to this point of view, the origin of the peoples of Equatorial Guinea would be close to the Nile river, just like the narratives derived from *Dulu bon be Afri Kara* expose (see Chapter 1 and eg. Creus 1995; Nerin 2011).

education during the colonial rule and they therefore tend to reproduce Francoist rhetoric and discourse. This is also a section of the population that either was already studying in Spain or had to migrate during the Macias dictatorship. They would return to Equatorial Guinea in the 1980s after *el Golpe de Libertad* and due to their education and their loyalty to the new regime, they occupied relevant positions in Obiang's administration. They constitute a group of people that, although they derive from diverse cultural groups, share an historical itinerary and have constructed their *Guineanidad* in the diaspora¹³⁷. Cusack (1999) described the factors that would have contributed to the construction of a national identity in this sector of the population. The British historian identifies five fundamental pillars in this construction: 1. The Hispanic heritage as a differential factor from the rest of Central African countries; 2. Bantu heritage as an element that unifies cultural diversity; 3. The shared trauma of the Macias dictatorship; 4. The experience of migration; and 5. The return.

To these points identified by Cusack I would add a sixth element that seems common to all the actors I interviewed in relation to this particular episode: their exhaustion and the disappointment of their expectations after their return in the 1980s. Changes in foreign policy after the discovery of oil and the diplomatic crisis of the beginning of the 1990s disaligned Spain and the Guinean state. This shift implied a gradual replacement of the political elite which had advocated a rapprochement with the ex-metropole. With the arrival of oil revenues, the distance between the expenses in infrastructure and those in the cultural sector increased. The creation of new cultural institutions and the creation of new positions of power, which have been taken up by the new generations, has relegated the promoters of the national dress to secondary importance as concerns with the creation of infrastructure to aid the oil industry take centre stage. Although most of them have kept their political or bureaucratic positions, those working to produce the national dress do no longer possess any influence on decision making.

The case of the national dress illustrates well how the discourse of Obiang's regime with regards to national identity has gone through different moments. These discourses can initially present themselves as antagonistic. In no more than thirty

¹³⁷ About the construction of the *Guineanidad* M'bare N'gom describes a group of Guinean students in Spain that constituted a sort of a 'nucleus of the Guinean intelligentsia abroad' that, according to him, organised the opposition to Macias Nguema abroad. (N'gom 2009:100-103).

years, Equatorial Guinea has transcended the isolation of the Macías Nguema regime, through the restoration of a close relationship with the ex-metropole during the first period of Teodoro Obiang, followed, after its departure from the Structural Adjustment Plans, by building ties with countries with which it had never previously had close relationships (Campos-Serrano 2011). The palpable result of this turn has been the celebration of the African Union Summit (under the presidency of Teodoro Obiang) in 2011 and the organisation of the African Cup of Nations soccer tournament in 2012 and 2014. The discourse of the regime plays around different identities that act as complementary elements for its multiple *Guineanidades*. For the official discourse, Guineans are categorised as *Hispanidad*, *Lusofonia*, *Africanidad*, *negritude*, *Bantuidad* and others. These same ascriptions are used for the practice of exclusion as well as for the definition of a national particularism awkwardly rooted in the ethnically diverse Guinean population (Nerin 2010).

It is not surprising then, that inside Equatorial Guinea the creation of a national dress became relegated to the category of anecdote and that the majority of the population is not aware of it. The 'uniform' used in the community, State celebrations and political meetings is the *popó de partido* (lit. the dress of the political party). In Barcelona, however, the majority of Guinean migrants recall and keep material images of the official presentation of the national dress. This has happened alongside other folkloric events that have been promoted from and for the diaspora, including the creation of dance groups or the collection of data about endangered folklore. The strategy of folklorism has been, in fact, one of the most relevant in the forging of this national identity constructed by the diaspora.

According to my interviewees the national dress was one of the first textiles that Guineans had printed to order in a Cameroonian factory. I afterwards found out that Macías Nguema was actually the first to order the printing of an African style pattern with his portrait for the celebration of the independence day in 1972. However, the tradition of ordering special prints and tailoring special dresses or uniforms for special celebrations only became widespread later, during the 1990s. The promoters of the national dress revindicate themselves as the pioneers of African fashion in Equatorial Guinea in the setting of this costume. By the mid-1990s the political *popós* proliferated. Prints with the PDGE emblem, photographs of the president or advertisements of electoral campaigns started to be used during the

official celebrations and in the party meetings to an extent that there was no space left for the *popó guineano*.

The *popó de partido* has a crucial role as a tool of social control. In official events such as electoral campaign meetings, but also during popular celebrations such as *fiestas patronales* there exists an unspoken obligation to wear the party uniform. The president of the *comunidad de vecinos*¹³⁸ of a neighbourhood in Bata told me:

It is not mandatory to wear your PDGE uniform in the meetings at the community or district level. However, if you don't do it people can start to talk. They can say that it seems that you don't support the government, or that you feel shame, that you support the oppositional politics... you can search unnecessary problems.

At the same time that the *popó de partido* serves to embody a particular political affiliation, it excludes from the national project those who do not want to comply with the idea that in order 'to be Guinean' you have to 'belong to the party'. On other occasions, however, ordinary Guineans use the same strategy of the uniform to show a form of resistance. This is the case of a group of Ndowe women that decided to wear an alternative uniform to the one provided by the official Ministry in the celebration of the 8th of March:

We are also women, we also want to celebrate [...] but not with big people or with their uniforms. We, ourselves, have our party and our uniform as a Ndowé women.

Folklorism. The thematisation of cultural diversity

Folklorism is, according to Josep Martí (1996), the interest in 'popular' or 'traditional' culture and its intentioned 'manipulation'. It often becomes a powerful tool for the production and representation of ideological and political discourses. The use of this tool in Equatorial Guinea is in part influenced by the colonial legacy. Folklorism was intensively used by the Francoist regime in the (re)creation of a national-catholic identity on the Spanish mainland, and equally so in colonial Guinea (Nerin 2007). The fixation of a set of 'regional dresses' (Sp. *Trajes regionales*) and of

¹³⁸ The *comunidades de vecinos* (Eng. Neighbourhood communities) are part of the *Organos Menores de Base* and they are crucial for the Guinean State apparatus and of the sociological *nguemismo*. The leaders of the neighbourhood communities are members of the PDGE and their wives are normally part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women's Promotion, and they are in charge of the management of the women's associations.

the *Coros y Danzas* (Eng. 'Choirs and Dances') was the Francoist strategy to trivialise cultural differences (Stehrenberger 2009, Ortiz 1999), de-politicise them and to convert 'regionalism' into an emotional and aesthetic element. In this manner, the historic regional diversity shifted from being seen as problematic in the composition of the general framework of the country to being used as a tool that served as an endless resource for the dictator's discourse. Of course, though, the (re)creation of Spanish nation-catholic identity was not only the work of discourse, as violent oppression was also widely used.

The performance of national diversity was the task of women. The *Sección Femenina de la Falange Española y de las JONS* was the institution responsible for preserving popular traditions. This included research on, and documentation of, those aesthetic aspects capable of producing 'picturesqueness' (just like the regional dresses in post-colonial Equatorial Guinea), as well as those more sensitive and emotional (like music and dance) (Ortiz 2009). In the folkloric manifestations the regional costumes were elaborated with modifications that were considered necessary to make them fit Francoist morals and values. Carmen Ortiz (2009) in a reflection about the invention of the *trajes regionales* in Spain highlights how all of the regional costumes of the *Coros y Danzas* groups incorporated elements like the *poplolos* (trousers under the skirt) and had the sleeves modified to comply with the strict codes of National-Catholicism. It was a requirement that the members of the dancing groups had to learn and perform the different dance variations found in their *Provincia* (Eng. Province). This way, folkloric dances that were originally circumscribed to a specific and small locality were extended to wider frames such as those of the 'province' or of the 'region'. 'Regional costumes' were, therefore, a selection of local folkloric garments, specifically chosen to represent a tipified diversity and to contrive the amalgam of a cohesive national folklore.

The *vestido nacional Guineano* seems to have responded to the same dynamics. This makes sense when we look at the life histories of its female promoters, who had mostly been educated at the school of the *Sección Femenina* and they took part in the activities of *Coros y Danzas*. There is, then, an obvious link between the proposal of Morgades and Alimama and the Francoist folkloristic strategies. In both cases the scheme of folklore creation is exactly the same: first, historical and ethnological research takes place that justifies the selection of relevant symbols for a cultural identity. Then, practices and materials are chosen that fit into the discursive aims.

These practices that produce 'picturesqueness' are then fixed so as to thematise identities. The Guinean national dress was thus thought to produce an inclusive identity that sums up the country's 'national ethnicities'. As we have seen, the chosen elements to represent such unity are: 'tradition' represented in the form of the old currencies, folklore materialised in musical instruments, and dancers' ornaments. Finally, everything is wrapped with an African print: the ethnic identities associated with the past and linked up with Bantu identity thus projects themselves towards a future, represented by the echo of a Panafricanism that has been made into cloth.

Fashionable tradition: constructing a trendy nation in the Malabo Fashion week

Following the failure of the 1990s national dress design, COOPCREME has found its replacement in a generation of younger female entrepreneurs. Since 2010, *International Malabo Fashion Week* has been celebrated annually. This event is organised by the editorial board of *Ewaiso* magazine, lead by Librada Asumu. *Ewaiso* is a recent publication (it started in 2009) and its editorial offices are in Malabo¹³⁹. The target reader is the female Malabo dweller, although the magazine is also distributed in Bata. Given that in Equatorial Guinea the printed press is both scarce and directly controlled by the regime, *Ewaiso* represents one of the most popular publications that one can find in the Madrid-like kiosks installed in Malabo and Bata in 2010¹⁴⁰.

The *International Malabo Fashion Week* is promoted by several private companies, and is backed by the Ministry of Culture and by the cultural centres of the

¹³⁹ *Ewaiso* means 'woman' in Bubi. It is striking that a Guinean mainstream magazine adopt a Bubi name, taking into account that the majority of its editors are Fang. *Ewaiso* has become one of the gossip magazines of Equatorial Guinea or, better, Malabo society. Inspired by this role and focussing on tabloid content, in 2011 another magazine called *MalaboSA* was launched. *Ewaiso* apart from announcing the calls and activities of the Social Affairs Ministry, offers diverse sections where there are some external collaborations, counselling and reflections about fashion, cooking, cosmetics and other considered feminine activities. The editorial board participates in a number of activities directed to women and always with the governmental support.

¹⁴⁰ The National Library of Equatorial Guinea installed a few kiosks in Malabo and Bata. The kiosks, are almost empty of materials. They were meant to constitute the vending spots for the country press and the country literature. Guillermina Mekuy has also promoted the edition of a fashion magazine and has printed extra edition of her books so that the kiosks can be filled up with merchandise.

Spanish and the French international development offices. It has been held every year since 2010 and in 2011 a satellite event was organised in Madrid (at *Circulo de Bellas Artes* - a prestigious cultural institution in the Spanish capital) with the financial support of the Spanish international development office, various private companies and the Guinean Ministry of Culture. The event, which was intended to serve as a Guinean tourism and cultural production, ended up organised and monopolised by the *Malabo International Fashion Week*, fashion being the major product promoted towards the exterior.

The discourse of the organisers of these fashion shows suggests that they and others perceive fashion as a manifestation of a 'great educational power' for the transmission of, according to Librada, 'important values for the society in general and women in particular'. In urban Guinea, fashion is a crucial element in social interaction, and social and material wealth can be assessed through body appearance and clothing habitus. The *International Malabo Fashion Week*, therefore, aims to capitalise upon this communicative capacity of dress. According to Librada:

'In Guinea every day physical appearance and fashion are becoming more important. What we want is to enhance African goods and designs while putting special emphasis on the promotion of Equatoguinean designers [...] Fashion represents us, Guineans and it is through fashion that we transmit values [...] this is why I have decided for the title 'Tijeras, Cultura y Vida' for the first edition of the Malabo International Fashion Week'. (Librada Elá, Malabo 2010)

Again, dress becomes a mechanism not only to represent identities but also to craft and work on them. We might ask, however, just how effective this process actually is. These fashion shows are organised by a new generation of women who, similarly to what I have described for the national dress, also occupy relevant public positions or are close to the Esangui network. They tend to elaborate an identity discourse to promote the social cohesion of the multicultural Guinean society. However, if they also use dress as a tool for identity expression, they do not use the same language as their predecessors. Rather than to resort to folklorism and the thematisation of essentialised cultural identities, they avoid ethnic boundaries and depart from an urban and modern reality. They draw upon panafrikanism, upon modernity and consumption practices of urban dwellers in order to project a Guinean national identity that has its audience in the elite and in the exterior.

Bauman (1996) in his reflection on post-modern identities states that if in the context of modernity there is a general need to ascribe to a specific identity, in the postmodern context, fashion constitutes the opposite: it becomes a tool to avoid being ascribed to a particular identity which is prescribed for the group, in search of individuation. The Guinean understanding of fashion as a vehicle to represent a Guinean national identity is interesting in this context. African fashion is used simultaneously as 'fashion', with its changes of trends and styles, and as a sort of 'ethnic dress' representing collective identities. The 'Afro-Guinean' fashion displayed in the fashion shows vindicates a distinction, a Guinean specificity. However, in the same manner that it expresses a Guinean national identity it is promoting the membership of a wider collectivity, the world-system itself (Ferguson 2006). Through dress and fashion the creative capacity and consumption linked to 'good taste' and bodily capital emerges, but it does so by differentiating it from 'the Western creativity' and reclaiming an Africinity that serves as union nexus between diverse ethnic ascriptions inside national borders and transnational entities.

The communication of this re-created identity, however, does not reach the majority of the Guinean population, which does not attend fashion shows, nor responds strongly to the idea of a national identity discourse. For ordinary Guineans, fashion shows and national dresses are 'stuff that belong to *los grandes*'. In one sense, the attempts to invent a Guinean consumerist nationhood through fashion are a self-catered processes in that, rather than integrating a majority Guinean citizenship, it serves to strengthen the elite sense of belonging, while confirming social hierarchies. Could we consider the project of creation a Guinean consumerist nationhood a process of class creation? Will it come to confirm the existence of an elite that tries to control, not only the access to foreign wealth and consumerist goods, but also meaning and its production? I think we have the empirical basis to answer these questions. However, they will need to be explored in future research.



Figure 31 Detail of the Popó Nacional Print



Figure 32 Detail of the drawings by Bualo Bokamba. Popó Nacional



Figure 33 Members of COOPCREME at a charity event wearing Popó Nacional.
© Morgades-Memba Archive



Figure 34 First Malabo International Fashion Week. 2010

Glossary and abbreviations

<i>Abaceria</i>	Small trading post
<i>Asamsé</i>	Second-hand clothes imported from the Global North
<i>Ayeñ</i>	Fang term that refers to transformative work
<i>Bayamselam</i>	‘To buy and sell’. Pidgin term for trade. Also used for the particular section of the marketplace dedicated to the retail of non-fresh foodstuffs.
CEMAC	‘Communauté Économique & Monétaire de l’Afrique Centrale’ Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
<i>De país</i>	‘Of the country’, used to refer to consumer goods that are not imported from abroad
<i>Dinero de comida</i>	‘Money for food’. Small amount of cash required for the purchase of daily provisions in a household
<i>Djangué</i>	Rotating Credit Association
<i>El interior</i>	The interior
<i>Elegancia</i>	First-Hand clothes imported from the Global North.
Esangui	Clan of the President’s Family
<i>Esseñ</i>	Fang term that refers to commoditised labour
<i>Factoria</i>	Trading factory/trading post
FCFA	‘Franc de la Communauté Financière en Afrique’. Franc CFA

<i>La triste memoria</i>	‘The sad memory’. Expression to refer to Macias dictatorship
<i>Le Patron</i>	‘The Boss’. Nickname of Teodoro Nguema Obiang
<i>Los Grandes</i>	‘The Big Ones’. Term popularly used to refer to the elite
LRO	Liverpool Record Office
<i>Mamá Constancia</i>	‘Mother Constancia’. Expression to refer to the First Lady
<i>Moda Africana</i>	African Fashion
<i>Mongob</i>	Leather Shoes
Mongomo	Provincial capital of the region where the presidential elite comes from
Naná Mangué	GONGO led by Constancia Mangué de Obiang
<i>Negocio</i>	Business, enterprise
NML	National Museums of Liverpool Archive Department
PDGE	Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial
<i>Popó</i>	Wide-cut dress tailored with African fabrics. Term also used to refer generally to African clothes
<i>Sansconfians</i>	Flip-flops made of plastic
<i>Tiempos de Ondó Edú</i>	‘Times of Ondó Edú’. Expression used to refer to the Autonomy period in late Colonial period

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