THE CENTRALIZATION OF BUBI´S CHIEFTAINCIES AND THE SPANISH COLONIAL EXPANSIO IN BIOKO´S ISLAND

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The Bubi is the autochthonous ethnic group of the Island of Bioko in Equatorial Guinea. It population is the second ethnic group in the country, although it represents only 9% opposed to the 82% that the Fang ethnic majority represents.

The abrupt topography of Bioko, with its orographic barriers, made contact with foreign populations difficult and also favored a certain isolation among the settlements which even produced different Bubi dialects that persist today.

First Contacts with the Europeans

The first data of interest on the Bubi ethnic group do not appear until the 19th century when African and European arrived to the island. As a result of the first commercial transactions the traditional agricultural and fishing Bubi economies underwent transcendental changes.

We can try to reconstruct the evolution of Bubi political and social structures from the documentation offered by expeditions, missionaries and civil servants of the Colonial Government. The fact that the first references to the Bubis go back only to the 19th century is due to the long period during which the island was abandoned between its discovery in 1472 by the Portuguese and when colonization began. Three centuries afterwards, in 1777, the island was ceded by Portugal to Spain. The absence of a colonization plan for the island by Spain led to the loss of real control to the benefit of England, who in 1827, founded the city of Clarence (today Malabo, the capital) on the north of the island to control and put down the slave trade. It was in the forties that the Spanish government began to send expeditions to the island. A decade later,

Spain began the enterprise of colonizing the island permanently together with the first Claretian missions leading the evangelization of the island. The Spanish colonization lasted for a century, until the colony became independent in 1968.

BUBI CHIEFTAINCIES IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Political and Social Organization

In order to understand how the Bubi chieftaincies developed, it is crucial to analyze the political and social organization, speccially the patriclans. Bubi social organization is articulated just as it used to be, in two descent groups: the matriclan and the patriclan; the clans are exogamous and segmented in lineages without names. Both patriclans and matriclans have a chief who is the oldest person and the oldest woman of the matriclan shares the chieftaincy of the matriclan with the man. All the patriclans in turn are divided in subpatriclans with different social ranking, which demonstrates the existence in the past of a very structured internal social hierarchization. On the other hand, the meaning of the names in the patriclans shows their functional character in the past and their importance in the social structure. In general, these names refer to jobs or are associated with ritual functions and in other cases, they allude to the social and hierarchical organization. In the past, there was a certain autonomy of government among the different clans, encouraged by the dispersion and isolation of the settlements due to the island's topography.

Internal Fighting: Fusions and Splits of the Clans

In the centralization process that took place, the patriclans were the main characters in the splits and fusions that shaped a power structure of key importance.

The tales of how towns were founded are, basically, tales of wars and escapes. In these legends, mythical explanations are mixed with historical events such as the wars and fighting attested to in explorers' and missionaries' descriptions. The majority of the wars took place between neighboring regions, confrontations between long distant settlements were less frequent. All of these wars produced numerous migrations in the interior of the island, which obliged them to establish new settlements. In many cases, called these new settlements with the same names as those where they had come from and they had split. Because of this, at present we can find many town names repeated

throughout the geography of the island. This fact is interesting for explaining the internal divisions. The displacement of patriclans or of segments of patriclans also implies the division of the matriclans.

This dynamic provoked a continuous restructuring of the system of chieftaincies. The patriclan groupings that the evangelization later carried out, in order to create the present-day towns, again produced a reorganization of the hierarchies among the patriclans.

External Fighting against Creole Settlements

In addition to the confrontations that broke out among the Bubi, there were also confrontations with other African peoples who had established the island, many of them, were the slaves liberated. In this way, they populated the northern part of the island with a Creole population of Krumans, workers from the Kru Coast (Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast) and with freedmen brought from the Gold Coast (Liberia), Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon, whose descendants were the so-called "fernandinos" (Fernando Poo was the former Bioko). The first half of the 19th century, this Creole population was the main actor in the colonization of the island's coast. Their main activity was commerce with the Bubis and with the European ships that reached the island. Relations between bubis and these Creole populations were distant and rather hostile; shortly afterwards, the conflicts about land began. Finally, the "fernandinos" managed to extend their market all along the western coast.

In this mid-19th century, the Spaniards were timidly initiating their expansion to control the colony, the difficulties that Spain faced for colonizing its possessions derived from ignorance about the territories. The colonization process then was characterized by a precarious political and administrative organization.

From this moment on, transcendental changes occurred in Bubi political and social structures. This second half of the 19th century coincides with the emergence of a kingdom in the Valley of Moka (southern part of the island) The evolution of what has been called the Bubi monarchy deserves special attention because of the important role it had as a native political organization reistance to the colonial government.

The Centralization of the Chieftaincies and the Apogee of the Monarchy:
The Reign of Moka

The Valley of Moka was also where the "Abba", or high priest, resided. In this way, the two great centers of power, religious and political, became concentrated in the same place, and it was precisely where the centralization of the chieftaincies began. There are hardly historical references about this period but we know that he was already reigning around 1870.

The king Moka represented the most distant line from the Spaniards, he even forbidden the Bubis to offer hospitality or provisions to any foreigner who approached his domains and the legend spread that he would die if he saw a European. Moka lived secluded in the valley and the mystery created around him reinforce their image as great chief, it was even hard for the natives to see him. In spite this isolation he was informed about everything that occurred in his domains and he managed to collect the tributes he demanded in exchange of protection and order. One of the keys that reinforce Moka's control over the chiefs of other towns was his military superiority. Moka had more power and influence over the Bubi population than the Spanish governor. As the years went by, the oscurantism that had surrounded him was dispelled and in 1887 he finally gave in and agreed to let the Spaniards visit him. Nevertheless, Moka maintained his attitude against any missions to be established in the valley or even didn´t allow the children to be sent to school. At the end of Moka's reign, only one decade later since his first encounter with Europeans, the missionaries introduced potato cultivation into the valley. This quickly facilitated the evangelizing mission in that center of resistance. Two years later, on 1899, Moka died.

From then on, during the following reign, the colonial government broke through and achieved political control of the natives. The transfer of powers had begun.

20TH CENTURY: DECLINE OF THE MONARCHY AND TRANSFER OF POWER TO THE COLONIAL AUTHORITY

The Reign of Malabo

King Malabo reign was characterized by a good relationship with the missionaries and submission to the colonial authority, besides his lack of decisiveness and the limited sphere of his authority.

During his mandate, a series of coinciding events occurred, which were relevant enough to unleash a change of direction in this structure of centralized power: the military institution was dissolved, the high priest "Abba Moote" died in 1909 without choosing a successor and there were many disturbances with the Bubis refusing to carry out the forced labor impossed by colonial authorities. Malabo lost the little influence he had with the northern Bubis, who maintained stronger contact with the colony.

In 1917, the Bubis were already completely disarmed, and in the twenties, Bubi autonomy was crushed. The so-called "Hispanization" process, initiated around 1909, already seemed to be a reality. The government and the missions then began the process of reunifying the villages and towns to carry out the evangelization and to control the population. This process totally upset Bubi society, not only because of the consequences of the intense evangelization and the colonial control , but also because it meant a restructuring of the Bubis' habits in all spheres: politics (in the clan chieftancies), economy (with property restructurations) and daily coexistence, since it forced them into a more sedentary and gregarious way of life. The concentration of the villages was not an easy task. The Claretian missionaries had continuous difficulties in their attempts to influence the Bubis and the regrouping in settlements was not finished until the forties.

In 1937, after a 33-year reign, Malabo died. During these last two reigns, until 1952 with the death of the last king, the decline of the Bubi monarchy became clear; it was only a symbolic authority since the colonial government named other parallel official chieftaincies. In those years, political power was already under the colonial government's control, but the colonizers' pretensions of obtaining maximum agricultural production from the island faded away. The colonists could not manage to get enough labor to work the fields. The failure of the administration's measures to solve this problem was justified, in colonial discourse, by the "Bubis' scarce fondness for work.

Final considerations about the bubi´s political power evolution:

- The independent chieftaincies and clans split described for the first half of the 19th century, could be attributed, more than to environmental conditions, to the political sphere of power relations: the internal fighting for leadership in the chieftaincies

- In the second half century , there were two causes that promoted the unifacation processes and contributed to the appearance of Moka´s reign: one was the need to defend themselves from foreign intrusions; the insecurity and threat they were exposed made it necessary remain group and Moka managed to implant new and effective military and judicial institutions. The other, is the sacred dimension of the Bubi monarchy; Moka´s leadership was not based on wealth but on spiritual legitimacy, an aspect that is very important in African royalties.

- It is also important to point out that this centralization was never complete and it would not have endured for long, because again, the threat of fragmentation was already evident during the following reign. King Malabo was incapable of maintaining unity, he did not have the previous military means and neither showed any initiative for mediating in the conflicts.

- In this parallel development where local power and colonial power were closely related, we should not attribute all the transforming power only to western colonial domination and bubi submission, because there was also a history of local reistance and internal conflicts.