


THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE INTERNATIONAL: THE MANDJAKU PEOPLE, KNOWLEDGE, AND ANCESTRY OF IRAN AND BALUGUM

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n4-142>

Submitted on: 03/14/2025

Publication date: 04/14/2025

Virgínio Vicente Mendes¹ and Erica Paula Vasconcelos²

ABSTRACT

This article aims to problematize the role of the international in the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, specifically the Mandjaku peoples, through the ideological/colonial project 'New Man'. The article argues that the international exerts a double movement of dehumanization and erasure of knowledge and ancestry in Iran's ritual Gêchai and Balugum, and their practices in the relationship with nature, food survival and forms of collective care. To this end, we used semi-structured interviews as a methodology to listen to the Mandjaku about the current situation of the people in the current structure of the country, being structured in the scope of the article in two sections. The first section problematizes the theoretical debate on the double movement of the international in the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, highlighting the negative influences against the Mandjaku people. In the second section, we highlight the ritual of Iran Gêchai and Balugum as a way of confronting this international, opposing colonial ideologies, based on ritualistic practices such as relationship with nature, food survival and collective care, in addition to ancestral teachings. In short, this article contributes both to the discipline of history and International Relations, since it addresses narratives of the history of Africa (Guinea-Bissau), unarchiving the epistemologies in the ancestral knowledge of the Mandjaku people, as well as dialoguing about the international, the nation-state and the relations and power, inserting itself in the literary currents that go against the forms of epistemicide and the ontological violence on the literatures of Guinea-Bissau.

Keywords: International. Mandjaku. Guinea-Bissau. History. International relations.

¹ PhD student in History

Federal University of Paraná (PPGHIS-UFPR), CAPES scholarship holder
Master in African Studies, Indigenous Peoples and Black Cultures (UNEB).

Lattes: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/4032056005065978>

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2000-2195>

E-mail: virginiovicente90@gmail.com

² PhD student in International Relations

Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (IRI/PUC-Rio), CNPq scholarship holder
Master and Specialist in International Relations (UNILA)

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1698626449272110>

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1261-2912>

Email: erica.vasconcelosubis@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

[...] "Tabanca, as we usually refer to it in Guinea, community is a set of cultural and spiritual conceptions that orders a certain way of doing and defining things. That's another way of being Mandjaku." (**Interview with Avelino Vilela, belonging to the Mandjaku people**)

What would be our initial thought when we heard the name Guinea-Bissau³? Going even further, and when do we hear the word *Mandjaku*⁴? Perhaps, and with great certainty, if we were to create a sense to quantify how many people know or have heard of both words, the biggest problem would not be the numerical data, but the negative conceptions, in large numbers, of the first and the null knowledge about the second. This last problem is even worse when we move both contexts to think about them in the international conjuncture that goes beyond the African sea coasts. This explains the frequent practices of many scholars on the subject of Africa, looking at their countries as fragile, poor, with political and economic instability and migratory crises, accusing ethnic conflicts as consequences of these reaffirming the theoretical conception of the native⁵, with the current Guinea-Bissau being included in this context.

In other words, little is looked at or thought about the structure that existed before the invention of what is known today as Guinea-Bissau. This construction of national identity as an element of the legacies of colonization, Portuguese and French, implemented through a colonial ideological project configured in the ideology of the birth of a 'New Man', which only materializes from the international, is erased. In this sense, the article aims to highlight the role of the international in the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, in particular of the Mandjaku, through the implementation of the ideological/colonial project 'New Man'. Starting from the latter to problematize the double movement of the international under the model of what is 'human' and what is 'civilized' for dehumanization and erasure against the Mandjaku, in addition to the knowledge and ancestry of the ritual of *Iran Gêchai* and *Balugum*⁶ and *Balugum*⁷.

³ Detailed geographic information in the first section.

⁴ This name is written as Manjaco in the Cultural Bulletin of Portuguese Guinea (BCGP), but we chose to use the written form as it is pronounced in the Mandjak language of the Mandjaku people. In the second section we worked on the meaning of the name, the ancestral soul and the stages of the ritual of Iran and Balugum.

⁵ Anthropological meaning used to name those born in the country.

⁶ Translated from the mandjak, *Iran Gêchai* are the spirits, and *Balugum* is the soul of the ancestors, both of which will be better discussed in the second section.

⁷ Translated from the mandjak, *Iran Gêchai* are the spirits, and *Balugum* is the soul of the ancestors, both of which will be better discussed in the second section.

The methodology used was a semi-structured interview to enable communication with some Mandjaku to understand how they understand national identity. We used some answers, which are within the scope of this article, organized into two sections. In the first section, we problematize the double movement of the international in the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, highlighting the negative influences against the Mandjaku people. In the second section, we highlight the ritual of Iran Gêtchai and Balugum as a way of confronting the international, opposing colonial ideologies, based on ritualistic practices related to nature, food survival, collective care and ancestral teachings. This article contributes to the disciplines of History and International Relations by contributing to the literature on the history of Africa (Guinea-Bissau) and the Mandjaku people, and also discusses the international, the nation-state and power relations. In addition, this article is a tool against forms of epistemicide⁸ and ontological violence⁹ against the people of Guinea-Bissau and their ancestral knowledge.

THE DOUBLE MOVEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF GUINEAN NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE 'NEW MAN' PROJECT

Understanding how the role of the international for the construction of national identity was operationalized through the implementation of the 'New Man' project ¹⁰ is the central idea of this section. Before we address these points, we will situate them geographically. Guinea-Bissau, corresponding to the official name of the Republic of

⁸ Term coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos to refer to the destruction caused by Western culture in the forms of knowledge, knowledge and their cultural traditions. In addition, it also refers to the continuation of this destruction through the concealment and exclusion of these other forms of knowledge, for a greater overview see the work *"By the Hand of Alice (2013)"* by the author in question.

⁹ We use this expression by analogy with the idea that violence represents the denial of the human against another in the desire to get rid of that other, making violence an ontological condition to generate other forms of violence of being, knowing and knowing. In this case, we understand that this article goes against this form of violence by talking about the Mandjaku peoples from them and not only from those who wrote observing them. For more, see the work *"Violence between ontology and history in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of (2013)"* by Judikael Branco.

¹⁰ It is important to emphasize, even though it is not the centrality of this article, that the ideological project of the New Man was mentored by Amílcar Lopes Cabral, who elaborated and engendered the short and long-term goals, during the period of the struggle for independence (1963-1973), to claim his participation and that of his followers (known as cabralistas) belonging to the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), in the process of building national identity (MENDES, 2021). These presented themselves as the party of the Creole class, in an attempt to fit into the white project and fight for the space of the Guineans. Actions carried out to unite the peoples, supporters of the cause, in an attempt to expel the colonizers, exclude conflicts among the people, and end the exploitation of man by man, aiming at the construction of a given freedom, solidarity and equality, were taught to his followers. Although it seems to be a liberation project, it was built from the guidelines of the colonial structure and thus produced colonial violence, this justifies why we used this project from this aspect.

Guinea-Bissau, is a country on the west coast of Africa and borders northern Senegal and the southern Atlantic Ocean (UNILAB, 2025). Added to this territory are the eighty islands that make up the Bijagós Archipelago, which are separated by the channels of the Geba River, Pedro Álvares, Baloma and Canhabaque, its capital is the city of Bissau, its currency is the CFA Franc, which is a reference to the former French colony (UNILAB, 2025). Therefore, the name of the country is Guinea-Bissau, being the sum of the name of the capital and that of the country, Portuguese is considered the official language, but the country has more than twenty ethnic languages (Balantas, Fulas, Mandjak, Papel, among others), Creole and French (MENDES, 2021).

It is important to understand that Guinea-Bissau, historically, has a very close relationship with the region of Senegambia and has been known by other names, such as, for example, Guinea of Cape Verde, Greater Senegambia, or simply the region of Guinea. It is important to show this relationship, especially through the historiography referring to the arrival of colonization by the Atlantic in this region, which influenced the commercial and identity formation of the Guinean people. As Barry (1990) points out, with the chronological cut of the twelfth century shows the spatial dimension of Senegambia, which is located between Gambia and the rivers of Guinea and Sierra Leone, based on the social knowledge of women, who know the past of Senegambia, coincide with the beginnings of the expansion of the Manden towards the Atlantic Ocean (BARRY, 1990).

This period is known in historiography as a marker of agricultural colonization, which began at the end of the twelfth century and went up to the beginning of the thirteenth century (BARRY, 1990; MENDES, 2021). Being the gateway to the arrival of the international, through the maritime routes of the Atlantic on the Guinean slope, which enabled the expansion of colonization, under the contradiction of modernity, for the formation of the nation-state. The model of civilized man is incorporated, both in the country and in other colonies, and this becomes the *modus operandi* of the colonists, which expands as an ideology and is incorporated into the social contract and makes up the structure of the international and in the relations between countries. According to Walker (2016, p. 172) "there is a contradiction between the sovereign representative and the sovereign represented in the critical limits of those that involve the "big" and those that involve the "small"; alternatively, those that involve the "local", the "different" and the "human". This contradiction is built on the consensus of the national, which is at the heart of any modern politics of the international.

This makes the international a space in which hegemony and equality is abstract and at the same time manipulated by sovereign law, while differences enter into tension with these abstractions, this occurs in several places, thus arising the need for homogeneity and a sovereign authority to constitute judgments (WALKER, 2016). This happens mainly through 'difference', that is, the peoples who did not fit into this political model of the nation-state in the international one, were defined as different through a "horizontal explanation of the subjects in the homogeneous space of the world-machine, framed as the perfect market, reintroducing in the vertical dimension under distinctions between the sovereign and the people, the legal and the illegal, freedom".

Therefore, despite the existence of a well-articulated social political organization in this part of Africa, which was even composed of great Kingdoms and Empires, having great Arab political, ideological, economic, cultural and religious influence. Which already occupied the territory before the arrival of Europeans in this part of the African continent, such as the great empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and the Kingdoms of Gabu and Fuuta Djalo, among others (MENDES, 2021). The arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century imposed changes, especially in trade relations, with the so-called civilization model, with tributes, taxes, slavery itself and domination added to extreme acts of violence used by the colonists in the region. When we analyze this scenario, the existence of a schizophrenic structure becomes evident, since this 'civilization' defended a stereotype of a civilized human being. However, those who characterized themselves as civilized humans carried out inhumane (barbaric) acts of extreme cruelty against those classified as non-human, uncivilized, and soulless (ZVOBGO & LOKEN, 2023; MENDES & VASCONCELOS, 2024; VASCONCELOS, 2024).

Not only the arrival of the Portuguese, but also the French, Dutch, and English, intensified the migrations by the aliens who arrived in the region to exchange agricultural products and later became interested in the slave trade to expand their hegemonies beyond the borders (VASCONCELOS, 2024). Therefore, the conquest of these new territories not only subjugated the native populations, but also violated their structures so that they became the territory of the Portuguese crown (MENDES, 2021). It is important to highlight these points, as they are actions that depended exclusively on the Atlantic, the conquest of Ceuta¹¹ in 1415, and the seizure of territories and subordination of the Arabs in

¹¹ This conquest, dating back to 1415, was the foundation of the Portuguese global expansion, which, during the fifteenth century, carried out several reconnaissance missions in the Central and South Atlantic, leading to

West Africa (LY-TALL, 2010). This explains why the Portuguese were the ones who expanded the most and began explorations on the coast where the ancient kingdom of warriors of Kaabu inhabited¹² (SILVA & SANTOS, 2014).

This form of domination, of territories for commercialization, at an international level across the Atlantic, enabled the rise of Europeans very similar to the form of globalization, forming a triangulation of world trade (WONDJI, 2010; MENDES, 2021; VASCONCELOS, 2024). With practices such as: "collection of fees, similar to customs duties, to traders and barter between agricultural products such as rice, copal, civet and palm fiber bags, as well as carved objects of ivory, spoons, vases and oliphant, notably" (WONDJI, 2010, p. 455) that became increasingly frequent. Consequently, the Portuguese achieved a monopoly on maritime trade, in the sixteenth century, of the west African coast, from Arguin to Angola. For Guinea-Bissau, these were the waterways used by the Portuguese to extract gold from Sudan and thus they practiced trade on the coast and at the mouths of the rivers (WONDJI, 2010).

This maritime financial system strongly influenced the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, as the country was being occupied and dominated, having its resources usurped by European settlers. It was necessary to fit into the political model to be fitted into the nation-state model. In this case, it would have leaders, monarchs, economists and merchants, an official language and especially a civilized people who obeyed the monarch leader. The composition of this nation-state could not be far from the systematic organization of exchanges, the growing slave trade in the eighteenth century and the possession of bases in West Africa, in addition to the East India Company to bargain for products from Asia, Africa, in large quantities of gold in the Ivory Coast distributing throughout Europe (WONDJI, 2010).

In this way, we can observe that economic dynamics are not separated from the need to build national identity, as well as the international remains active in the continuation of economic internationalization, serving as a subsidy for Europe. Although I am not favorable to this context, we highlight the Hobbesian contributions regarding the role of the

the discovery of the islands of Porto Santo and Madeira, the Azores, the archipelago of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe (BETHENCOURT & CURTO, 2010). Thus began the exploration of the west coast of Africa, and the colonization of these Atlantic islands occurred approximately in 1420, realizing the maritime connection between Europe and Asia, but in the first decades of the century, Portuguese ships explored the entire east coast of Africa, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf (BETHENCOURT & CURTO, 2010).

¹² Also written as Gabu, Ngabou or N'Gabu, it is a federation of kingdoms located in the interior of West Africa, it has territories on the Gambia River, which has grown politically and economically, being one of the local changes in the face of the development of Atlantic trade (MALACCO, 2016).

international. It is important to mention that it offers a way for us to think about the relationship between achievements and problems as a type of internationalized political order. Hobbes directs this analysis to states of war, where he establishes the possibility of the existence of a political order, which would function internally and externally, with humanity as an element to be governed (WALKER, 2016). However, as Walker (2016. p. 203) points out, Hobbes' claims "are read in a philosophical climate, since they have a more historical climate, like normative advice for someone in particular, caught up in the changes in fortune of revolutionary England".

As we are not talking about the revolution in England, not disregarding this history, we need to understand that the international operated through a double movement in the construction of national identity in Guinea-Bissau. The first was the dehumanization movement. This happens in a context of mobilization of transport (colonial technologies), which followed the Atlantic sea routes, these technologies facilitated colonial expansion with the movement of trade between continents (VASCONCELOS, 2024), which was already happening among native African peoples. For example, barter was an exchange of food, hunting objects and also culture, with some conflicts, but nothing as disturbing as artillery and countless deaths, as happened in the West. This first movement marks the implementation of the ideological project, because, with the arrival of colonization and its imaginaries perpetrated in the form of practices on human and non-human, added to the allegations made by colonialist ideologies were central to classifying Guinean men and women as non-human, soulless and without civilization (MENDES & VASCONCELOS, 2024).

To reinforce these ideologies, the theology of demonization was preached against the race of these peoples, inferiorizing them and, at the same time, demonizing their cultural practices, the colonialist theories that placed the continent as a space without history, laws, kings, faith and without a soul (MENDES & VASCONCELOS, 2024). On the one hand, the devaluation of these, on the other, they continued with their colonies of exploitation, usurping their wealth and enriching their Western countries. This is not only Guinea-Bissau but also all of Africa considered a place of 'desertified land', which needed to abdicate its pagan gods, surrender to the Christian god, learn the language of European civilization and thus would be becoming a European nation-state (MENDES & VASCONCELOS, 2024).

In this case, the ideological project, which had in its scope this justification of the need for civilization, fostered the central ideology of Guinean national identity. By ignoring the varieties that already exist in the country, using the instigation of ethnic conflicts, colonial violence and the ideological war that was the I, Europe, against all Others, non-Europeans.

Therefore, the second movement of this international represents the ideological project of the New Man, which, like the first movement, needed even more the intensification of violence against peoples and their linguistic and cultural variations. Added to this violence, a kind of cursed package was formed that included other forms of violence and not only the physical one, such as: subordination, fossilization, marginalization, silencing. All this to impose people on the figure of a national identity that would be the new form of identification, based on the complete distancing of the people, in this case centralizing the Mandjaku, from the old garments (traditional customs) and distancing from nature and ancestral rituals. This represented the rebirth of the New Man who was civilized and humane, in addition to being identified as belonging to Guinea-Bissau.

Adding to this double movement that highlights the role of the international in the construction and implementation of national identity in Guinea-Bissau, it is representing the sense of evolution for the conjuncture of the development of the nation-state. We list three elements, which fatefully mark both this double movement and the implementation of national identity, the latter is fateful because they contributed to the erasure of customs with corporal punishment and also mental punishment of the Guinness and Mandjaku peoples. The first we call image substitution, which represents the removal of one's image to put another in its place, as Pollak (1992, p. 5) explains, identity incorporation was the creation of an image of oneself, for oneself and others, "that is, the image that a person acquires throughout life regarding himself, the image that she builds and presents to others and herself, to believe in her representation, but also to be perceived in the way that she is perceived by others".

In other words, the roots, ancestry, wisdom of the people were erased to fit in as citizens of a country, this one led by the white, who imposed laws and norms that must be obeyed, in addition to a flag, an anthem and the official language. The second we call the folklorized animalization of nature in the relationship with humans, which in the words of Ivaldo Lima (2018), the logic of identity is to distance the people from the relationship with nature, being imposed through violence, on all the Mandjaku, who despite being a gift from

nature, but, above all, a construction operated in time and space, under the contexts and circumstances of the field of culture (LIMA, 2018). In this context, the negation should be fulfilled, therefore, one is not Mandjaku only by birth issues, but by acquiring customs through interaction, experiences and coexistence with other peoples, since beyond this category of birth, there is the true identity, that of the nation.

The third and final point we consider as a form of genocide of the different, that in the justification of Hall, Woodward & Silva (2000, p. 36), "one of the main contributions of identity politics (construction of national identity) has been to construct a politics of difference that subverts the stability of biological categories and the construction of binary oppositions". This action of having a national identity shows how the 'genocide' was justified as necessary, which in this case was against the difference and the difference materialized in the Guinean people, in the Mandjaku, in the more than twenty different peoples, including Papel, Fula, Balanta, Mandinga, Biafada, Nalu, Bijagó, Felupe, Djankanka, etc.

Its particularities, worldview and cosmologies about nature. In this way, this national identity was composed of the thoughts and emotions, whether conscious or innocent, that the colonists put into practice the "who" or "who we are", as well as placed us in subjectivity, between our most personal feelings and thoughts. Therefore, it is in the difference that we mark our symbolic representations that we attribute meanings in our social and personal relationships (HALL, WOODWARD & SILVA, 2000).

Based on these assumptions, and following up in the following section, it becomes evident that the national identity of the Guinean people was imposed by violence, with the international playing a dual role, in confluence with other elements such as image substitution, folklorized animalization of nature and the genocide of difference, in addition, the stigmatization, marginalization and subordination that worked for the development of the process of erasure of existing customs. These processes have affected Guinea-Bissau and its Mandjaku people, to the point that, even today, they face the unique and exclusive Guinean social structure that defines those who are part of the country from those who are not (VAMBE & ZEGEYE, 2012). In this way, this structure of the country has affected the way of life of the Mandjaku people who try to move to claim participation in the country even though they are placed as different. In this case, in the following section, we bring the knowledge of ancestry in the ritual of Iran and Balugum, which have a strong relationship

between ancestry, nature and food survival, as highlighting this format of life as a marker of existence/difference in Guinea-Bissau in the post-identity.

CONFRONTING THE INTERNATIONAL THROUGH THE RITUAL OF IRAN GËTCHAI (SPIRITS) AND BALUGUM (ANCESTRAL SOUL)

Confronting the international through the ancestral knowledge of Iran's ritual Gëtchai and Balugum, about the relationship with nature, food survival, and collective care practices, is the main focus of this section. We would like to emphasize, especially in this section, that we will be entering a territory that requires a surgically sensitive look, bearing in mind that these subjects are not part of the literature incorporated and disseminated in the scientific environment. For a better understanding of the context in praxis, some words transcribed in the Mandjak language will be translated in a footnote. Another point is that the language and literature used is the sum of the experiences of the author, who is Guinean and belongs to the Manjaku ethnic group, along with the views of the interviewees who are from the same ethnic group dialoguing with diasporic authors who research race, racism, Africa and Guinea-Bissau. Among these, we use the few authors who write about the Mandjaku, some unfortunately, will box them into Western generalizations to analyze this people and their knowledge.

As Carreira (1947) affirms that the Mandjaku have similar linguistic affinities, habits and customs both in funerary ceremonies and in the enthronement of the régulos (kings) with the Papel and Mancanha peoples, stating that they are descendants of the same trunk (CARREIRA, 1947), that is, they are from the same family tree, this will be demystified later in the text. It is true, on these aspects, that the first generalization was made by the Portuguese, in which they stated that the population they inhabited in that part of Africa were rebels, including those of the Papel, Mandjaku and Brame ethnic groups. For Carvalho (1998, p. 59) "the Mandjaku are formed as a social and political organization that suffered from the colonial regime and is being harassed by the independent State and degraded by the traditional power structures of the colonial administration". Although it brings a political meaning to the mobilization made among the Mandjaku, we will avoid fitting them through the use of nomenclatures such as: 'social organization' or 'political' because they represent different temporalities and arise in historical contexts guided by modernity.

Starting from these assumptions, we will start with the 'who', who are the Mandjakus? In the 'Cultural Bulletin of Portuguese Guinea (BCGP)', the official organ of the Portuguese colonial administration in present-day Guinea-Bissau, the *Manjacos*¹³ are named and characterized based on a set of analyses made by a series of authors, including colonial administrators and ethnologists. From these constant observations with a scientific method of ethnological discourse (VIANA, 1947; GOMES, 2018). They define the Manjacos as peoples of Guinea and currently as an ethnic group that make up the Guinean territory. However, among the Mandjaku they are called "*fidjos di tchon*", which means 'children of that land' or could also be 'originators of the ground/land', based on the belief that their ancestors already inhabited space long before the arrival of the first European vessels on the African coast (GOMES, 2018).

Regarding the definition of the name, Quintino (1967, p. 85) explains that the name Mandjaku translated into Portuguese means "I tell you" or "as you believe", "Man=eu + Dja=disse + Co = particle that reinforces the statement)". This expression is connected to the devotion that the Mandjaku practice in the belief of the souls of their ancestors, represented by pitchforks (petchap or itchap). This is a type of symbol that is part of the principle of worship of souls, through these, it refers to the intimate relationship with the constitution and perpetuation of the family, accompanying it until the end of life by this ancestral soul (CARREIRA, 1947). In this way, ancestry for the Mandjaku starts from the belief in the soul. The interesting thing is that the concept changes depending on the place and the people, in Brazil, for example, ancestry represents the inseparable relationship marked by the relationship between Africa and Brazil that connects a line of ancestral spirits.

Like Ubuntu, Brazil exists because Africa has existed since before, even though this relationship is built by the forced migration of enslaved blacks that in the post-slavery period the recognition of belonging is touched on the diaspora of resistance of black populations, mainly through Candomblé and Voodoo. This is somewhat similar to the thinking of the Mandjaku who consider ancestry to be the inheritance of the knowledge of the ancestors, that is, of the dead, in the ritual practices of the Balugum, Iran, Bapene. Ancestry is present in the way of planting and cultivating, funerary rites, contact with the dead, storytelling to teach children, among other teachings. As Ernesto Pereira said in an

¹³ As mentioned earlier, in the BCGP bulletin, this word is written this way to refer to the pronunciation of Portuguese from Portugal.

interview when he answers the question about what it means to be a Mandjaku in a colonized country? He replied that "his ancestors are from Guinea-Bissau, and his parents came from there, we are originally from the land, the young people here care to know their origins" (MENDES, 2021, p. 115). Ernesto Pereira indicates in his answer questions about the sense of belonging as a biological and descendant issue, emphasizing the importance of teaching this ancestral belonging to young people, as a way of continuing to belong in future generations. He, too, does not recognize himself as a member of French society, and imposes himself against the idea of Guinean identity placed on all the Mandjaku, since they already existed in that land (MENDES, 2021).

In other words, this relationship between land, birth and belonging indicates this understanding of what ancestry is, the very word sender to something central, that is, the as a starting point for contact with the essence of the soul of the dead, which is the ancestors. Thus, they believe that these ancestral souls have the power to guarantee health, well-being, prosperity, wealth, and have the power of revolt. The festivals, for example, are for the Madjaku to show faith in the living presence of their ancestry, the festivals of farming, sowing and harvesting, to ask, thank and renew the bonds of affection with their ancestors. As Carvalho (1998, p. 79) reiterates, "the presence of ancestors is daily and honoring them becomes something normalized. The first rice is offered to them. Children are introduced to them. They are the first owners of the ground where the animals live." Mendes (2014, p. 120) reiterates stating that "*Petchap/Itchap* represents the link between those who are alive and those who have already died, especially the ancestors. It is through Petchap/Itchap that the living communicate with the dead in the Mandjaku communities" (MENDES, 2014, p. 120).

Consequently, this belief in the ancestral soul will be the mediator of the way of life, in the relationship between the Mandjaku and their relationship with nature, this becomes a chain of consequences for food survival. In other words, this ancestral soul that provides, corrects and welcomes is part of the ritual of Iran and Balugum, this social structure of coexistence between humans (Mandjaku) and non-humans (nature) and the very idea of belief in the soul oppose the ideological narratives that led colonial practices, such as the need for civilization justified in the absence of the soul of Africans and the expropriation and violent extractivism against nature in Guinea-Bissau. This leads us to demarcate points about how the ancestral ritual of the Mandjaku people confronts this international, which is composed of a double movement, in which one of them is the execution of the colonial

project. To do so, we list three practices present in the ritual of Iran and Balugum that are ways of confronting this continuation of the colonial that was introduced by the international in the country.

The first (I) we call the 'nature of care', to show that the harmonious relationship with nature is the central axis in the life of the Mandjaku, involves aspects of ancestry with the soul, collective care, wisdom of ancestors, food survival and especially forms of healing and affection between beings. In other words, this demonstrates that there can be no separation between humans and nature, because the former depends extremely on the latter, the latter, which is nature, is still composed of the lives of land, sea and air. This scenario refers to the central figures in the performance of the ritual, marked by the link between the living and the dead, especially the ancestors (Balugum). The figure of the entity called *Petchap* (entity of communication), which communicates between the living and the dead, among the Mandjaku, the *Kansaré*, are the angels of protection and justice, who act at the moment of birth and death (MENDES, 2014).

These entities create teaching and learning mechanisms in the community regarding the stories of ancestors, life conduct and especially how to take care of the land, which connects the ways of living well, healthy and how to teach children to take care of this land. For this reason, the umbilical cords of the newborn babies are buried on the altar of this angel, marking their belonging to the parents' community. If any person dies anywhere in the world, the remains must be transferred to their community of birth (Mandjaku lands). This act signals that the person will continue to belong to such a community (MENDES, 2021). From this scenario, agriculture represents the relationship with nature in these rituals that the Mandjaku perform annually, about this aspect, Carreira (1947) points out that the Mandjaku practice agriculture for two reasons: The first would be for self-sustenance and the second for commercialization.

However, even for commercial practices, the Mandjaku do not exercise mass extractivism over nature to the point of devastating large forests, as was done during colonization and after it, as is still carried out among agribusiness companies. Both practices will depend exclusively on the good relationship with nature, as is required by Balugum and Kansaré. Once disobeying this requirement, it is taught that punishment comes from both these entities and nature itself, which would be like environmental catastrophes.

The Mandjaku cultivate cotton, rice, bananas, sweet potatoes, cashews, beans, back, yams, oranges, lemons, chillies, mancara, cassava, corn, papaya, purgueira and sorghum, among others (CARREIRA, 1947). This agriculture is carried out with balance in the way used to plant, cultivate and harvest. Other products of Mandjaku agriculture are: anileiras, bissilão, buco, calabaceira, canafístula, cola amarga, cola, azeite amargo, farroba, ladolphias, macête, mampataz, mandiple, mangal, palmeira-do-azeite, pau bicho, pau carvão, pau sangue and poilão (CARREIRA, 1947). Which are extracted from tree trunks, roots, milk wood trees and other types of leaves. In addition to the practice of agriculture, marine fauna and terrestrial animals also serve as a food survival subsidy for the Mandjakus, such as hippopotamus, busse fish, barracuda, squirrel, jafal, mullet, sole, shark, shrimp, razor clams, combé, oyster, bentana, crab, leopard, saninha, palm rat, green pigeon, porcupine, among others (CARREIRA, 1947).

In the ritual, all this composition of fauna and flora of nature, it is taught that they belong to the Iran and the Balugum, because by them life is made by a circle that generates everything, also involving the issues of political and social life, which must be analyzed through the Bapene, who are the soothsayers and healer characterized as the wise. This relationship between entities and political figures is justified by the practice in which entities are solicited in situations of misfortune, both by peasants (Mandjaku who live from agriculture) and by politicians (JONG, 1988). For consultations and guidance regarding the resolution of various problems, to mediate humans with the gods, to consult the souls of ancestors and also traditional healers, who work with all kinds of medicinal plants (JONG, 1988).

In other words, the nature of care, based on ritual, has a common understanding among the Mandjaku people, and even those who belong to another ethnicity, that it keeps humans alive, for the natural resources, food, water and air, to exist. Which also decants in the political and social structures that belong to the colonial project of the nation-state, which, by its logic, should be separated from traditional and religious knowledge, but are also joined in the actions in the community. This scenario is repeated with another entity called *Pësson Bëpene*¹⁴ (healer and diviner), invoked to solve physical, mental and soul

¹⁴ Translated from majaku, *Pësson* means 'to rest' and the *Bëpene* is the characteristic given to the person who practices acts of divination and healer, that is, he is the Soothsayer and the Healer in the Mandjaku community. These two words together represent the path that the person will take in a rest of isolation to incorporate the entity and thus assume the role given and teach the community. Roughly speaking, he is the soothsayer and healer.

health issues. These soothsayers are responsible for conjecturing the future events of the lives of those who seek their assistance and care. To learn about their destinies, political figures seek guidance to discover things from their social, cultural, marital strata and so on.

Regarding the function of Pësson Bëpene Jong (1988, p. 16), he states that "in trance he can make his diagnosis through divine inspiration or theomania. The spirit transmits its message to normal human beings through an unintelligible language, which the *djambakus* (translated from Guinean Creole is diviner) can utter by ventriloquism." He adds, "Bapene also represents the ceremony itself that, after its performance, the person becomes a healer and diviner, becoming able to give consultation and/or cure diseases." (MENDES, 2014, p.126). To assume the function of Bapene, he must first of all come from the specific lineage of those in this group, so that they can be designated and summoned by the manifestation of a (dead) loved one. This will occur after the occurrence of signs, such as: a disease (yellow fever, malaria); a different behavior from the usual (committing robberies); conflict in relationships, at home, at work; among others.

According to Mendes (2014, p. 126) "the constant presence of these signs leads the person to consult a Bapene to make sure of the need to perform the ceremony and identify the respective *kakanda* (type of a call) if it is confirmed that the person must perform the ceremony, and cannot refuse". Carvalho (2004) reiterates that this person must perform the sacrifices on the altar of the spirit of initiation, the most powerful of the autochthonous altars, he points out (CARVALHO, 2004). We bring these details to point out the stages of Bapene's role in the initiation ritual, and how these stages fit into the second (II) way of confronting the international.

In this second (II) we can call it the 'nature of the collective', performed in both phases. The first culminates in the removal of the person to a forest, outside the village, accompanied by the Bapene, where secret rituals are performed, being kept for a certain time out of the reach of other people who do not belong to the Bapene lineage. After this time has passed, he returns to the people, as a new member, accompanied by another Bapene directly to his house, symbolically dead, or asleep, for he cannot walk alone, nor move his arms, much less open his eyes, so he is carried by other Bapene. This first phase demonstrates the relationship with the collective, as this person is cared for by other people, during this period of separation from the community, which is fair for a collective good since he will be in contact with the Balugum to learn about ancestry and care for nature and future generations.

The second phase, known as margin, in which the transmission of knowledge through orality of an expository nature, of teachings that are applied to the initiate for the good performance of the function of the godfather of Bapene and his assistants for a week. Thus, the new Bapene receives the consent of the Balugum to make interpretations of the speeches of these ancestors for humans, in addition to exercising the cure of the most diverse diseases, among these, diseases that modern medicine has not been able to cure. In short, the Bapene are considered people who have capacity beyond the human, especially about the knowledge of the invisible world and its future. That is why they are special, endowed with immeasurable aptitudes that go beyond what can be explained by the contemporary scientific universe.

This second phase of the Bapene ritual presents elements of the nature of the emotional care of the collective, also of the care of the health of the bodies focused on the practice of healers that need plants and other elements of nature. Showing how the idea of 'civilization' and 'modernity' brought by the international used methods to break and distance humans from this type of practice, on the one hand, demonizing it as witchcraft, on the other, stealing this knowledge and transforming it into laboratory science controlled by groups in social positions of power.

Finally, we bring the third (III) that we can call the "nature of the protection of the body", present in the ritual of the Mandjaku and which confronts the need for artillery while defending the discourse of peace, both present in the international. In other words, this third practice confronts this need for military weaponry as a form of protection, which ends up causing even more violence within countries, which even along with the feeling of patriotism this 'possibility' of weapon power is defended as part of the divine mission for them. Not far from this context, we had the eradicated feeling of Bolsonarism in Brazil and a policy of hate sentiment spread, with persecution and even death, against anyone different from the figure of the man, white, Christian, from a normative hetero family and who in his wardrobe had a collection of baby look t-shirts of the Brazilian flag.

In this regard, it is also important to mention the culture of American Trumpism and its war against immigrants, even though they are the ones who clean the streets, drive their cars and strengthen organ trafficking and sexual exploitation, indispensable services for conservatives who defend this thought. This (III) practice is governed by the entity called Irans or Gêtchai (spirits), the Mandjaku believe that they possess the upper force. According to Jong (1988), they have the characteristic of omnipotent creator who provides

humanity with protection and clemency through spiritual intermediary forces. In addition, in the words of Jong (1988, p. 19), the name 'Iran' indicates a spiritual force or being, as it also means the serpent".

The Irans represent the guard, protection and prosperity that the Mandjaku request at crucial moments in their lives. He also reiterates that "all adults have an Iran guarding them to protect themselves and their descendants against bad events." He carries this Iran on his waist or in his backpack wherever he goes, from time to time while he makes a ceremony to thank him for the guard and protection as a sign of gratitude for everything that Iran is providing him so far. Mendes (2014) agrees, also highlighting that this is the fundamental spirit in the social interaction among the Mandjaku, mainly because they are creatures that inhabit the skies, are messengers of ancestors and pass on prophecies that will guide those on earth. In addition to being protectors of humans and their generations, mediating negative behaviors in the collective, such as acts of stealing, killing, rape and injustices, the penalties are applied by the ancestors and involve incurable diseases with suffering until death.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the international, which arrives across the Atlantic on the Guinean slope, made possible both the expansion of colonization, in its contradiction of modernity, to conjecture the nation-state from the New Man project, conjecturing the national identity in Guinea-Bissau. Imposing changes and a model of civilization, in addition to tributes, taxes, slavery and domination added to acts of extreme violence, were used by the settlers in the region. Certainly, the international worked through a double movement for the construction of national identity. The first movement was dehumanization, putting into practice the ideological project added to imaginaries perpetrated in the form of practices on the human and non-human, the civilized from the animalized. These ideologies are central to the separation of the people from nature and being subjugated to exploitation in the colonial conjuncture. The second movement was the model of the New Man, which, like the first movement, happens through the intensification of violence against peoples, their linguistic and cultural varieties, which already exist. To create a national identity that would be the new form of identification of the nation-state of Guinea-Bissau.

In this way, we understand that the ritual of Iran and Balugum both oppose the ideological project of the New Man, because the Mandjaku believe in the ancestral soul, as

the one that provides, corrects and welcomes, that strengthens and mediates the relationship between humans (Mandjaku) and non-humans (nature). This belief in the soul also counterposes the narratives of colonial practices, such as the need for civilization justified in the absence of the soul of Africans and the expropriation and violent extractivism against nature justified by the theory of domination. Therefore, we mention three points, which confront the international, which are present in this ritual, composed of actions that teach practices of care for nature, representing the harmonious relationship for survival. Another point is the nature of the collective, performative in the phases of care between people, care for health, for bodies through practices of healers that need plants, and mental care with the transmission of tradition through orality. The last is the nature of the protection of the body, which teaches the protection and prosperity coming from Iran, being the fundamental spirit in the social interaction between the Mandjaku and are protectors of these and their generations.

Given this, we recommend this article as literature to inspire those who are thinking of contributing to research on African countries or countries that share colonial experiences, as in the case of Latin America. For these, we recommend that they try to make the opposite movement, to those of the existing literatures. This is to (de)center oneself from the West, to analyze its political organizations, social models and the religious and cultural orderings, which were imposed by colonization, to center on the works, references and visions of those who are at the center of marginalization. This movement is often incomprehensible, criticized and ridiculed by academic programs, undergraduate courses, professors, institutions, etc. But, from this movement of action that we (de)construct, (de)marginalize, (un)box and (de)archive the untold story, the non-existent positive representation, aligning with the feeling of belonging between the marginalized with our anxieties to know, research and understand to find themselves, this forms the construction of 'us' from 'them', the ancestors.

REFERENCES

1. Barry, B. (1990). Senegambia from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century: In defense of a sub-regional history. **Soronda: Journal of Guinean Studies*, 9*, 3–21.
2. Bethencourt, F., & Ramada, D. (2010). **The Portuguese maritime expansion**. Edições 70.
3. Carvalho, C. (1998). Rites of power and the recovery of tradition: The Manjaco rulers of Guinea-Bissau. **Soronda: Guinean Journal of Studies*, 4*(1), 1–349.
4. Carvalho, C. (2004). Colonial knowledge and gaze: Politics and iconography at the Centre for Guinea-Bissau Studies. **Soronda: Journal of Guinean Studies*, 8*(Series II), 55–83.
5. Carreira, A. (1947). **Social life of the Manjacos**. Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa.
6. Gomes, B. de. (2018). **Manjacos of Guinea-Bissau: On discourse, culture, knowledge and traditions (colonial and post-colonial period)** [Undergraduate thesis, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul].
7. Hall, S., Woodward, K., & Silva, T. T. da. (2000). **Identity and difference: The perspective of cultural studies**. Vozes.
8. Jong, J. T. V. M. (1988). Iran, so-and-so and disease. **Soronda: Journal of Guinean Studies*, 5*, 5–24.
9. Ly-Tall, M. (2010). The decline of the Mali Empire. In D. T. Niane (Ed.), **Africa from the twelfth to the sixteenth century: General history of Africa** (Vol. IV, pp. 193–210). UNESCO.
10. Lima, I. M. de F. (2018). **African representations in Brazil: New interpretations**. Ed. Bagaço.
11. Malacco, F. S. de O. (2016). **The Gambia in the Atlantic world: Fulani, Jalofof and Mandingas in modern global trade (1580–1630)** [Master's dissertation, Federal University of Minas Gerais].
12. Mendes, V. V. (2017). **Initiation rituals of the Manjaco people of Guinea-Bissau: Advino/napene and régulo/namantch** [Undergraduate thesis, University of Afro-Brazilian International Integration].
13. Mendes, V. V. (2019). **Guinean historiography: Analysis of processes of collaboration and resistance of native leaders to colonization (1885–1943)** [Undergraduate thesis, University of Afro-Brazilian International Integration].

14. Mendes, V. V. (2021). *Mandjaku identity(s): The “new man” project in the post-colonial context (1963–2012) and the invention of Guinea-Bissau* [Master’s dissertation, State University of Bahia].
15. Mendes, V. V., & Vasconcelos, E. P. (2024). “Desertified land of barbarian men and without civilization”: Eurocentric claims about Africa and the construction of identity in Guinea-Bissau. *International Journal of Human Sciences Research, 4*(26).
16. Pollak, M. (1992). Memory and social identity. *Estudos Históricos, 5*(10), 200–212.
17. Pereira, E. (2021). Analysis of the interviews [Interview]. In V. V. Mendes, *Mandjaku identity(s): The “new man” project in the post-colonial context (1963–2012) and the invention of Guinea-Bissau* [Master’s dissertation, State University of Bahia].
18. Quintino, F. R. (1967). The peoples of Guinea. *BCGP, 22*(85–86).
19. Silva, F. H. da, & Santos, M. B. (2014). *From Portuguese Guinea to Guinea-Bissau: A roadmap*. Fronteira do Caos.
20. University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony. (2025). *Guinea-Bissau*. <https://unilab.edu.br/guine-bissau-2/>
21. Vasconcelos, E. P. (2024). *From slave ships to the disembarkation in Salvador-BA: The role of the city in the formation of the modern international system* [Master’s thesis, Postgraduate Program in International Relations].
22. Vambe, M. T., & Zegeye, A. (2012). Amílcar Cabral and the vicissitudes of African literature. In C. Lopes (Ed.), *Contemporary challenges of Africa: The legacy of Amílcar Cabral* (pp. 35–67). UNESP.
23. Viana, J. B. (1947). Manjacos de Cacheu. *Cultural Bulletin of Portuguese Guinea, 5*, 280–281.
24. Vilela, A. (2021). Analysis of the interviews [Interview]. In V. V. Mendes, *Mandjaku identity(s): The “new man” project in the post-colonial context (1963–2012) and the invention of Guinea-Bissau* [Master’s dissertation, State University of Bahia].
25. Walker, R. B. J. (2016). International, imperial, exceptional. In R. B. J. Walker (Ed.), *Out of line: Essays on the politics of boundaries and the limits of modern politics* (pp. 236–265). Routledge.
26. Wondji, C. (2010). The states and cultures of the coast of Upper Guinea [Excerpts]. In B. A. Ogot (Ed.), *Africa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century: General history of Africa* (Vol. V, pp. 437–473). UNESCO.
27. Zvobgo, K., & Loken, M. (2020, June 19). Why race matters in international relations: Western dominance and white privilege permeate the field. It’s time to change that. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/19/why-race-matters-international-relations-ir/>