

Introduction

THE GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF THIS BOOK was essentially determined by Eurafri-
cans and their African landlords, while many of the chronological chapter
breaks derived from the disruptions to trade caused by European wars and
commerce raiding. Western Africa, depicted on Map 1.1, extends some three
thousand kilometers from the Senegal River in the north to the Bandama River
in the south and fifteen hundred kilometers east from the Atlantic littoral to the
bend of the Niger River, equivalent to the part of the United States that lies east
of the Mississippi River. The great majority of the inhabitants of this vast and
geographically diverse territory speak languages belonging to two principal
families—West Atlantic and Mande, the former principally in coastal regions,
the latter mainly in the interior.

The peoples of western Africa have been linked by commercial networks
since ancient times. Mande-speaking traders and smiths pioneered caravan routes
from the interior that connected the riverine networks of West Atlantic-speaking
groups, promoting long-distance trade in salt, gold, iron, kola, malaguetta pepper,
and numerous other commodities. By the third century A.D., western Africa's trade
networks connected trans-Saharan routes, and exchanges with North Africa mul-
tiplied over the centuries. The huge profit that Maghrebian middlemen exacted
from Europeans for gold, ivory, malaguetta pepper, and other western African
commodities was a principal factor promoting Portuguese reconnaissance voy-
ages along the coast of western Africa during the fifteenth century.

When Portuguese mariners arrived in western Africa, they were constrained
to accommodate to centuries-old landlord-stranger reciprocities concerning the
host societies' treatment of itinerant traders, hunters, migrants, and other travelers.
Portuguese had to use African modes of barter commerce, pay tolls and taxes, visit
only where they were invited by African hosts, and adhere to local customs and
practices while ashore. *Lançados*—venturesome Portuguese and Luso-African
inhabitants of the Cape Verde Islands, who were allowed to reside in African

communities—were subject to numerous constraints. African landlords refused to rent *lançados* more land than needed for dwellings and stores, rendering them dependent on indigenous communities for food, water, and other necessities. Of inestimable consequence for the *lançados*, however, they, like African strangers, were permitted to cohabit with local women, usually relatives or dependents of influential members of communities who sought the advantages that came with affiliation with foreign traders. Wives were invaluable to the *lançados* as interpreters of languages and cultures and as collaborators in commercial exchanges—roles subsequently undertaken by many of their Luso-African children.

Luso-Africans, the children of Portuguese traders and African women, represented a new and unprecedented element in western African societies. In social and cultural terms, these children, raised in African communities, acquired much more of the heritage of their mothers than of their Portuguese fathers, many of whom died or departed after a brief stay. This imbalance is conveyed in the word *Luso-African* itself, in which the short prefix *Luso* (derived from *Lusitania*, the Roman name for the area of Portugal) is combined with the longer *African*. The same can be said for the words *Anglo-African* and *Franco-African*, as well. *Eurafrican* serves as a generic term.

Raised in African societies, *Eurafricans*' lifeways were chiefly determined by the social status of their mothers. But there were significant differences in this regard between stratified and acephalous societies. The stratified and patrilineal societies of Senegambia—Wolof, Serer, and Mandinka—excluded Portuguese and Luso-Africans from marrying free persons. Luso-African children were denied membership in the “power associations” that educated youths and conferred adult status in these societies. Social outcasts, Luso-Africans lacked the rights and privileges of other members of their age sets, including the right to cultivate land. Luso-African males in these societies sought employment as sailors, interpreters, and compradors working for Portuguese and fellow Luso-Africans, with the bleak prospect that whatever wealth and possessions they acquired would be expropriated by rulers and other elites. Female Luso-Africans shared the same disabilities and became interpreters and intermediaries for European traders and African elites. Luso-African men and women contested their pariah status. They wore European-style garments, displayed crucifixes and rosaries attesting their adherence to Catholicism, spoke Crioulo (which derived from Portuguese and West Atlantic languages), and asserted that they were “Portuguese,” “whites,” and “Christians”—claims derided by Portuguese and other Europeans.

Circumstances were significantly different among acephalous and matrilineal societies south of the Gambia River, such as the Papel, Landuman, Temne, and

Bullom. In these societies, elders and community leaders generally allowed *lançados* to marry daughters and female dependents in order to derive commercial opportunities from kinship affiliations. Luso-African children in acephalous societies shared the same socialization and opportunities as all other children, including membership in Simo, Poro, Sande, and Bundu—the male and female power associations whose leaders appointed village heads, monitored trade routes, and exercised other transsocietal powers. Luso-Africans could participate in their parents' commercial undertakings, using to advantage their kinship affiliations and membership in power associations; alternatively, they might follow the same lifeways as their African peers, intermarry with them, and become assimilated into their societies. Many Luso-African women prospered in commerce, owning numerous slaves that served them as sailors, domestic servants, blacksmiths, boatbuilders, and other skilled artisans. These female entrepreneurs were known as *nharas*, from the Portuguese word *senhora*, meaning a woman of property and status.

The principal arenas of Luso-African commerce and settlement were the Petite Côte of Senegal and along the Gambia, Cacheu, Geba, Grande, Nunez, Pongo, and Sierra Leone Rivers where riverine and caravan networks linked numerous African groups. Luso-Africans and *grumetes* (hired African mariners, navigators, and compradors) monopolized coastwise trade in kola, iron bars, *panos* (cloth strips), indigo, and other commodities that were exchanged for slaves, gold, ivory, and other African products sought by European traders. Besides spreading the use of Crioulo wherever they traded and settled, Luso-Africans disseminated numerous European, Asian, and American plants and animals, and they developed a cuisine adopted by both Africans and Europeans. Luso-Africans' whitewashed, rectangular dwellings—ventilated by spaces between walls and thatch roofs and featuring front verandas—were widely adopted by African elites and European traders.

When English, French, and Dutch traders arrived in western Africa, they were constrained by African societies to accommodate to the same circumstances as Portuguese and Luso-Africans, and any Eurafrican children they might father with African women would live under similar constraints. Dutch commerce was expedited by Sephardic Jews established in Amsterdam affiliated with Portuguese "New Christians" who reverted to Judaism while living in western Africa. Dutch trade with western Africa was limited to the last years of the seventeenth century and early decades of the eighteenth century, after which the descendants of Dutch traders assimilated with Luso-Africans. Frenchmen employed by a succession of Senegal trading companies flouted regulations by collaborating in

illicit commerce with African and Eurafrican women. So also did English traders during the interludes when the British occupied Saint-Louis and Gorée, and likewise those living along the Gambia and other rivers.

Eurafricans' circumstances significantly changed in Senegambia during the second half of the eighteenth century. French and British colonial officials at Saint-Louis and Gorée introduced European legal codes that enabled Eurafricans to acquire freehold property, bequeath dwellings and other possessions to descendants, and exercise civic responsibilities. Eurafricans procured schooling for their children and promoted marriages that combined families' commercial assets. Similar developments occurred in the colony English philanthropists founded along the Sierra Leone River in 1787 for destitute "Black Poor." Destroyed by local Temne in 1789 and refounded in 1791, this colony, called "Freetown," thrived following the 1792 arrival of some eleven hundred "Nova Scotians" — slaves freed by British forces during the American War of Independence. European and Eurafrican traders established along rivers neighboring the colony opportunistically dispatched their children to Freetown for schooling, with consequences similar to the developments at Saint-Louis and Gorée.

While Eurafricans are the focus of this study, their fortunes were inextricably linked to the vicissitudes of western African societies, which experienced far-reaching changes during the period treated here. Increased European demands for slaves promoted warfare and slave raiding by predatory warrior groups. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mandinka of the Kaabu Empire pillaged numerous groups dwelling between the Gambia River and the Futa Jallon highlands, selling their captives to Eurafrican and European slavers. The Fula state founded in Futa Jallon during the 1720s conquered neighboring societies and sold more and more captives into transatlantic slavery. During the second half of the eighteenth century, predatory warrior groups victimized members of their own societies. Meanwhile, Eurafrican and European slavers living in acephalous societies manipulated kinship affiliations and membership in power associations to gain dominance over their landlords, and they used retinues of armed slaves to pillage their societies.

The volume concludes with the onset of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which contributed to extensive changes across the globe, western Africa not excepted. Eurafricans' experiences during the era that followed — which saw the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, an increasing commerce in agricultural and forest products, and the expansion of European imperialism — will be treated in a subsequent work.