A well-informed 'model of administration' for agrarian states. Or: how not to fall into the trap of 'nostrification' when comparing colonial West African States with 18th century Prussia

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In a noteworthy essay entitled "The Operation Called Vergleichen (Comparison)" Joachim Matthes has drawn attention to the fact that studies which claim to compare particular phenomena from one's own culture (such as law or administration, for example) with those of an alien culture do not, strictly speaking, perform a real comparison. Instead, what takes place is (in his words) a "nostrification", that is, "an appropriation of the other in one's own terms" or conceptual assimilation. Even the ideal-type constructions of Max Weber seem largely to confirm this proposition. In principle, then, it ought to be quite hard to find studies which are not exposed to the charge of nostrification. In what follows works by Gerd Spittler are examined in some detail from this particular perspective. In the first instance Spittler investigated the specific problems encountered by the colonial administration in West African peasant states (1919-39), before examining if this problematic could be applied to the peasant state of Prussia in the 18th century. So, for example, he asked himself how a bureaucratic administration reliant on written documents resolved the problem of raising taxes on a body of untruly peasants who to a large extent communicated orally amongst themselves. Since in both cases Spittler relates the typical structures of an agrarian society to typical administrative structures, he attains a level of reflection where the "'One" can be translated into the "Other" and vice versa' (Matthes), and in this way he escapes the particular danger of nostrification.

1. Introduction

In his noteworthy essay "The Operation Called Vergleichen" Joachim Matthes (1992) has suggested that as a rule the procedures aimed at comparing particular phenomena of one's own culture (administration, for example) with those of an alien culture do not, strictly speaking, make a comparison. Instead, this involves "a 'nostrification', an appropriation of the other in one's own terms" (Matthes 1992: 84). Elsewhere in his essay he elaborates on this:

> The aporia of such a 'comparative' practice consists firstly in the fact that its *tertium* is not constructed as a meta-reflection, but forms it as a cultural projection. The other aspect of this aporia is *that a tertium gained through a cultural projection provides at the same time the standard for the search, for the identification of comparative phenomenon elsewhere*. The *there* for the substance (Sachverhalt) of this

'comparison' is detected with the aid of this projected *tertium* using the concept that the *here* of the content to be 'compared' has of itself – transposed into an abstraction unlimited with respect to time and space. What is presented as 'comparison' is performed, first, as an identification of what is 'like' (or on a 'par') according to its own standard, before com-parison (Ver-gleichen) as an explicit operation begins. (Matthes 1992: 83).

Once this illuminating observation is taken into account, we realise that there are very many instances of this.[1] Some of Max Weber's ideal-typical constructions take this form, and seem to provide confirmation for Matthes' claim. On the other hand, it appears much more difficult to show how one might avoid this trap of "nostrification". However, it seems to me that the studies of Gerd Spittler do offer a demonstration of this kind.

Gerd Spittler, a sociologist by training, but one whose first-rate credentials as an ethnologist are displayed in his field research (Spittler 1978: 140ff.), had a fascinating idea. Having investigated the manner in which (colonial) West African peasant states were administered during the period 1919-1939, he devised a 'model of administration in peasant states' (Spittler 1976; 1978; 1981), applying this model to agrarian 18th century Prussia (Spittler 1980), framing it as an *intercultural comparison* in which he first examined the interaction between administration and peasant culture in Prussia.[2] Spittler demonstrates typical patterns of domination in the agrarian Prussia of the 18th century, but also administrative problems of the type that regularly tend to crop up in the day-to-day practice of administration. By linking the structures of an agrarian society (a peasant state) to typical administrative structures and problems (Spittler 1981: 9), he is able to construct a well-informed 'model of administration' for agrarian states, avoiding the danger of nostrification, the "appropriation of the other in one's own terms" (Matthes), especially since he begins his intercultural comparison with the analysis of a twentieth-century African agrarian society, then shifting his perspective to eighteenth-century Prussian agrarian society, a society which we today perceive as remote.

Drawing upon Spittler's work on colonial West Africa (1919-1939) and on the agrarian society of Prussia in the 18th century, the following paper sketches in outline a 'model of administration' in peasant states. In doing so, I draw upon more recent studies than were available to Spittler at the time when he constructed and tested his model (Eifert 2003; Wagner 2005).

[1] Treiber 2012: 28f.
[2] Spittler's "model of interaction between agrarian peasant societies and (bureaucratic) administration" can in part be "applied to the Prussian bureaucracy as it existed from the turn of the century to the 1860s" (Wagner 2005: 63).

2. The development of a 'model of administration' in agrarian states

2.1 Typical characteristics of agrarian states or peasant societies

First of all, some terms need to be explained. Spittler, drawing upon Max Weber, defines a 'state' as a 'territorial political association with a central authority and bureaucracy', which claims 'to exert direct domination' over its members (Spittler 1981: 13). A state can be described as an 'agrarian state' if farmers make up the majority of the population and if the burdens of taxation and other obligations fall first and foremost on them, and they can also be conscripted when military forces have to be raised (Spittler 1981: 13). Agrarian or peasant states can also be defined in terms of the degree to which a monetary and market economy has developed. For the present purpose, the following will suffice: where there is widespread subsistence agriculture and self-sufficiency (i.e. a low level of market integration), the administration will find itself confronted with substantial problems, for example in the fields of information gathering and surveillance. The agrarian states investigated by Spittler in colonial West Africa (1919-1939) are characterized by an oral culture, i.e. 'communication and intellectual abilities are predominantly governed (by the oral mode)', though this is by no means intended to imply that peasant farmers lack talents or are ignorant. Where Prussia is concerned, Spittler can draw on an outstanding authority, in the person of Christian Garve, to demonstrate the contrary, namely that a specific type of intelligence is to be found amongst the peasant population that can be ascribed to their methods of production and their subjection (Spittler 1981: 18f.; Garve 1796). Even if it is accepted that the ability both to read and to write is to be found among peasant farmers to a certain degree (Quéniart 1981), it may nevertheless be assumed that the description of rural areas in the 18th century as a 'world of semi-oral culture' is an apt one. For this characterization we are indebted to the highly illuminating study by Quéniart (1981: 133). Much light is also shed by his remarks and suggestions on the 'delimitation of partial literacy', in the course of which he states that 'partial literacy that is limited to the ability to read does little to change the nature of a person's cultural dependency. In oral culture the memory continues to be the only means of accumulating and transmitting knowledge: such partial literacy "does not change the individual's relationship to this culture, but reinforces it." Only when the ability to write has been acquired may we assume that such a change occurs (...)' (Quéniart 1981: 117). The picture painted by von Ungern-Sternberg (1987: 386f.) for some 18th century German states either supports Quéniart's or at the very least does not contradict it:

Thus while many people who were described as illiterate could not, or could hardly, write, they were nevertheless, at least to a certain degree, able to read. (...). Around 1800, Württemberg, Saxony and the Thuringian states, above all Gotha, were considered to be exemplary regions, thanks above all to their relatively well-developed school systems, whereas the Palatinate, for example, was judged to be distinctly backward. (...). Even if elementary reading abilities were more widespread in Germany than has been assumed up to now, for most peasants, as for the lower social classes and the lower middle class, reading was a "surplus activity", at least to the extent that it went beyond the needs of religious observance and the modest amount of leisure time available (see Friederich 1987: 126ff.).

All this means that 'information was [predominantly] not laid down in writing, but was stored in the memory' (Spittler 1981: 19) and handed down orally. To this extent, the 'elders' occupy a special position as reliable sources of information. Thus 'the retrieval of information (...) is much more strongly dependent on people than it is in a written culture which accumulates its knowledge in books and documents' (Spittler 1981: 19). Wagner (2005: 106f.) finds a particular impressive example that may stand for many others as late as the year 1871 (!) in Prussia:

When there were conflicts about the boundaries between the areas of land assigned to private and to communal use, those concerned found themselves on shifting sands as far as the legal basis was concerned, since the stock of information that the authorities could draw upon in order to mediate in conflicts was diffusely distributed in the village. Mostly it was a case of memory versus memory, while the few written or cartographical documents (…) were all too often imprecise and susceptible to different interpretations.' The procedure used to resolve such conflicts tells its own tale: the *Dorfschulze*, the village mayor or reeve, who represented 'the very lowest level of the state administrative apparatus' (Wagner 2005: 112), was permitted, as a person acting in an official capacity, to draw upon his 'personal memory' if 'there were no documents available and people's recollections diverged (Wagner 2005: 107).

However, the implications of a written culture are more far-reaching: 'Definitions of terms, abstraction from concrete situations and individual cases, thinking in lists and tables, all these features that constitute the way a bureaucracy operates, cannot be dissociated from written culture' (Spittler 1981: 19). This can be seen above all if, as was the case in Prussia, there are particular regions where particular dialects (e.g. Low German) or other languages (e.g. Polish) were spoken. Those who are at home in such a dialect or language,

those whose whole manner of speaking and thinking is shaped by it, do not (in the 18th century) necessarily feel the need to learn the dominant written language which is at the same time the language of the administration. Rather, for groups of the population who have no need to master the written language, bilingualism is more of a hindrance, especially to learning to write (Quéniart 1981: 125). Moreover, written information can easily be passed on orally by a small number of persons, e.g. by the village clergymen, so that it is not essential to be able either to read or to write (Quéniart 1981: 133).

Characteristic features of agrarian states, especially those with a low level of market integration, are on the one hand the high degree of inaccessibility of the peasants living in remote villages, scattered hamlets or isolated farms, and on the other hand the regional and local heterogeneity, which makes it extremely difficult to obtain a clear picture: 'Where every village has its own customs, where there are sharp distinctions in language and dialect from region to region or even from village to village, where a word may mean different things in different villages, and the same thing be designated by different words, where every little town has differing units of length, area, capacity and weight, but all use the same words for them' (Spittler 1980: 578), any administrative apparatus will find it difficult to collect reliable information and evaluate it, and to enforce compliance with its general (and increasingly abstract) rules. The multiplicity and diversity of local and regional harvest customs is well documented for as late as 1865 (!) by a survey, carried out by Wilhelm Mannhardt, of the names given to particular harvest customs and their dissemination in Germany and some adjoining countries, because he was seeking to demonstrate – being in this respect a true disciple of Tylor's – that these were 'remnants of a Teutonic religious cult' (Kippenberg 1997: 125; Mannhardt 1868; Tylor 1873).

It is necessary to consider briefly the extent to which 18th century Prussia was an agrarian or peasant state. Spittler (1980: 584ff.) states that it was. In terms of the features set out at the beginning of this paper, Prussia was not only an agrarian state, but was characterized by a degree of heterogeneity that was inescapable to any observer and confronted the bureaucratic administration with substantial challenges: 'Prussia was heterogeneous not only with regard to its weights and measures, but also in language, religion and ethnic composition, in manners, customs and law' (Spittler 1980: 585). Prussia as a military and agrarian state was particularly dependent upon its peasants as recruits and as taxpayers. They were the ones that bore the burden of the *Kontribution* (see below) that was regularly levied, and which represented a more important source of income for the state than the municipal excise duties; and in addition, the peasants made an essential contribution to the incomes of the landed estates (Büsch 1962: 5f., 16f., 21f.; Braun 1975). As explained above,

the assumption that rural areas were a 'world of semi-oral culture' may also be taken to apply to 18th century Prussia. Wagner (2005: 111) gives a vivid example of this from as late as 1850 (!) in relation to a village in West Prussia. Of the 113 people who took part in a parish meeting in that year, 43 (48.6%), i.e. almost half, did not sign the record but placed their marks under it in the form of three crosses. But illiteracy is likely to have been widespread even among the holders of positions in the lowest ranks of the administration, the village reeves (Dorfschulzen) and the *Kreisreiter*, the officials who toured the district on behalf of the *Landrat* (Wagner (2005: 122f.).

2.2 Three types of administration in agrarian societies: bureaucratic, intermediary and arbitrary administration

In considering the workings of the administration in colonially governed agrarian societies with a view to gaining insights that are susceptible to comparison with agrarian Prussia, Spittler constructs three ideal-types of administration (Spittler 1981: 21ff.): bureaucratic, intermediary and arbitrary (extending as far as despotic), each of which is distinguished by quite definite advantages and disadvantages. *Bureaucratic administration* rests, according to Max Weber's ideal type (Treiber 2007), on abstract, universally applicable rules or on abstract knowledge that is collected and recorded in documents or in lists and tables.[3] The features characterizing the manner in which such a bureaucracy functions are inseparable from the existence of a written culture, but this is something remote from the population of an agrarian state: 'The bureaucratic way of thinking is foreign to peasants who have grown up in an oral culture' (Spittler 1981: 22). Where there is a low level of market integration, local and regional 'heterogeneity in economics, society and culture' (Spittler 1981: 22) and an underdeveloped infrastructure (e.g. inadequate road networks), the fundamental problems for any bureaucratic administration that stem from the incongruence of written and oral culture are intensi-

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[3] In the period following the royal Instruction of 19 January 1723, by which the General War Commissariat and the General Finance Directory were amalgamated to form a single General Directory, serious efforts in the direction of rationalization and enhanced effectiveness can be seen to have been undertaken within the central administration (Kohnke 1996; Mainka 1998; Schellakowsky 1998). It is therefore not surprising that the administrative reform of 1723 also involved the creation of a special statistical office within the General Directory. The Commissariat had played a decisive role in the process of building up a modern administration and smashing the old Estate-based system in the course of the previous two centuries (Hintze 1981). But despite this, in regard to the peasants, the lowest hierarchical level at which the state made demands upon its subjects, the central bureaucracy was long dependent upon intermediary administration.

fied. These are on the one hand the problem of collecting and processing information, and on the other hand that of being able to exercise domination (i.e. to enforce compliance with laws and regulations). The peasants to whom such (abstract) regulations are addressed very rarely display open resistance to compliance, however; rather, they generally react to the demands of the administration with 'defensive strategies' (Spittler) such as avoidance (by hiding), ignoring them, bending them through wayward interpretation or concealed non-compliance (Treiber 1995: 71ff.; Garve 1796). All these 'defensive reactions' and the associated communicative behaviour are characterized by the fact that they are not 'sophisticated strategies for exercising influence', but are rather quite simply intended to withhold important information from the administration, especially since this is the most important resource for bureaucratic administration.

These two fundamental problems of bureaucratic domination do not apply if arbitrary rule is exercised by government and administration: the type of *arbitrary administration*. This form of administration may appear advantageous because it does not 'require any written documentation or (…) storage of information' (Spittler 1981: 23). It is precisely in situations in which obtaining and storing information proves to be extremely difficult, that an arbitrary style of administration may come to prevail. Arbitrary rule can however only be used selectively and in particular places; it therefore has a very limited reach, in both time and space. So it is no surprise that arbitrary domination is always accompanied by a *'laissez faire'* attitude, i.e. by largely abandoning the attempt to enforce compliance with the regulations.[4] This paradoxical coexistence of the use of force at one point and *laissez faire* at another is by the way thoroughly characteristic of the early modern state in the Occident (Tilly 1989). The transition to despotic rule, in which arbitrariness is accompanied by the threat or use of force, something to which even the lowest administrative level commonly resorts (v. Trotha 1995: 136ff.), is fluid: 'Bureaucratic taxation turns into something close to looting, and organized conscription for military service becomes more like a hunt after people' (Spittler 1981: 23).

One rational solution to these two fundamental problems of bureaucratic administration is to be found in Spittler's third type, *intermediary administration*, or more precisely the combination of bureaucratic and intermediary administration. The function of such 'intermediary systems' is to enforce compli-

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[4] „The economy of the use of violence explains the apparent paradox in the co-existence of violence and toleration that so astonished a European observer. He experienced on the one hand a high level of violence focussed on the imposition of a few demands, and on the other an equally unfamiliar level of disobedience to many demands made by the state." (Spittler 1978: 69).

ance with the universal requirements of the central administration and to collect basic information on the country and its population. Intermediary administration relies on middlemen who are recruited locally and are well rooted in the community. These people are no strangers to the written culture of the administrative bureaucracy, but nor are they excluded from access to the (semi-)oral culture of the peasants. Thanks to the way these middlemen are anchored in local or regional society, intermediary administration is also more readily able to deal with the heterogeneity described above. The middlemen fulfil both the expectations of the bureaucratic system and those of the (semi-)oral culture, even though, depending on their social origin and the prevailing constellation of power factors, they may see themselves as owing loyalty more to the one side or to the other. The combination described offers substantial advantages both in obtaining information and in collecting taxes. To obtain information, the middlemen predominantly communicate with the peasants orally, whereas for tax collection the invention of the 'repartition' or tax-farming system shows itself to be advantageous. In this system (here in relation to the tax known as the '*Kontribution*') a quota is laid down in advance for a group of the population, which the middleman is then responsible for collecting and handing over to the authorities; but it is left to him to determine how the quota is allocated within the group concerned (Spittler 1981: 24).

Spittler's brief history of tax collection, taking the *Kontribution* as its example, tells of comparable technical difficulties, but also of the extent to which the data collected was dependent on those who furnished it (which also included the gentry-dominated district assemblies). This is not least because the *Kontribution*, a land tax, was calculated on the basis of a fictitious or virtual unit of measurement. This unit was the hide (*Hufe*) (HRG, vol. 2: col. 248ff.; Ersch/ Gruber 1980: 369), which was actually a measurement of area, although the areas under agricultural use had not yet been comprehensively surveyed and recorded. According to Meitzen (2007: 13), triangulation did not begin in Prussia until 1750. For example, when the "Generalhufenschoss' (a levy on real estate) was introduced in East Prussia (1715-1719), the necessary survey of arable land was prevented by the resistance of the aristocracy (Spittler 1980: 591). In Prussia, cadastres or land registries as a basis for land tax assessment were first introduced in 1822, initially in the Rhineland and Westphalia, 'and by the the Act of 21.5.1861 for the entire state' (HRG, vol. 2: col. 661f.). According to Wagner (2005: 58), it was 'ultimately (…) not until the land tax reform [of 21 May 1861] and the associated creation of new land registries in the course of the 1860s that the foundations were laid for the collection of more and more accurate data on the situation in the countryside. It was the Land Register Ordinance of 5 May 1872 that finally created an information system relating

to parcels of real estate, their ownership and the obligations attached to them that was both geographically comprehensive and also constantly kept up to date.' In view of the situation described, the yield of arable land in Prussia was calculated in accordance with the '*beschworene Aussaat*' or 'sworn seedcast', a form of affidavit in which the peasants were required to declare how much seed they had sown. This 'was assessed in bushels for every place in the monarchy, and the *Kontribution* levied in accordance with the number of bushels sown.' The *Kontribution* was used to finance the army. As it was levied regularly and represented a more or less constant amount (Büsch 1962: 22), it enabled the King to make himself independent of the Estates. In practical terms, the *Kontribution* was treated like a tribute, i.e. 'each district was assigned a certain quota, which it had to raise.'

From the point of view of the central authority and its bureaucracy, the obvious advantages of *intermediary administration* are accompanied by one considerable disadvantage: these relatively autonomous middlemen not only make it more difficult for the central bureaucracy to exercise surveillance, but also tend 'to mediatize the relationship between the subject and the state bureaucracy' (Spittler 1980: 582). In respect of the two principal features that characterize agrarian states – that it is peasants who bear the burden of taxation, and also form the pool from which the (standing) army is recruited – Spittler describes typical distinctions between the three types of administration: 'As taxation is a function of bureaucracy and tribute of intermediary domination, so looting is a feature of despotic rule. A similar distinction can also be made with regard to military recruiting: bureaucratic recruiting is based on muster lists, intermediary recruiting on quotas; but despotic recruiting relies on hunting for people – the press gang.' (Spittler 1980: 580).

3. The interaction of peasant agrarian society and bureaucratic administration in Prussia: Landrat and village clergyman as typical representatives of 'intermediary administration'

In the 18th century, the *Landrat*, the chief administrative officer at district level, may be regarded as a typical example of intermediary administration, as can be seen *inter alia* from the fact that he was recruited from amongst the landowning gentry of his district, who also had the right to propose new personnel in the case of vacancies (Spittler 1980: 586; Büsch 1962: 77f.; Gelpke 1902). In the 18th century all *Landräte* were drawn from the aristocracy; they were proposed by the *Kreisstände*, the district assemblies dominated by the aristocratic landowners, and appointed by the Crown. In 1713 the King had restricted

this right of proposal, but from 1756 onwards the *Kreisstände* were once again able to exercise it without restriction in all provinces of Prussia, though untitled landowners were excluded (Eifert 2003: 45).

Indeed, 'the status of the *Landräte* as representatives of the landowning interest was in line with the concept of their office that had prevailed since the 18th century' (Wagner 2005: 67). The repercussions of this view that the *Landrat* represented the landed interests can still be seen as late as the end of the 19th century in the tax evasion practiced by large landowners and the derelictions of duty committed by *Landräte*. Both these types of offence were 'so widespread that those who committed them no longer even subjectively felt them to be such, but rather regarded them as representing the correct interpretation of the law's intentions, though the application of this interpretation was of course to be limited to a certain social class' (Witt 1973: 217). At the same time, this provides a vivid example of shortcomings in enforcement in the classic field of fiscal administration just at a time when the Prussian administration appeared to be in the process of coming much closer to Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy, and as late as 1911 well-regarded scholars, such as Otto Hintze (1981a: 27), extolled the generally admired virtues that were taken to characterize the Prussian civil service, namely its honesty, devotion to duty, professional competence, observance of the law and personal integrity.

In the 18th century the office of *Landrat* appeared as an 'extended squirearchy' (Wagner), as can be seen, in an external view, from the fact that up until 1861 the *Landrat*'s office was located on his estate. So the paternalistic attitudes that were cultivated by the squire and which consequently helped to shape the way in which he saw himself (Wagner 2005: 158f.) were customarily reflected in the way he carried out his duties as *Landrat*, and were considered to be legitimate, or appropriate to his status (Wagner 2005: 159). These paternalistic attitudes are attributable amongst other things to the fact that the 'manorial estate (was) not only a large agricultural operation, but also had far-reaching rights of rule [*Herrschaft*] attached to it outside the economic field. Purely by virtue of his ownership of the estate, the great landowner exercised law and order functions and jurisdiction over his tenants. In 1837, around one-third of all Prussian subjects in the areas east of the Rhine were subject to this patrimonial exercise of law and order and of judicial functions' (Jessen 1995: 142, referring to Koselleck 1967: 674f.; Lüdtke 1982: 196-227). Only after the promulgation of the Decree of 16.12.1861 was a *Landrat* obliged to reside in the town that was the administrative centre of his district and also to exercise his official duties from there (Wagner 2005: 74f.). The *Landrat* had to meet both the costs of keeping up his public position and also the costs of administration largely out of his own pocket. The latter were a major factor especially from the 1840s onwards, when written correspondence increased

in volume to such an extent that it was necessary to employ a number – varying from district to district – of clerical staff to cope with it (Wagner 2005: 76).

Even though the *Landräte* had officially been required to take an examination before the Higher Examinations Commission since 1770, most of them appear to have managed to avoid it, so that the level of (formal) qualification required for the office would not appear to have been particularly demanding at first. The same may also be deduced from the fact that the office of *Landrat* was an honorary one performed by its holder on the side (Eifert 2003: 46f.). It is also demonstrated by the basic level of manpower available to the *Landrat*, which up to the end of 18th century consisted of ancillary staff with low qualifications, a clerk and a *Kreisreiter*, whose job it was to tour the district and keep in contact with the village reeves; from 1815/16 onwards every *Landrat* then became entitled to have a district secretary to manage his office (Spittler 1980: 586; Wagner 2005: 76; Eifert 2003: 78ff., 85). Eifert characterizes the tasks of a *Landrat* in the 18th century as being 'an accumulation of supervisory duties', and yet if the office was exercised in the manner outlined above, then these supervisory duties must have been undertaken for the most part through non-bureaucratic methods, i.e. less by the making and keeping of documents than by the kind of oral communication that typified the tours of inspection – modelled on the monarch's 'royal progress' ('koenigliche Revuereisen') (Eifert 2003: 78ff.) – which according to an Instruction issued in 1766 were to take place 'twice a year, in the spring and in the autumn' (Eifert 2003: 43). The colonial civil service was also well acquainted with this method of obtaining information and exercising surveillance (Spittler 1981: 105ff.) – in this case it was the colonial District Commissioner who was required to go 'on tour' or 'on safari'. With regard to this 'non-bureaucratic method' of exercising surveillance, Spittler (1981: 107f.) remarks:

> The type of contact and conversation propagated in this way may allow the District Commissioner to penetrate the reality of a village. But it is very difficult for him to standardize the results and manage them in a bureaucratic manner. The form of communication is more appropriate to an oral culture than to a bureaucracy based on abstract written documentation. To this extent, it is no mere accident that the District Commissioner spends most of his time in his office and has no time to go on tour. Producing written documents in an office accords with the bureaucratic way of doing things, and creates a familiar reality, even if it is a fictitious one. (…) The system of gathering information called "going on tour" requires a physical presence and therefore takes up a lot of time. Thus it must of necessity be restricted to small numbers and is unable to cope with any mass phenomenon (large numbers of peasants and villages) such as bureaucracy typically attempts to deal with.

As late as 1816 – not long after which those areas of activity had begun to expand which 'required a greater degree of written and less personal activity' (Wagner 2005: 72) from the *Landrat* – Wagner observes that the *Landrat*'s task was 'to govern not from his office, but from the saddle, to take decisions on the spot, in direct contact with those involved' (Wagner 2005: 68), and draws attention to the draft of an Instruction which itself dates from the year 1816 (!) in which it is stated that the official business of the *Landrat* should 'as far as possible be exercised orally and should not give rise to unprofitable masses of paperwork' (Wagner 2005: 68). In this Instruction it seems very clear that the bureaucracy was prepared to renounce a major tool which would have allowed it to keep the *Landrat* under more effective surveillance. On the other hand, it did appear to be interested in having such a tool available, since at the same time it raised demands for the *Landrat* to have prior qualifications and practical administrative experience, which would further his integration into the bureaucratic hierarchy (Wagner 2005: 73). This was also connected to the interest of the bureaucracy in detaching the *Landrat* from his relationship of loyalty to the local (landowning) elite. However, it remains, the case that with regard to the requirement for prior qualifications, which was understood to mean that the *Landrat* should have already taken or be in the process of taking the 'higher administrative or legal examination', there were substantial shortcomings in implementation (Eifert 2003: 120ff.). As the most important representative, together with the village clergyman, of 'intermediary administration', the *Landrat* was not only at the interface between the bureaucratic administration and its peasant subjects; he also had to act in a field of opposing forces, exerted mainly by the central government bureaucracy on the one hand and his fellow members of the local (landowning) elite on the other, which (furthermore) were constantly shifting through the impact of socioeconomic developments (Wagner 2005: 39ff.).

As a further representative of 'intermediary administration' in 18th century Prussia, the village clergyman must be mentioned, not least because it was he who supplied the data on which all important lists and tables drawn up by the bureaucracy were based. To Spittler he was 'the Trojan horse which enabled state bureaucracy to penetrate the rural areas, bypassing the mediatizing aristocracy' (Spittler 1980: 597). Even though he was subject to the patronage of the squire and to this extent was in a relationship of dependency, he nevertheless formed an integral part of the bureaucracy: 'The clergy were more and more regarded and treated as state officials. They were required to keep lists of the population, plant mulberry trees and proclaim new government regulations from the pulpit' (Hintze 1967: 81f., after Spittler 1980: 597). As local representatives of the state church they were subject to regular visitations, i.e. a type of bureaucratic surveillance. Since the village clergy were on the one

hand able to read and write, but on the other hand also thoroughly well ac-quainted with the 'semi-oral culture' of the peasants, they were highly suitable to fulfil the role assigned to them by the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy real-ized that the church registers kept by the clergy, in which all important basic demographic data was recorded with the names of the persons concerned, constituted a most important and reliable source of information, so that both the population lists and the lists of those liable to military service were based on them (Spittler 1980: 597).[5] There may have been some deficits in its imple-mentation – as a result, for example, of there being an insufficient number of clergymen in relation to the population, or of their being unsuitable or lacking in commitment (Spittler 1980: 597f.) – but the fact that the data contained in the church registers was collected 'for religious reasons, and not (primarily) in the interests of the state' (Spittler 1980: 597) vouches for their reliability.

It has however become customary to query the extent to which the church registers are reliable sources of valid information. In this regard it may suf-fice to recall the suggestion made by the Strasbourg City Councillor Georg Obrecht. In his treatises on public order, published posthumously in 1644 under the title 'Fünff Unterschiedlichen Secreta Politica', he presented 'the first comprehensive concept of a modern administrative organization in Ger-man political literature'. On the basis of comprehensive registers that were to be kept by persons designated as 'Deputaten' ('commissioners'), general population statistics were to be compiled, while on the other hand 'effective surveillance of moral behaviour' was also to be facilitated (Maier 1980: 122-131; Meitzen 2007: 11). At the same time, Obrecht goes into the question as to 'whether the church registers might not also be able to fulfil the purpose of the registers to be kept by the commissioners' (Maier 1980: 129). It is true that he declared in favour of his 'Institute of Commissioners', mainly because of the objection that the church registers would not afford 'any overview of the total state of the community', since they would remain in the individual

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[5] From 1719 onwards there were 'population lists' in Prussia, in which the turnover of the population (baptisms, marriages, deaths) was recorded and these were gradually extended by the addition of further headings and categories and increasingly kept in tabular form (Meitzen 2007: 12ff.; Schaab 1967: 1). It was also on the basis of the data obtainable from the church registers that the *Kantonslisten* were drawn up, the lists of young men subject to military service kept by the *Landräte* (Behre 1905: 145). The population lists and historical tables were also the basis for the 'population policy', which was a classic instrument of mercantilist economic policy in the 17th and 18th centuries (Blaich 1973: 1-31; 170-178), a type of economic policy that in its turn demanded more comprehensive and more precise information; so that in the end the central administration, which initially had done no more than collect the numerical material and publish it (Behre 1905: 136), began to present it in tabular form in order to analyse it and draw conclusions.

parishes and would thus not be known in their entirety to the authorities. All the same, it remains the case that through this administrative concept 'the individual, detached from his or her position within a social class, the abstract "population", was for the first time discovered as the object of administration' (Maier 1980: 130).

4. How does Spittler avoid the trap of nostrification?

Spittler avoids the trap of nostrification in a remarkably simple way. By asking the question "how does state administration work in agrarian societies?" he systematically links the structure of (bureaucratic, document-based) administration with the structure of an agrarian society (Spittler 1981: 9). A rural peasant economy moulded by market integration not only determines the strategies of bureaucratic, document-based administration and the character of the peasants inhabiting a semi-oral culture; it also presents administration with a number of problems that it must solve, and to which it responds with quite specific actions. These problems primarily arise from the fact that (on the one hand) dues and taxes have to be collected from peasants, who (on the other hand) represent the pool for military levies, for which every time serious informational problems emerge. The various approaches selected by the administration can be reduced to ideal-typical structural types: to bureaucratic, document-based administration; to arbitrary and despotic rule; and intermedial administration,[6] which in practice can be observed operating in typical combinations, in particular that between bureaucratic, document-based and intermedial administration.

The *comparison* between West African colonial administration in the period 1919-1939 and eighteenth century Prussian administration is made by first considering the structure of West African agrarian society (or societies). These typically have "imposts" (tax payments and military service, together with their associated informational problems) which for their realisation have to be related to a suitable administrative structure, characterised in particular by a combination of bureaucratic, document-based administration with that of intermediaries (canton chiefs). Separately from this eighteenth century Prussian agrarian society is approached in a similar manner, linking imposts with an administrative structure appropriate for their realisation. Here again,

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[6] The relationship between bureaucratic, document-based administration and its various intermediaries is as a rule based upon personal rule of a clientilist nature – the village priest is an exception.

the combination between bureaucratic, document-based administration, and that based upon intermediaries (village priest, councillor) proves especially robust. Even if the analysis in this contribution is concentrated upon the Prussian case, it could benefit from the analysis conducted for the West African case, together with the insights gained thereby; and it does not presume the "projection of *one* comparative measure derived from one's own society." (Matthes 1992: 81). Instead, this approach opens up the space for reflection that Matthes demands (1992: 96), and which in the reciprocity of the analyses made reveals a remarkably high level of common features, as well as characteristic (often culturally determined) differences, as happens for example in the involvement of suitable intermediaries.

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