

Luanda in the 17th Century: Diversity and Cultural Interaction in the Process of Forming an Afro-Atlantic City

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Mu Luanda, mu uauaba: mu izê mukuku, ubiluka ndua
Luanda is good: Every cuckoo which comes here is transformed into a *ndua* (an eye-catching African bird).

Mubika ua mundele, mundele uê
A slave of a white master is also white
Kimbundu proverb (Ribas1961: II, 207–208)

ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the social reality of Luanda (Angola) during the 17th century. While it will seek to profile the main groups in question it focuses especially on the universe of African slaves, the largest social group by far. It will describe these socio-ethnic groups with some of their characteristics (language, everyday habits, beliefs and rituals) revealing a clearly evident cultural diversity. Simultaneously, it also aims to assess how processes of transfers took place in these areas, generating forms of reciprocal adaptation between vast sectors of the African and European population, in a process of miscegenation which was typical of this city.

Keywords: Luanda (Angola); 17th century; slaves; cultural interaction; miscegenation.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the colonial State, which is by definition based on social inequality, cultural differentiation, especially based on race, was one of the ways of imposing the European hegemonic model, since difference is recognised just to belittle the other and justify their domination.

However, despite the subalternisation that the central administration and its ideological apparatus, i.e. the Church, sought to impose on the language, experiences and beliefs of the colonised population, the colonists had to interact with the new context. A good example of this is the Portuguese colonisation in Angola, which began in the last quarter of the 16th century with the foundation of Luanda and the attempt – which proved to be quite protracted – to neutralise the kingdom of Ndongo.

Although the city of Luanda also became an instrument of territorial conquest, it was founded and developed as a port city. Its rapid integration into Atlantic dynamics by means of the slave trade resulted not only in a growth in the population but also a diversification and consolidation of the city's ethnic-cultural composition, making it a truly Creole city: an Afro-Atlantic city. However, this process has not yet been studied in depth even today.

Historiography regarding Central-West Africa in general, and Angola in particular, has grown considerably in recent decades, but has essentially centred on questions related to the slave trade (Alencastro 2000; Ferreira 2003; Curto 2004; Cândido 2013) or the cultural consequences of the diaspora (Heywood 2002; Sweet 2007; Thornton and Heywood 2007; Ferreira 2012) and, in the case of the city of Luanda, historians have focused on the 18th century (Couto 1972; Miller, 1988; Pantoja 1994 and 2004; Venâncio 1984 and 1996).

A notable exception to this lesser interest in the 17th century is the German historian Beatrix Heintze, who authored a number of studies about this century (Heintze 2007), a period for which she has also published two volumes of sources (Heintze 1985–1988). However, having focused on traditional societies in Angola, she consequently paid less attention to Luanda¹.

This article aims to overcome this virtual historiographical vacuum by examining the social reality in Luanda during the 17th century, a period when the urban structuring had already begun to be consolidated. In my view, this is a perfect area and period to detect the mechanisms for interaction which can be generated between different social universes with unequal power relations. To this end, this study will characterise the main social groups in question but will focus especially on African slaves, the largest social group by far. It will then try and analyse in which fields transfers occurred and how forms of reciprocal adaptation emerged, despite the social and cultural diversity.

This study is essentially based on archival documentation, especially documents preserved at the Torre do Tombo and the Overseas Historical Archive (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*), both in Lisbon. On this occasion it was not possible to directly consult Angolan archives, which are actually not particularly rich in terms of 17th century collections (Silva 1995; Pantoja 1999). Among the documentation preserved in Portugal, the official texts (e.g. *Chancelarias* and *Conselho Ultramarino*) are of limited interest for a socio-cultural theme such as this. On the other hand, the Inquisition collections (*Processos* and *Cadernos do Promotor*), preserved at the Torre do Tombo² and partly available online, are capable of revealing surprises and provide a glimpse of the vibrant African population, which is almost absent from the

¹ Nevertheless, the following articles are worthy of an attentive perusal, *viz.* “O comércio de ‘peças’ em Angola. Sobre a escravatura nos primeiros cem anos da ocupação portuguesa” and “Asilo ameaçado: Oportunidades e consequências da fuga de escravos em Angola no século XVII” (Heintze 2007: 473–506 and 507–538).

² Torre do Tombo National Archives – TT (Portugal), *Tribunal do Santo Ofício* (TSO), 1536–1821.

administrative discourse. Although the Inquisition never became entrenched in Angola, “apostolic envoys” were sometimes sent from Lisbon to conduct inquiries and institute cases in the territory. These individual inquiries and denouncements are scattered across the *Cadernos do Promotor*³ as well as in the records of some resulting cases and were one of the main sources for this article, although not the only one.

2. THE SETTLEMENT OF LUANDA AND THE SLAVE TRADE

The settlement of Luanda was founded by the Portuguese in 1576 and it was raised to the status of a city a few years later. Built in a semi-arid area on the Angolan coast, with infrequent and light rain, the lands around the city did not have much agricultural potential. Fertile lands, which were capable of ensuring the necessary produce for the city’s subsistence, were located kilometres away, to the north (the basins of the Bengo and Dande rivers) or to the south (near Kuanza). Luanda’s location was chosen on account of the outstanding port and excellent conditions for defending the city.

In this manner, the city developed into an administrative and military base to penetrate the interior (kingdom of Ndongo) and, above all, became a commercial hub for the trade in human merchandise since it was located far away from the timber and ivory producing regions, the other two leading export products. Situated on the western coast of Africa, Luanda⁴ was, for more than two centuries, the busiest centre for exporting slaves to the Americas (Klein 1992: 223).

It is possible to calculate fairly accurately that during most of the 17th century an average of 10,000 to 15,000 slaves set sail every year from the port of Luanda bound for Brazil and Spanish America. Naturally, some variations did occur, due to political conditions, such as the Dutch occupation of 1641–1648. In the last quarter of the century, with competition from other ports, especially Benguela (to the south) and Loango (to the north) and the weariness of the supplying markets, this figure dropped to some 5,000 or 6,000 slaves (Caldeira 2009: 14–17).

In any case, during this entire period economic activity was always centred around the Atlantic slave trade and the city’s growth was largely due to this.

³ A rich set of documentation which includes diverse information, organised in a somewhat chronological manner, from all regions in Portugal and the empire. There are 72 thick volumes just for the 17th century.

⁴ The city’s name varied. It was first simply called São Paulo, then São Paulo da Assunção of the Kingdom of Angola or São Paulo de Assunção of Luanda and finally just Luanda, but all these names could coexist simultaneously.

3. ETHNIC AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

The demographic data available for 17th century Luanda is rare and inaccurate, making it hard to ascertain growth rates.

The first known estimate of the population dates to 1622 and indicates a total of 40,000 people, however, this figure also included the “crew slaves” (those who were about to set sail for the Americas)⁵. In 1631, the bishop, Dom Friar Francisco do Soveral, calculated the number of black residents in the city at 20,000⁶ and the same figure was also cited fifty years later by Cadornega (1972: III–28), which indicates a stabilisation of the population. However, other authors have indicated very different figures. At the turn of the 18th century, the Franciscan clergyman, António Zuchelli (1712: 102) already spoke of 40,000 African residents. According to the same source, the total population was about 50,000 inhabitants, which, apart from the aforesaid 40,000 Africans, also included 6,000 mestizos and four thousand whites. Even if these figures are inflated, the proportions would have been close to reality: for every ten blacks (mainly slaves) there was one white and one or two mestizos.

3.1 THE EUROPEANS

The instructions of the governors in the early decades of the 17th century essentially concerned identifying who could take up arms and classified the city into two large groups among the non-African population: those who received wages (the so-called *gente da guerra* or “military men”) and those who did not receive a wage.

The latter group included “merchants, burghers and professionals”⁷. If one added the ecclesiastics, justice and treasury officials and less than half a dozen non-Portuguese Europeans they would together represent practically all of the European or Euro-descendant population. It must be kept in mind that all the sub-groups indicated were fluid and thus merchants could be found across the spectrum while almost all of them could be considered to be “burghers” (*moradores*).

The “burghers” were the most stable group and their status was defined on the basis of being able to vote as well as the possibility of being elected to the administrative bodies of the City Council. They could also hold other highly symbolic positions such as the stewardship of the *Misericórdia*, charitable

⁵ “Mapa das regiões circunvizinhas de Luanda com uma minuciosa descrição”, 1622 (Heintze 1985–1988: I–164).

⁶ Report by D. Friar Francisco do Soveral during the “Sacra Limina” visit, Luanda, 1 April 1631 (Brásio: VIII – 22).

⁷ Instructions (*Regimento*) for the Governor of Angola dated 26 March 1607 and 22 September 1611 (Brásio: V–264 e VI–21).

institute, and in the main religious orders (the “brotherhoods”). In Portugal, during this period, there was a clear distinction between “burgher” and a mere resident and there were specific requirements for an individual to be classified as a “burgher”, which would have been hard to apply in settlements such as Luanda, where there were only a small number of Europeans. The fundamental requirement to be able to participate in the activities of the city council was to have some property and to be married to a daughter or relative of another burgher. Thus, “New Christians” were even chosen to be councillors (Diogo 2006: 119), a situation which would have been unthinkable in Europe. Along with these essentially honorific offices, burghers participated in the slave trade and were the main owners of lands in the fertile valleys of the Dande and Bengo rivers.

The number of “burghers” must have been relatively low during the 17th century. A report dating from 1620 stated that the population was “about 400 neighbours” in Luanda⁸, but probably this figure does not just refer to “burghers”, who never exceeded about a hundred householders, as confirmed by Cadornega (1972: III–28).

The Crown did its best to encourage new white settlers. One of the methods it used was to grant privileges to the city council and colonists (Santos 1965: 27–31), but it never managed to attract a significant number of couples of white settlers willing to go and live voluntarily in Angola. As an alternative, the Crown also resorted to coercion.

One of the solutions implemented was to prevent residents from leaving Luanda with their families without express permission from Lisbon⁹. Another was to send convicts or individuals living in charitable institutions.

During the 17th century, Angola was one of the main overseas destinations for exiled convicts sent out from Portugal and they very often constituted the bulk of effective soldiers who accompanied the governors on their initial travels (Coates 1998: 136). They could also be sent in other circumstances: in 1654, the majority of passengers aboard the ship on which Father Manuel Matos travelled from Funchal to Luanda were deportees¹⁰.

Since the deportees were mainly males, steps were taken to encourage more European women of a childbearing age to go to Angola. A total of 57 women were sent to Luanda between 1594 and 1657, to marry “worthy men” (Santos 1965: 17; Brásio: VI, 183; XI, 354; XII, 121-122; Coates 1998: 138), almost all

⁸ Garcia Mendes Castello Branco, *Da Mina ao Cabo Negro...* (Brásio: V–477).

⁹ Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Lisbon), *Conselho Ultramarino* (hereafter AHU, C.U.), *Angola*, Box 5, No. 128, 22 September 1653.

¹⁰ Letter from Father Manuel de Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–456–457).

of whom were former prostitutes who had been taken into charitable institutions in Lisbon¹¹.

Some of them did not marry, either because they died prematurely or because they returned to prostitution. A coeval source affirmed, “In the city [Luanda] they easily revert to their old ways and cause scandals and set a bad example in the houses where they live”¹².

Perhaps this was why the city council, through its procurator António Buíça, submitted a petition to the *Conselho Ultramarino* (‘Overseas Council’) in 1664 requesting that “such women” not be sent anymore, on the pretext that there were many marriageable widows and orphan girls thanks to the war with the Dutch. It does not seem a convincing argument, especially since the Dutch occupation had ended some 15 years ago. Apart from moral reservations with regard to the “rehabilitated women” sent from Lisbon, the main reason must have been that all the settlers would have wished to ensure that their own daughters (almost all of whom were of mixed blood) would be able to find a suitable match among available white males. Parents (some of whom were themselves *pardos*, ‘browns’) strove to avoid what an anonymous poet described thus: “While the son might be dusky/ the grandson is almost all black/ and the great-grandson is entirely black”¹³.

Be that as it may, the logic of the white colonisation which Lisbon sought to achieve by sending settlers and soldiers, deportees and unmarried women¹⁴ was unable to check the advanced process of the emergence of a Creole society, i.e. a “mestizo city” which Luanda had already become.

As has been mentioned, apart from “burghers” there were also *gente de guerra* (‘military men’). In 1658 the Infantry Regiment of Angola had ten companies of paid soldiers, another company of cavalry and an artillery company (Silva 1996: 126). In all they would have numbered more than one thousand men but their presence would not really have been felt in the capital since most of the companies were engaged in campaigns in the hinterland. Moreover, the military units were permanently short of men and only managed to complete their ranks, as shall be seen, by incorporating blacks and mestizos en masse.

Some soldiers at the end of their careers, especially senior servicemen, who had married in the meanwhile, settled in the capital and acquired the status of burghers. Many of them also came to hold the handful of public administration offices available in the areas of justice and the treasury, as owners or *em serventia* (‘on behalf of others’). Only the very top posts, i.e. those which

¹¹ Almost all these women came from the *Casa Pia das Convertidas ou das Penitentes*, also known as the *Recolhimento da Natividade ou de Santa Maria Madalena*, founded in Lisbon in 1587.

¹² Consultation by the Overseas Council on 19 November 1664 (Brásio: XIII-511).

¹³ “Descrição da cidade de Loanda e Reyno de Angola” (Teixeira 1978: 169–184).

¹⁴ Unmarried women were once again sent to Angola in 1673. However, this time they were “orphans from institutions”. Royal letter dated 4 March 1673, AHU, C.U., Codex 545, fl. 2.

required higher education qualifications, were held by individuals sent from Lisbon as royal appointees.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the city's growth attracted several dozen *homens de negócio* ('businessmen') of European origin to Luanda. The majority were owners of simple "stores and shops", i.e. engaged in petty commerce of alcoholic drinks and everyday consumer items¹⁵. These petty merchants were generally deportees or soldiers who were unable to fight and thus turned their hand to commerce to survive or to rise socially.

Mercadores ('merchants') availed of other economic opportunities, selling (normally on credit) the wares which burghers sent to the hinterland in order to buy the slaves which they later sold for export. These merchants also engaged in the slave trade and also traded in gold and silver objects, items which were highly sought after in a city which lacked metal currency. Many of them were *cristãos novos*, "crypto-Jews" who sought to avoid persecution by the Inquisition's agents for their beliefs and lifestyle in the tropics. However, Gonçalo Rodrigues Meneses, arrested by the Inquisition in 1626, was unable to escape persecution. This New Christian goldsmith facilitated credit operations and leading burghers in the city, such as Diogo Serrão, Gabriel de Moraes, Simão Roiz (Rodrigues?) Brandão or Diogo de Teixeira da Fonseca, were his partners or clients in the slave trade. At the time he was arrested he had invested a total of 3 880 800 *réis* in this activity. Gonçalo Meneses was a bachelor, although he had children with his female slaves. He had lived for more than 30 years in Luanda and appears associated with another New Christian who had also lived in the city for a long time, a merchant named Sisto de Almeida¹⁶.

There were also some foreign merchants, although they numbered just a few individuals. In 1656 there were only two, both large scale traders: a German named Baltasar Vandunem, married with children, and a Catalan named Diogo Sanches Xarroso¹⁷.

In 1652–1654 these two merchants had been holders of royal concessions, the highest scale of businessmen in Luanda, since they were the ones who oversaw all shipments of slaves. When these concessionaires did not live in Angola, they at least had representatives in the city.

Finally, there were the *negociantes de mar em fora* ('overseas merchants'), but they only passed through Luanda. They were Portuguese from Lisbon or from Brazil or, less commonly, Spaniards, who were owners or part-owners of the ships which arrived in the port, bringing European and American merchandise and exchanging them for shipments of slaves, who were sent along the tragic Atlantic slave route.

¹⁵ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 15, No. 116, 9 September 1699.

¹⁶ Torre do Tombo National Archives, *Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa* (hereafter TT, TSO, IL), Case 9609.

¹⁷ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 6, docs. 60 and 148, 6 August 1656 and 22 March 1658.

3.2 THE MESTIZOS

If only a small group of white men lived in Luanda, white women were even fewer in number, even though all the legitimate daughters of white men were identified as being white in official documentation, irrespective of their actual colour. While the number of males is not quantifiable for the 17th century, a census of the population of Luanda in 1781 recorded 217 white women of a childbearing age for 838 men of the equivalent age group¹⁸, i.e. one woman for almost four men.

It is clear that, although not being the sole reason, this was one of the main factors for the intense biological miscegenation which took place in the city of Luanda since, in Cadornega's (1972: III–30) words, "owing to a lack of white ladies", white men had offspring with "black ladies".

The forms of these relationships varied considerably. They could be sporadic or enduring, consensual or imposed by force. Although the initiative was almost always taken by the white male, one cannot overlook the fact that some black women or their families could obtain benefits via these liaisons and the resulting mestizo offspring.

Almost all the Portuguese who arrived in Angola were bachelors or married men who had left their wives behind in Portugal. Few of them intended to settle there permanently but anyone who had any resources at all established a house and acquired African slaves, most of whom were female. Informal polygamy was more or less the general norm¹⁹.

While describing the city of Luanda an anonymous 17th century author, cited above, wrote about this issue quite ironically: "Polygamy is growing everywhere/living with many women / exceeding all the powers / allowed by the Church. (...) // Because one man was found to have eight/ between black and mestizo women /and these infractions are not punished / as they deserve to be"²⁰.

In the case of the offspring of owned female slaves, the majority were freed by the fathers and in fact it was commonly accepted that whenever the father was known, the children would be considered to be free. Only a very small number were legitimised and had access to paternal inheritances, although Portuguese legislation facilitated this latter aspect²¹.

In any case, there continued to be mestizo slaves, although relatively few in number. There is no reliable quantitative information for the 17th century but the

¹⁸ These age groups were: women from 14 to 40 years and men from 15 to 60 years. The figures for the men included soldiers and seafarers. AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 64, No. 63 "Relação dos habitantes desta cidade de São Paulo de Assumpção do reino de Angola no anno de 1781".

¹⁹ TT, TSO, IL, Case 9609, fl. 13v.

²⁰ "Descrição da cidade de Loanda..." (Teixeira 1978: 169–184).

²¹ *Ordenações Manuelinas* 1521: Book IV, Title LXXI; *Ordenações Filipinas* 1603: Book IV, Title XCIII.

data for the 18th century could provide some indicators. In 1781, there were a total of 1770 *pardos* ('browns'), men and women, in the city of Luanda, of which 354 (20%) were slaves²².

Irrespective of whether they were the result of stable or occasional relationships, the majority of the children were raised by their mothers. In the case of children who were legitimised, they were sometimes raised by their mothers only during their early years and were then handed over to a Portuguese family. Be that as it may, all or almost all these children imbibed the African language and culture along with their mother's milk. A soldier who lived many years in Angola described mestizos as "offspring of whites who know the language"²³, and the language was Kimbundu. It is therefore quite natural that this group of mestizos played an important role in connecting the two cultural universes.

The designation of this socio-ethnic group had not yet been established during the 17th century, various names being attributed to such individuals. It is not clear whether these designations were used indifferently or in a specific manner known only to people living in that age. Thus, the most common designations are *mulato* ('mulatto')²⁴ and *mestiço* ('mestizo') but it is also possible to find *pardo* ('brown')²⁵ and *crioulo* ('Creole')²⁶ and, in a broader sense, "native children" (*filho[s] da terra*). A former governor, Fernão de Sousa (1624–1630) caused even more confusion when, in 1632, he spoke of "*mestiços a que chamam filhos da terra que são mulatos* ('mestizos who are called native children who are mulattos')"²⁷. Perhaps he intended to say, which would make more sense: "mestizos, as they call native children who are mulattos".

What is known is that being legitimised and not being legitimised were two different things and that even among legitimised offspring a child of a free black woman was considered to be superior to the child of a black female slave. There were differences in status which had nothing to do with the colour of their skin.

In fact, there were mestizos who had brilliant official careers and were not normally referred to as mestizos, it becoming evident only in passing that their mothers were black. This was the case with Francisco da Mata Falcão, who was a military captain and later became a captain-major²⁸. He also subsequently

²² AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 64, No. 63 "Relação dos habitantes..., 1781".

²³ Letter from Baltasar Rebelo de Aragão, 1618 (Brásio: VI, 342).

²⁴ In certain contexts the word could have a pejorative meaning.

²⁵ For example, a letter from the Portuguese monarch to the Governor of Angola, 10 March 1692 (Brásio: XIV–241).

²⁶ For example, a letter from Fernão de Sousa to the Portuguese monarch, 28 September 1624 (Brásio: VII–255). However, the designation also appears to have been used for second generation slaves (Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–470)).

²⁷ Report by Fernão de Sousa, 29 July 1632 (Brásio: VIII–175).

²⁸ TT, *Registo Geral de Mercês*, Book 15, fls. 490–490v, Letter patent of appointment as captain-major, 1648.

received the habit and title of a knight of the Order of Santiago²⁹. He was the offspring of an adulterous relationship (his father was married) of Antão da Mata Falcão and, according to him, a *gentia* ('local heathen'), a way of guaranteeing that she was free. This was also the case with another and even more well-known captain-major, Luís Lopes Sequeira, who was the son of a sergeant-major named Domingos Lopes Sequeira and a free black woman³⁰.

The attitude of the civil as well as religious authorities with regard to mestizos ranged from praise, especially of their military skills, to great mistrust. It is possible that they were referring to different groups of mestizos but this is a subtle nuance which is not always easy to discern.

In 1618, Captain-Major Baltazar Rebelo de Aragão described mulattos as, "The worst kind of people in this land"³¹. In 1624, Governor Fernão de Sousa used similar words, affirming that they were, "The worst kind of people because not only are they weak but they are also thieves and dishonest"³².

In 1692, in a letter addressed to the governor, the court in Lisbon felt that "brown and native [Angolan]"³³ chaplains "have many vices" and the bishop was prohibited from ordaining new mulatto priests³⁴. This apparently referred only to those who were illegitimate children, but they were the majority, and this could have resulted in a sharp reduction in clergymen in the interior. This was the context in which Portugal's representative submitted a request to the *Propaganda Fide* to allow "*illegitimi figlioli di bianchi e neri* ('illegitimate sons of whites and blacks')" to be promoted to the priesthood³⁵.

Although it could have been caused by other kinds of preconceptions, the aforesaid mistrust does not seem to have been directed at legitimate or legitimised offspring, who apparently could easily enter a military career (where they could access all posts) and, when literate, an ecclesiastical or administrative career, apart from being able to hold seats in the municipal council.

However, this mestizo elite constituted just a small minority. As has been mentioned, the situation of illegitimate offspring (speaking only of free mulattos) was very different and it is no surprise that they were sensitive about their marginalisation by white fathers and a white State and appeared to be problematic for the authorities.

²⁹ TT, *Habilitações da Ordem de Santiago*, Letter F, *maço* 2, No. 46; Dutra 2011: 101–114.

³⁰ TT, *Registo Geral de Mercês*, D. Afonso VI, Book 14, f.193v, Letter patent of appointment as a captain-major of the Kingdom of Angola, 22 April 1673; Alencastro 2000: 293–294.

³¹ Letter from Baltazar Rebelo de Aragão, 1618 (Brásio: VI–342).

³² Letter by Fernão de Sousa to the Portuguese monarch, 28 September 1624 (Brásio: VII–255).

³³ Letter from the Portuguese monarch to the Governor of Angola, 10 March 1692 (Brásio: XIV–241).

³⁴ Letter from the Governor of Angola to the Portuguese monarch, 24 April 1693, (Brásio: XIV–299).

³⁵ Memorial from Portugal's representative to the *Propaganda Fide* (Brásio: XIV–377).

3.3 THE AFRICANS

The population of Luanda was overwhelmingly African during the 17th century, although it is hard to quantify their proportion. As has been mentioned, contemporary estimates of the number of black Africans vary between 20,000 and 40,000 individuals. This difference can be explained not just by a lack of precision in the mentality of the age but also perhaps on the basis of the greater or lesser area around the urban centre being considered.

From the point of view of social status, the main distinction mentioned in sources regarding this population was between slaves and *forro* ('free') individuals. "Free" was understood to include not only slaves who had been "enfranchised" (slaves freed by owners) but also free Africans (sometimes called "free by birth").

The number of free individuals was far lower than enslaved individuals. Free individuals included the Axiluanda (sing. Muxiluanda), fishermen, sailors and *nzimbu*³⁶ catchers from the island of Luanda, a community which already existed at the time when the Portuguese arrived and always maintained its free status, despite some impositions by governors, on the pretext of having supported the Dutch occupation. The richer Axiluanda themselves owned slaves (Carvalho 1989: 31–36).

The descendants of the scattered inhabitants living in the coastal areas before the new settlement was founded (known as Akualuanda) were also considered to be "free by birth", as were some Africans from the interior, generally dignitaries or the offspring of dignitaries from "friendly" chiefdoms, who were invited to settle in Luanda on a temporary or permanent basis, for diverse reasons³⁷.

Paradoxical as it might seem, the free population of the interior regions, known as the *sertão*, were sometimes received in settlements inhabited primarily by slaves, in Luanda and in the area of the *presídios* ('garrisons'). This often gave rise to protests by African chiefs who felt undermined by such flights³⁸.

The newest "free" or "enfranchised" individuals were slaves, in most cases domestic slaves, who had received their freedom as a personal favour from their owner, as a way of showing their gratitude or liberalness, almost always by means of testaments³⁹.

Although it was common in other places and periods, there are no known cases of slaves buying their own freedom in Angola during the 17th century, even when they had the means to do so. This was probably due to the fact that

³⁶ Nzimbu (*Cypraea moneta*), a univalve mollusc whose shells were used as coins in the kingdom of Kongo and in other regions of West Africa.

³⁷ Letter from Father Baltasar Barreira to the Jesuit General, 31 January 1582 (Brásio XV–269); *Relação* by Fernão de Sousa, 1627 (Brásio: VII–524).

³⁸ In 1666, the new governor was advised to prevent "free men from living among and taking shelter with the slaves of residents in their *sanxalás* and plantations". Instructions for the Governor of Angola, 10 April 1666 (Brásio: XIII–18).

³⁹ Testament of Gaspar Álvares, 28 October 1623 (Felner 1933: 463–465).

the situation of free individuals was not very different from that of *escravos soltos* ('unconfined slaves'), who will be described shortly. In fact, many free individuals lived together with such slaves and marriages even took place between them⁴⁰.

Some "free by birth blacks" (who hence did not have any stain of slavery) managed to rise in colonial society by means of two routes: by joining the priesthood or becoming professional soldiers. Such limited possibilities for upward social mobility resulted in the emergence of a small black elite and served as an escape valve for possible conflicts caused by skin colour.

As Catholic priests, trained at the Jesuit College, they served above all in chapels in the interior (Cadornega 1972: III–13). As soldiers, although blacks had always been part of garrison troops, a royal letter dated 24 March 1684 allowed them to join white companies and rise in the ranks to hold various posts, based purely on the criterion of merit⁴¹.

Among this multitude of black slaves not only were there differences in occupations but also in status. The fundamental distinction (which some historiography does not always duly note) was between "resident slaves" and slaves in transit or "slaves from the interior".

The latter regularly arrived in the city, chained to each other in more or less long and tightly packed lines. Those who were not directly sent to the island of Luanda, where they were loaded onto ships, were locked into sheds and walled yards in the lower part of the city.

Although many "residents" could be associated in one way or another with the arrival, maintenance and transport of these batches of labour which fuelled the Atlantic slave trade, they did not identify with them at all, or only to a very limited extent. This detachment intensified even further as the "slaves from the interior" began to be sourced from regions which were increasingly far away from the coast.

The numerical increase in residents was due more to the natural growth of the population than to new arrivals from the interior and by the mid-17th century many of the slaves in Luanda were already part of a second generation, who had been born there. The chance of elements of this group being sold to the Americas was relatively low, unless as punishment for a serious lapse⁴². However, this was nonetheless a powerful threat which owners could use to dissuade disobedience.

⁴⁰ For example, Francisco Pedro, a slave belonging to Francisco Pereira de Vasconcelos, was married to Serafina Rodrigues, a free woman (TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl. 47).

⁴¹ AHU, C.U., Codex 545, fl. 30v, royal letter dated 24 March 1684.

⁴² Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–470).

On the other hand, slaves had an equally powerful weapon against the threat of being sold to America or if the pace of work was too harsh: escaping⁴³. Although, as demonstrated by Beatriz Heintze (2007: 507–538), escape was not as easy a solution as it might seem, some group escapes did take place when the intensity of the work demanded of them was unviable or when the death of an owner or their prolonged absence caused apprehensions of a loss of stability and uncertainty regarding the future⁴⁴.

The resident slaves in the city and surrounding areas were far from being a homogenous group. It is possible to distinguish various sub-groups, citing the terms commonly used during that age:

- a) *casados* (married) or *soltos* (unconfined slaves)
- b) plantation slaves
- c) inside slaves (domestic slaves)
- d) *pombeiros* (trader slaves)
- e) *escravos de guerra* (military slaves).

a) In 1594, according to official figures compiled by the Jesuits, the Jesuit College in Luanda owned 152 slaves: 62 married, 34 unmarried (who can be equated to domestic slaves), while the others were elderly slaves or children (Alden 1996: 544).

The slaves described therein as being “married” were also called *escravos soltos* (unconfined slaves) in other sources, reflecting the significant level of autonomy they enjoyed, or *escravos de ganho* (earning slaves), although this latter designation was more restrictive in nature. Any of these expressions could be used to describe slaves who worked in a profession, who had constituted a family or could constitute one and who lived in their own dwelling. It is not known whether the percentage indicated in the figures for the Jesuit College (about 40%) can be taken as a general guideline for the overall slave population in Luanda but it seems fairly certain that this category of slave predominated as compared to any of the other groups in this population.

They were the ones who ensured the city’s productive activities: at sea and on the river (as fishermen and sailors, even working aboard long haul ships); in “industrial” activities (e.g. potteries and manufacturing lime) and as artisans in the many urban craft activities. A source from 1678 listed such professions: “ironsmiths, caulkers, house carpenters, dockyard carpenters, painters, wax

⁴³ “And even though they are in great need and have far too many slaves in their plantations, *senzalas* and houses, they cannot sell them, because it would immediately upset the others, who would then run away” (AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, No. 76, Letter from Governor Gonçalo Alcáçova Carneiro, 29 January 1692).

⁴⁴ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, No. 135, Letter from Captain Manuel Simões Colaço, 7 September 1693.

workers and various other trades”⁴⁵. Another source added “stone masons and joiners” (Guattini and Carli 2006 [1668]: 85) and yet another completed the list definitively, mentioning “tailors, cobblers and tanners and all kinds of trades which can be seen in a republic”⁴⁶. “Married slaves” could be found in the most unexpected occupations (for example, “official sock maker”⁴⁷) as well as positions of great responsibility: “official barber and bleeder” at the Jesuit College⁴⁸ and even at the *Misericórdia* hospital (Cadornega 1972: III–21).

Many of these professionals, particularly in specialised occupations, did not work directly for their owner but rather for third parties, in exchange for a payment which reverted totally or partially to the slave’s owner (Guattini and Carli 2006[1668]: 85).

The exploitation of “earning slaves” could reach unexpected levels. Sebastião Machado was accused of having had a homosexual slave (who had died in the meanwhile) who engaged in prostitution, which his owner never prevented, ostensibly because he received half of everything his slave earned in this activity⁴⁹.

As has been mentioned “unconfined slaves” lived in their own dwellings. Normally these were traditional structures made of wooden stakes, with walls sometimes being coated with clay and thatched with hay, grouped together in clusters known as *senzalas* (from the Kimbundu word *sanzala*, village) built within the estates of the residences of their owners. However, some of these *senzalas* were built outside the boundaries of the estates and were established in open areas in the city, amidst the stone buildings inhabited by Europeans, thus providing an African touch to the urban landscape.

When the Jesuit “new college” was founded during the early 17th century, accommodation was built within the boundary walls for bachelor slaves⁵⁰. The married slaves built a *senzala* outside, which grew rapidly. So much so that in the mid-17th century a governor stated that it was as big as some towns in Portugal⁵¹.

b) The “plantation slaves” or *escravos dos arimos* (‘estate slaves’) were also married slaves, in the sense described above, but they worked on estates which residents in Luanda owned along the banks of the closest rivers, especially the Bengo.

⁴⁵ Reply from the Governor of Angola to a Jesuit letter, 1678 (Brásio: XIII, 467–468).

⁴⁶ Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–470).

⁴⁷ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl. 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fl. 43.

⁴⁹ TT, TSO, I.L., Case 1467, fl. 9.

⁵⁰ Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–470).

⁵¹ Letter from Governor Luís Chichorro, 17 September 1655 (Brásio: XI–521).

Contrary to the intentions of the central authorities, this plantation system did not generate agricultural produce for export but instead favoured a multipurpose system of growing “provisions”, based on corn, manioc and vegetables. The plantations operated with slave labour which, enjoying a relatively high level of autonomy, used the traditional agricultural practices and technical knowledge of the African continent.

Many owners were absent and, during their absence, all production and the work of the slaves were overseen by a trusted factor, known as the *maculunto* (from the Kikongo word *nkuluntu* ‘older, superior’), who was generally a slave himself⁵².

In this manner the pace of work on these estates was very similar, and in some cases more favourable, to that of the neighbouring estates, fields belonging to African authorities operating on free or slave labour. This is the only explanation for the absence of mass escapes by workers, who apparently had ideal conditions to flee.

c) *Domestic slaves* were in a paradoxical situation: although they enjoyed the best living conditions and had the greatest chance of being freed they had a far lower level of autonomy and were more subject to the caprices of their owners, which could border on inhumanity. The main difference with regard to other categories of slaves was that they worked and lived in their owner’s house, although, if they were male, some could marry and sleep in their own dwellings, normally built in the *senzala* annexed to the owner’s residence.

Every resident, rich or poor, had domestic slaves, although they were far more numerous in white families⁵³. Even some slaves could have slaves in their employ. For example, in 1698, Francisco Pedro, who was himself a domestic slave, living with his wife in a *sanzala*, had a *moleque* (‘young male slave’) in his house⁵⁴. As shall shortly be seen, some slaves in specialised trades also had slaves working for them⁵⁵.

In fact, the social status of much of the population was measured by the number of slaves they owned, which was not very different from traditional African societies, in which, albeit for other reasons, owning captives was the main source of power and prestige (Thornton 2004: 124–125). In Luanda there were burghers who had dozens of domestic slaves and never went out without an entourage of servants (Guattini and Carli 2006 [1668]: 85–86).

⁵² AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, No. 76, Letter from Governor Gonçalo Alcáçova Carneiro, 29 January 1692.

⁵³ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 57, No. 34, “Mapa das pessoas que residem nesta cidade de São Paulo de Assumpção”, 3 March 1773.

⁵⁴ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl.47.

⁵⁵ Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–470).

In houses, slaves were subject to any task which was demanded of them. When one of them was asked what he did, he answered that he had no trade “and was just a slave at the service of his master”⁵⁶.

Female slaves were used for all kinds of domestic tasks, including some that required skills which were acquired over time, such as cooking, sewing or embroidery. In the case of bachelor owners, as well as some married owners, the younger female slaves who were less scarred by life often served as concubines and nannies for other people’s children in addition to their habitual domestic tasks⁵⁷.

Of all the different types of slaves, domestic slaves were most subject to physical punishment, as a penalty for any shortcomings, no matter how small, often amplified by the whims of their owners⁵⁸.

For all these reasons, the “married slaves” with minor daughters were mistrustful of owners who wished to take their daughters to serve in the house: “And, from the plantations as well as the *senzalas* they take young girls to serve within the four walls of their houses (...) even though the parents do not let them go willingly for these occupations”⁵⁹.

Thus, the most habitual way of renewing stocks of domestic slaves, of both sexes, was to buy new slaves, who were almost always small children who were raised and educated within the house⁶⁰.

d) The *pumbeiros* or *pombeiros* could be free blacks or mestizos but were normally black slaves who, however, enjoyed an almost total autonomy. Men who were trusted by their owners (traders or other individuals) they were the ones who ventured into the hinterland in expeditions which could last months or years, to buy slaves at the *pumbos* (fairs) in the interior. In fact, in coeval documentation they are also described as being *escravos mercados dos moradores* (‘slaves trading on behalf of burghers’)⁶¹ and as *escravos resgatadores ou compradores* (‘purchasing slaves or buyers’)⁶².

They generally spoke two or three languages (Portuguese, Kimbundu and sometimes Kikongo) and needed to be well versed in the geography of the hinterland as well as the trading mechanisms and power relations they would encounter there. Accompanied by an entourage of porters, they transported the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ TT, TSO, I.L., Case 9609, *passim*.

⁵⁸ TT, TSO, I.L., Case 9609, fls. 46v–47.

⁵⁹ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, doc 76, Letter from Governor Gonçalo Alcáçova Carneiro, 29 January 1692.

⁶⁰ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 21, Book 222, fls. 248–263.

⁶¹ Letter from the Luanda city council, 19 February 1656 (Brásio: XII–12).

⁶² Letter from Father Gonçalo de Sousa in the name of the Luanda city council, 6 July 1633 (Brásio: VIII–243).

wares entrusted to them in hazardous journeys⁶³. While some were unable to resist the temptation to flee with these goods⁶⁴, the majority scrupulously concluded the missions which had been entrusted to them, bringing to Luanda in tightly packed rows the slaves who were the main commodity traded by their owners⁶⁵.

e) Africans always participated in military expeditions which set out from Luanda into the interior regions of Angola, including free men and slaves, as auxiliary troops, constituting the so called *guerra preta* ('black troops'). However, the expression is ambiguous because it was also used to describe the armies with which allied political chieftains (for example, the Jagas) fought on the side of the Portuguese.

Slaves belonging to Europeans in Luanda who were incorporated into military expeditions did not always do so in the same conditions. In exchange for the fact that European residents in the city did not participate in military offensives⁶⁶, when governors prepared campaigns considered to be important they launched a sort of muster, by which everyone had to provide a certain number of slaves. These slaves were used above all as porters, especially to transport munitions⁶⁷.

However, there were also combat units constituted by slaves and these slaves were known as "military slaves" or "archer slaves". Generally commanded by a mestizo or by another *filho da terra* ('native'), who could even be the proprietor of these slaves⁶⁸, they formed highly regarded and feared corps of archers, almost always being recruited among young plantation workers⁶⁹.

4. CONTACTS, INTERACTION AND CONVERGENCE

The power relations between the group of Portuguese (and their direct descendants who had settled in Luanda from 1576 onwards) and the far more

⁶³ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, No. 71, Letter from Governor Gonçalo Alcáçova Carneiro, 28 November 1691.

⁶⁴ Letter from Father Gonçalo de Sousa, 6 July 1633 (Brásio: VIII–243).

⁶⁵ Consultation by the Overseas Council, 19 December 1664 (Brásio: XII, 508–513); AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 14, No. 76, Letter from Governor Gonçalo Alcáçova Carneiro, 29 January 1692; Cadornega 1972: I, 143–144.

⁶⁶ Order dated 23 October 1660 (*Arquivos de Angola* 1934: 133–134). This confirmed previous measures to the same end.

⁶⁷ AHU, C.U., Codex 545, fl. 43, Letter from the Portuguese monarch to the bishop of Angola, 14 March 1688.

⁶⁸ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 8, No. 28, Consultation by the Overseas Council, 19 June 1664.

⁶⁹ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 5, No. 128, Consultation by the Overseas Council, 22 September 1653.

numerous group of Africans who had gone to live in the city, either by force or their own free will, were very unequal.

The Portuguese arrived with the intention of “occupying and conquering”⁷⁰ and their attitude was one of domination and imposing a way of life which, in many aspects, clashed with prevailing local socio-cultural norms. Representatives of the Catholic Church were the ones who introduced the most well defined ideological formula, which not only clashed with traditional beliefs but also with longstanding and institutionalised forms of behaviour (e.g. polygamy) and even everyday habits (e.g. clothing).

However, it would be wrong to think that the African community of resident slaves and free men played a passive role in relations with the European occupiers, even without considering the tenacious military resistance which occurred in the interior regions. In truth, as will be seen, during the period in question there emerged a complex cultural interaction which resulted in Africans imbibing European habits and Europeans becoming more African.

The existence, from very early on, of an intermediate group of bilingual mestizos facilitated the mechanisms for interaction. The diverse activities of married slaves, some of which required a prolonged period of technical apprenticeship based on European techniques, and the permanent presence of a large group of domestic slaves living side by side with Europeans and European descendants resulted in inevitable communication and a greater and reciprocal familiarity. The fact that the Portuguese colonisers were very few in number and were generally from poorer segments of Portuguese society, with low levels of literacy and a historic tradition of mixing with other races, as well as in some cases (e.g. deportees) being completely cut off from their roots, would also have facilitated mutual contacts and processes of adaptation.

4.1 LANGUAGE

Urban slaves in Angola were not a “foreign” and heterogeneous minority, who had been deprived of all their identity ties, as was the case in other colonial capitals. Primarily consisting of unconfined and domestic slaves, they were far greater in number than the population with European roots, did not have to abandon their area of cultural origin and formed an ethnically homogenous group. Almost all of them came from the city’s hinterland, the area between the Dande and Cuanza rivers. They generally spoke Kimbundu, which continued to be their everyday language of communication.

It is likely that even though domestic slaves spoke Kimbundu among themselves they were capable of understanding and making themselves understood in colloquial Portuguese, which was less common in the case of unconfined slaves and even rarer among plantation slaves.

⁷⁰ Donation letter to Paulo Dias de Novais, 6 September 1571 (Felner 1933: 407–412).

In the set of documents pertaining to the Inquisition, to date only seven slaves and two “free blacks”⁷¹ appear as witnesses or deponents, of whom only one had not been born in Luanda. This was António, a “moleque” or young lad aged just 14 years, a domestic slave who had been bought a short while ago by a clerk named Luís Gonçalves de Alter. António was the only one who needed an interpreter for his testimony, since he only spoke “Ambunda”⁷². Despite the limited nature of the sample, it is possible that sections of the African slave and free population living in the city could express themselves in Portuguese, as has been mentioned. However, the following statement by a governor, Aires de Meneses e Sousa, could only have been the result of the controversial situation in which it was written: “The heathen who simply frequents our company learns to communicate like someone who has attended classes, [they] can pronounce and speak [Portuguese] perfectly, as though born in Lisbon”⁷³. This is a manifest exaggeration.

When the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks was officialised, which was to bring together slaves and free men, one of the concerns of the bishop, D. Francisco, was that the respective church should be assisted by “a native curate to confess, administer sacraments and teach the doctrine in their language”⁷⁴.

A bilingual catechism was soon published (Portuguese-Kimbundu; Pacconio 1642) and the first grammar of this African language was prepared before the end of the century, reflecting how missionaries and other individuals were interested in being able to communicate in the “language of Angola” (Dias 1697).

On the other hand, apart from the mestizos, many whites understood and spoke Kimbundu, it being impossible to quantify them. Among Portuguese speakers in Luanda who were able to communicate in the local language, the majority were probably women, influenced by the bevy of female domestic slaves with whom they interacted on a daily basis. As early as 1578, D. Catarina Álvares, one of the ladies in the governor’s entourage, was said to speak “Ambundo better than many blacks in these parts”. In the 18th century, when the situation would not have been very different from the previous century, after affirming that the “predominant language was Ambundu”, Elias Alexandre Corrêa (1937: I–83) commented that, “The ladies are used to communicating with their female slaves in this language and are verbose in familiar conversations”. He concluded by saying: “The [white] men speak Portuguese and can express themselves elegantly in Ambundu”.

⁷¹ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fls. 31–58v and No. 21, Book 222, fls. 248–263v.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Book 222, fl. 251.

⁷³ Reply by Governor Aires Meneses e Sousa to a Jesuit letter, 2 November 1678 (Brásio: XIII–469).

⁷⁴ Report by Fernão de Sousa addressed to the Portuguese monarch, 23 February 1632 (Brásio: VIII–153).

Proof of this are the numerous words derived from Kimbundu which appear in Portuguese texts written in Angola, both in correspondence⁷⁵ as well as in literary works, of which the best example is the book by Cadornega (1972), where this “new” vocabulary appears quite spontaneously.

However, this linguistic exchange was not a one way process and several Portuguese words and elements of grammar were absorbed by Kimbundu. It is difficult to precisely ascertain when this occurred but in some cases it would date back to the 17th century. At least since the 19th century philologists have found traces of distinctive traits in the Kimbundu spoken in the interior and the Kimbundu spoken in Luanda where this Portuguese influence is more evident (Chatelain 1888; Chatelain 1964; Inverno 2009: 89).

4.2 EVERYDAY HABITS

This cultural exchange also took place in other everyday areas, at diverse levels. In the case of clothing, a clear demarcation between European garb and African garments used in public spaces appears to have continued to exist. Insurmountable preconceptions meant that here, as in other areas of the Empire, the Portuguese essentially maintained their style of dress taken from Europe, despite being quite unsuitable for local climatic conditions, only gradually lightening their garb. The fact that revealing the body was considered to be a transgression in European society of the *ancien régime* and strategies of personal differentiation were closely associated with clothing would have been the main reasons for this resistance.

On the contrary, although the use of European style clothing by Africans was considered to be a source of prestige it was uncomfortable to use and the materials were expensive. However, sometimes, simply using a pair of shoes or a hat also served as a symbolic distinction. It is interesting to note that the bans on entering and staying in the *pumbos* (‘slave fairs in the interior regions’) encompassed, along with whites and mestizos, “blacks wearing pants”⁷⁶ or “dressed blacks”⁷⁷, i.e. Africans who had adopted European habits and, on the basis of their outwardly appearance, were deemed to belong to the group of the whites.

Some slaves engaging in more important professions, such as specialised trades, sought to draw closer to the dominant segments of society by means of their clothing. This was described by a Jesuit priest, when referring to the slaves at the college in Luanda: “Some of our blacks are so respectable that they go

⁷⁵ See, for example, Heintze (ed.) 1985–1988: I, 114–130.

⁷⁶ AHU, C.U., *Angola*, Box 10, No. 95, Instructions for the Governor of Angola, 27 March 1673.

⁷⁷ Consultation by the Overseas Council regarding a petition submitted by the Luanda city council, 19 November 1664 (Brásio: XII–509).

around dressed like squires and they have their own slaves, who serve them or assist in their trade”⁷⁸.

In terms of food, considering the components of the respective diets, it can be seen that Africans gradually imposed some of their food habits on the colonisers, by means of products supplied from the plantations.

Over the course of the 17th century, the basic foodstuffs of the urban and rural African diet were manioc and maize corn (plants originating in America, recently introduced by the Europeans, which soon became an integral part of the African diet) as well as local varieties of corn and banana. Oil palms provided vegetable oils and alcoholic drinks (oil and palm wine).

Apart from being prolific consumers of fish and meat the Portuguese remained faithful to the sacred trilogy of the Mediterranean diet (wheat bread, wine and olive oil) and took time to abandon these elements⁷⁹. In a report dating from 1633, burghers described the efforts to make use of their lands “planting and sowing manioc and local corn, *to sustain the blacks*” (my italics). They further added: “And in this land there are no other cereal fields or vineyards or olive groves”⁸⁰. However, perhaps it was an Italian who had arrived in Luanda three years ago who expressed his anguish most vehemently. A Capuchin missionary, Serafino da Cortona wrote: “It is essential to keep in mind that we are in these miserable lands deprived of every human consolation, reduced to living like animals, without seeing either bread or wine or any other comfort, spending our lives eating vegetables and fruits, dying not once but a thousand times each day”⁸¹.

The ships which sailed from Lisbon to Luanda continued to bring kegs of biscuit and wheat flour. Treats sent from Portugal to relatives in Luanda included barrels of biscuit, along with preserved meats, cheeses and quince jam⁸².

However, reality ended up by prevailing and African provisions, especially manioc flour, progressively became part of the diet of Europeans in Angola⁸³. This first occurred among soldiers, where blacks, mestizos and whites ate together in camps. It is no coincidence that this flour was known as *farinha de*

⁷⁸ Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI-470).

⁷⁹ “Grape wine, along with olive oil and bread, formed a trilogy of basic consumption items that radically differentiated the material world of the Lusophone population, as well as of other Mediterranean Europeans, from that of peoples who inhabited other continents” (Curto 2004: 142).

⁸⁰ Letter from Father Gonçalo de Sousa in the name of the Luanda city council, 6 July 1633 (Brásio: VIII-244).

⁸¹ Letter from Father Serafino da Cortona to the *Propaganda Fide*, Luanda, 5 June 1651 (Brásio: XI-44).

⁸² TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 21, Book 222, fls. 248–263.

⁸³ In the late 16th century manioc flour was known as “Brazil flour”. It was later called “stick flour” (*farinha-de-pau*), “local flour” (*farinha da terra*) and “soldier’s flour” (*farinha de guerra*).

guerra ('soldier's flour'). It was slowly adopted by most residents, a good example of this phenomenon being the Jesuit College. In 1636, the college menu always included "a ration of manioc flour, an everyday staple of all the people living there" (Lobo 1971: 635). Another source clarifies that at the main table, apart from local produce, priests were served, with their soup, "a small bun made of wheat flour from Portugal, which they like"⁸⁴.

Along with manioc flour, black beans (known as *encassa*, from the Kimbundu word *nkasa*) and, more slowly, palm oil, other products used daily by Africans were adopted by the Europeans. One of the most curious cases was that of cola nuts, widely consumed in Ndongo, which, owing to the medicinal and aphrodisiac properties attributed to it, was soon accepted by the Europeans. In 1575, it was already a "fruit used by whites and blacks"⁸⁵ and, one hundred years later, was appreciated by "all the Portuguese people in Angola" (Cadornega 1972: III, 201–202). Similarly, the *jinguba*, known by its African name or as a peanut or *amendoim*, as it was known in Brazil, was widely consumed (Cadornega 1972: III–202; Azeredo 1799: 59).

4.3 BELIEFS AND RITES

If, as has been seen, it is possible to find socio-cultural transfers in languages and everyday habits as the city of Luanda grew, this process was even more visible in the realm of the sacred.

In the 17th century the city's entire population was officially Catholic, irrespective of being white or black, free or slaves. When Cardonega (1972: III–28) estimated that there were "more than twenty thousand" Africans "in this city", he said that the majority were slaves and further added that most of them were "married and participated in communion".

The slaves belonging to the Society of Jesus, who were quite numerous, had their own brotherhood, named after Our Lady of the Rosary, with their own chapel, and already participated with dances and banners in the grand festivities in Luanda in 1620 when news arrived of the beatification of Francisco Xavier (*Procissam* 1994: 29; Cadornega 1972: III 15).

Some years later, perhaps in 1628 but definitely sometime before 1631, the bishop, D. Francisco Soveral (1628–1642), felt that religious assistance for slave and free blacks was insufficient and created a specific parish for them. The seat of the parish was the existing Santo António chapel, where the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks would later be built, concluded before 1676. The new parish had its own vicar, who, as has been mentioned, had to compulsorily know how to speak Kimbundu. A new brotherhood was

⁸⁴ Letter from Father Manuel Matos to Father Diogo de Alfaia, 15 February 1655 (Brásio: XI–471).

⁸⁵ Letter from Father Garcia Simões to the Provincial, 20 October 1575 (Brásio: III–133).

simultaneously founded, also invoking Our Lady of the Rosary, which was organised and administered by black Christians⁸⁶.

If some slaves felt coerced into aligning with the Catholic Church, many joined voluntarily and even enthusiastically.

So were they staunch and orthodox Catholics? The ecclesiastical hierarchy and civil authorities always doubted this. Governor D. João de Lencastre (1688–1691) even tried to ensure that the missionaries of the various religious orders in Angola, and not just mere chaplains, carried out missions “in the *senzalas* of residents of the city of Luanda” due to the “sins, superstitions and ignorance” rife among the blacks living in these neighbourhoods⁸⁷.

Such actions reflect an issue which has long been debated by historians examining African culture, which has to do with the fact that the Africans who converted to Catholicism from the 15th century onwards saw no incompatibility between their new beliefs and their previous rites and convictions. John Thornton has even called the result of this process of religious syncretism “African Christianity” (Thornton 2002: 76–84).

In 17th century Luanda this dynamic is evident in the magic-religious manifestations of Mbundu origin which took place in the city and its outskirts. Since these were practically public ceremonies they would undoubtedly have had the consent and perhaps even complicity of slave owners.

For example, in a discreet corner of the estate of Dona Inocência Corte-Real, a widow and the mother-in-law of Captain Álvaro de Aguiar Osório, domestic slaves carried out “diabolical ceremonies”. They summoned Ganga Anzumba (*Nganga-i-zumbi?*) and the devil responded, speaking in a nasal voice. Here, as in other descriptions, it is not known whether the European eyewitness-informer confused the invoking priest (the “*ganga*”, from the Kimbundu word *nganga*) with the entity supposedly being invoked. The ritual in question was probably the *kalundu*, a ceremony in which the officiating priest, with the support of those present, who shout, sing and play instruments, enters into a trance and embodies the spirit of a deceased individual, with whom those present can then communicate (Sweet 2007: 167–190). The *kalundu* was used for divination practices, with diverse objectives, and for the Catholic Church the results obtained could only have been due to the intervention of the devil.

It would perhaps not have been possible to hold *kalundus* everywhere throughout the city without raising the suspicions of the more orthodox authorities but other ancestral practices would have passed unperceived. Slaughtering a goat and offering a festive meal to friends and family could seem almost natural, but actually represented an important funerary rite. In a

⁸⁶ Report by D. Francisco do Soveral regarding the “*Sacra Limina*” visit, Luanda, 1 April 1631 (Brásio: VIII–22); Report by Fernão de Sousa addressed to the Portuguese monarch, 23 February 1632 (Brásio: VIII–153); Gabriel 1981: 121–123.

⁸⁷ Opinion by Father Sebastião Magalhães, 6 February 1694; Letter from the Portuguese monarch to the Governor of Angola, 10 March 1692; Letter from the Governor of Angola to the Portuguese monarch, 24 April 1693 (Brásio: XIV, 238, 241 and 296).

documented case, the deceased had been a seer with special powers and the sacrifice of the goat and the subsequent ritual meal were “homage and veneration for the deceased” so that the malignant spirit did not disturb the living⁸⁸.

It would also not have been very strange for Catarina Borges, a free black female, who had been born in Luanda and lived in a *senzala*, to bathe in water in which she had soaked some herbs she had expressly ordered, along with her two daughters. However, something more complex was afoot: one of her granddaughters had died recently, she had been in mourning for eight days and after that the ritual ablution was to prevent the soul of the girl from appearing before them⁸⁹.

These two examples reveal that with regard to death and the deceased there was a clear chasm between Christianity and traditional black Africa, where “the *invisible living* (the dead) lived side by side with the *visible living*, and often intervened in the latter’s lives in various ways” (Thomas and Luneau 2004: 93).

Using seers to recover lost items or to try and cure illnesses would have been a common practice among the African population, almost without exception. This is proved by the fact that such instances are known to have occurred among domestic slaves at the Jesuit College, who would have been expected to be more faithful to Catholic mores since they were subjected to a more persistent indoctrination, especially since divination in Africa always involved contacting spirits of the dead, who provided the desired information.

A *moleque*, or young male slave, fled from Francisco Pedro, a slave of Francisco Pereira de Vasconcelos, taking some of Francisco Pedro’s belongings with him. He was advised to contact a seer passing through the city, who conducted several ceremonies with a pan wrapped in rope⁹⁰. João Inácio, a Jesuit slave serving as a barber and bleeder (almost a doctor), sought out a *ganga* or seer when his wife fell sick, who the inquisitor described as an “Ambundu surgeon”⁹¹.

If it was easy to detect signs of an enduring Mbundu culture in Luanda, a short trip outside the city was enough to find the culture flourishing among plantation slaves.

In 1699, a youth named António Soares went to Bengo to visit his father’s plantation. In the houses in the *senzala* he was able to watch festivities known as *quicumbe*, which celebrated a rite of passage, when three girls, all of whom were the daughters of slaves, entered puberty. Soares described the rite with the rigour of an anthropologist⁹². Apart from these ceremonies, he also learnt of “Ambundu oaths”, a kind of ordeal, in which a person suspected of something was subjected to a test, which confirmed or eliminated the respective suspicion.

⁸⁸ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl. 32.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, fl. 39.

⁹⁰ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl. 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, fl. 43.

⁹² *Ibid.*, fls. 302–302v.

For example, Susana de João, a female slave at the plantation, was obliged by a female slave owned by Captain Manuel Simões Colaço, from a neighbouring plantation, to twice undergo the *Kilumbo oath*, which was administered with a hot iron, having been accused of stealing a chicken⁹³.

Alongside this “African Christianity”, this “Afro-Atlantic” religion widely accepted by baptised Africans, did Europeans and their descendants maintain a pure Christianity which was indifferent or even hostile to the African context?

This could perhaps have been the position maintained by a part of the Catholic Church hierarchy. However, it was not the attitude of another section of the clergy (especially clergy recruited locally, who were described as being “inclined towards superstitions”⁹⁴) nor of many of the city’s white residents and even less of the mestizos, a permanent bridge between the two cultures.

One of the ways by which Europeans opened up to Mbundu culture was in the context of health and illnesses. Doctors with a university education were scarce in 17th century Luanda and the few who could be found there were not particularly effective in diagnosing and curing illnesses, as in many other parts of the world. Despite the magic nature of African medicine, or perhaps precisely because of it as compared to the pseudo-scientific contents of western medicine, many patients with European roots often resorted to the services of the *gangas*, believing in their effectiveness to “manipulate the supernatural and neutralise evil” (Karasch 2000: 351).

In 1651, when the wife of an ensign, Manuel Marçal, was giving birth the “people in his house”, i.e. his domestic slaves, carried out some “heathen ceremonies and rites”⁹⁵. In 1698, when a slave owner, Bernardino Correia da Gama, was very ill he summoned a “black Mbundu surgeon”, Tomé de Angonga, who lived in the district of Massangano⁹⁶. In the same year, when a daughter of a widow named Antónia Vilaça fell ill, her wet nurse, a slave named Isabel, called a “black warlock from the hinterland” to divine the child’s disease⁹⁷.

In her turn, Dona Joana (ou Juliana) Corte-Real, the mother of a captain and slave owner, Tomás Borges Madureira, who was born in Luanda, was suspected of having raised her son with “heathen ceremonies”. She had a sack, “In which she placed some things belonging to the realm of witchcraft, which in the local tongue is called *moginga*”, and, during the new moon, she scattered these things all over the child’s body and anointed him⁹⁸.

The ways in which traditional Mbundu beliefs and rites influenced individuals from a European cultural matrix were far vaster in their scope and often made religious and civil hierarchies uncomfortable.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fl. 303.

⁹⁴ Report by Fernão de Sousa, 29 July 1632 (Brásio: VIII–175).

⁹⁵ TT,TSO, I.L., Case 1467, fl. 4.

⁹⁶ TT,TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 72, Book 266, fl. 31.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, fl. 298–298v.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, fl. 8.

A Franciscan deplored this situation in 1658, mentioning Africans and Europeans alike: “Among Catholic Christians, both black and white, the Catholic faith is greatly abused and they especially invoke the demon to foretell future events and also to guard against the dangers of illnesses”⁹⁹.

Over thirty years later Governor Gonçalo de Alcáçova Carneiro (1691–1694) was of a similar opinion, accusing “leading white men and women” of “using many of the superstitions of the blacks, Bulungo (sic) oaths and diabolical rites”¹⁰⁰.

More suggestive than official discourses was an inquiry which began in Luanda in early 1651, regarding divergences from the faith and good habits¹⁰¹.

The inquiry was conducted during a particularly sensitive period in the history of the Portuguese in Angola, just three years after the end of the Dutch occupation. Having had to flee from Luanda, many Portuguese had to seek refuge in their plantations in the interior or in the town of Massangano, where some still remained in 1651 and from where others had returned a short while ago. This exile in the “hinterland” greatly increased the possibility of contact with the Ambundu universe, while the social and psychological instability also resulted in a greater openness towards new realities.

The inquiry encompassed 33 complaints against 25 individuals (12 men and 13 women), of which 19 (6 men and the 13 women) were implicated in witchcraft practices, 18 of them involving beliefs and practices of African origin. This study will only examine one of the most significant cases.

Living in Luanda at the time of the Dutch invasion, Helena de Brito fled in 1641, with her staff, to one of her estates in Quisequele, near the Bengo River. Her arrival coincided with the new moon festival, celebrated by a large gathering of “black people and slaves of the said Helena” (the free population in the surrounding area and plantation slaves) with various unspecified ceremonies, to the sound of horns and other instruments. Helena Brito and her staff (the domestic slaves who had accompanied her) attended these ceremonies, which continued over the following days.

Her daughter, D. Mariana de Figueiredo, joined her at an unknown date and both began to regularly participate in these “heathen rites”. The daughter played an active role and even began to call herself a *ganga*. She apparently even oversaw some steps of the ritual.

D. Mariana had an ox horn with “various things and inventions”. On the nights when the new moon appeared, she and her mother brought together many of their slaves and she took out the things she had in that horn and the blacks brought other things and they shared them among everyone, drinking *oalo* (a beverage made from fermented corn) from the said horn. *Oalo* was also poured

⁹⁹ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 40, Book 239, fl. 10v, complaint by Father Serafino da Cortona.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from the Governor of Angola to the Portuguese monarch, 24 April 1693 (Brásio: XIV, 296–297).

¹⁰¹ The entire inquiry is attached to Case 1467 of the Lisbon Inquisition.

from above a house so that it fell on D. Mariana's head, so as to protect her against all dangers. These ceremonies were also attended by other white men and women (which is why they were able to provide such detailed information), participants or mere spectators.

Moreover, in the lands owned by Helena Brito and her daughter there already existed or they ordered be built a "devil house" dedicated to Ganga Anzumba, where a black slave called Mateus, reputed to be a "great warlock", officiated and whom they consulted often and firmly believed in his prowess.

When D. Mariana, who was pregnant, went into labour, she faced great difficulties. She called the "great warlock", who responded that she was to promise to call the child Naveza (?) in exchange, which "in the local tongue is the chief of all demons". In the meanwhile a black woman arrived with a hamper of flour and told Helena de Brito to take a fistful of that flour, which was "good for labour" and rub it over her daughter's belly. And she also insisted on the child's name. Everything apparently went well. In fact, when her sister, Ana de Almeida, and her nephews, who had also sought refuge in Quisequele, fell ill, Helena de Brito always advised them to "cure themselves by local practices and they would soon become well"¹⁰².

Like Helena, many other residents of Luanda who had gone to live in Massangano and nearby settlements had their "idol houses" or "houses of Ganga Anzumba", which they trusted to protect them during difficulties. These "idol houses", which the inquisitors called "houses of the demon", were small structures, commonly found throughout Central-West Africa, which had altars with wooden sculptures representing territorial deities (*kiteke* in Kimbundu). After Christianisation, images of Catholic saints, identified with the *kiteke*, could also be seen on these altars (Thornton 2002: 76–84).

Baltasar Pinto, a brown baptised man, had not one but rather two "idol houses", which he ordered be built on the estate he owned. He often went to them, taking many black women and men with him, one of whom, from the surrounding area, was the main *ganga*. Before entering these houses, Baltasar Pinto undressed in the porch, anointed himself and "engaged in other heathen superstitions habitual among the blacks"¹⁰³.

Apart from the religious issue, the reason for the outrage on the part of the accusers (or the Church hierarchy, which promoted and recorded the accusations) was precisely that Europeans and their descendants "imitated" blacks and acquired their habits. A widow named Ana Banha, exiled in Massangano, apart from also having a "house of Ganga Anzumba", was accused of wishing to imitate Queen Ginga (*Nzinga Mbandi*), not in any other aspect but only in terms of her sexuality. She had "some black males" (it is not known how many) who she had freed and maintained at her cost and with whom she

¹⁰² TT, TSO, I.L., Case 1467, fls. 5 to 6v and fl. 12.

¹⁰³ TT, TSO, I.L., *Caderno do Promotor* No. 48, Book 245, fl. 116.

engaged in “venereal acts”, not allowing them “to be with other women apart from herself”¹⁰⁴.

Irrespective of Ana Banha’s erotic excesses, comparable to those of some male slave owners, there is no doubt that the Dutch conquest of Luanda and the transfer of residents to the interior helped deepen the relationship with African culture, which was later reflected when the Portuguese returned to the city. This was a circumstantial factor which, along with other factors which have been described in this article, helped consolidate the dynamics of a Creole culture which characterised the social life and even the landscape of Luanda.

In conclusion, one can recall that the primary objective of this text was to reconstruct the ways of social organisation associated with the installation of the Portuguese in the kingdom of Ndongo, namely in Luanda, and to assess the process of mutual influences which involved large sections of the African and European population during the 17th century.

Although this theme is not unknown in recent historiography it nonetheless has not been studied in depth, especially for the period examined herein. This study sought to clarify this question by turning to rarely cited primary sources, namely the records of the Portuguese Inquisition (*Tribunal do Santo Ofício*), which have been used systematically.

While skin colour is inevitably considered while defining the main groups which comprised colonial society (whites, blacks and mestizos) in truth it is also necessary to contemplate other forms of social hierarchies which are not necessarily related to phenotypes. This social complexity is evident within the group of slaves, which was far from being a homogenous category.

This article was essentially dedicated to the dynamics of the cultural interaction between Europeans and Africans, with a view to reformulating the habitual stereotypical vision of colonial domination. These influences were not a one way process and in the course of racial intermingling there is a discernable ‘Africanisation’ of habits, behaviour and even of values on the part of most Europeans residents and their descendants.

This is, naturally, merely a preliminary text. An important step would be to prepare a comparison with other colonial societies (Cape Verde, Brazil or Spanish America) which would enable a juxtaposition of hypotheses and experiences and reveal possible singular aspects of the Angolan process. It would also be essential to assess to what extent relations between Africans and Europeans changed in later phases of colonisation, namely from the 19th century onwards, in Angola in general and in Luanda in particular.

¹⁰⁴ TT,TSO, I.L., Case 1467, fl. 10v.

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